New Actors, Historic Landscapes

THE MAKING OF A FRONTIER PLACE IN
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Dedicated to the memory of Koska Lamail, Peter Vomne and Martina Gomeyan.

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1. Introduction

This is a study of how people in the rural Pomio District of New Britain Island, Papua New Guinea (PNG), make their lived environment, and how in the process of doing so, they make themselves. More specifically, I look at how Mengen speakers living in the Wide Bay area on the eastern coast of New Britain engage in swidden horticulture, logging, wage labor on plantations and community conservation. All these practices have created and continue to create different kinds of places and social relations that involve the Mengen, like other inhabitants of Pomio, within larger political and economic structures. These practices have also produced, reproduced and at times significantly changed the environment of Wide Bay.

By examining these four modes of engaging with the environment, I attempt to answer two strands of questions. First, how do the rural Mengen speakers produce their livelihood, a socially meaningful environment and valued social relations in the process? Second, how do they take part in natural resource extraction, the expansion of industrial agriculture and state territorialization on a resource frontier? In this study I will show that the two lines of questions are closely related and that to answer one fully, one must also address the other. As the diversity of engagements with the forests and land implies, there is no uniform way in which "the Mengen" take part in logging or the making of the state. The very different approaches deployed and the ensuing disagreements are, however, often disagreements over how best to pursue Mengen values of establishing productive relations with each other, the land and people from elsewhere.

This focus on socially and environmentally generative practices is at odds with the expansion of commodity relations and associated social forms, such as corporatized forms of governance or rationalized labor. This disjunction is not specific to Wide Bay, but one that people throughout the world grapple with. Likewise, the processes of expanding capitalist relations or various forms of state formation have not been, and are not, all-encompassing or coherent. Rather these processes unfold in historically specific and contingent settings through interactions between different actors; and in these interactions the actors themselves are changed and elicited.

In 2004 the Member of Parliament for the Pomio District, Mr. Paul Tiensten, a Wide Bay Mengen man with a university degree in geology from Scotland, initiated the so called Ili-Wawas Integrated Rural Development Project. The Ili-Wawas, as it was called in everyday talk, was a combined logging and agriculture project with the goal of integrating the marginalized Pomio District more fully with the rest of the province and with markets. According to the plan, in exchange for logging concessions and land for oil palm plantations, companies would connect the existing logging roads of Pomio with the provincial road network. This would make services more accessible and cash-cropping more profitable, while logging and plantations would bring employment opportunities and immediate income in the form of rents and compensation. The companies would also take part in the funding of infrastructure and services. At the turn of 1980–1990s Malaysian logging companies had started to operate in Pomio and had built a network of logging roads connecting inland forests with the coast and coastal villages with each other. This private network ended in the Mengen village of Wawas in the southern part

of Wide Bay while the provincial road network around the capital of Kokopo reached the village of Ili on the northern shore of Wide Bay. If a road were built between Ili and Wawas, large parts of the remote Pomio District would be connected to the provincial road network.

Questions of natural resource extraction, land use and the role of the rural population in larger political and economic structures, themes I explore in my thesis, are all raised by the Ili-Wawas project, which is also explicitly about state-making in that it integrates remote areas more closely with the administration and services. In addition, it exemplifies a change in the role of the state, as the provision of infrastructure and services, usually associated with national states, was shifted to private and extractive companies. The project, initiated by a Mengen man, also demonstrates that the rural people of Pomio were not passive by-standers, but actively took part in natural resource extraction and the politics of the province—but not in uniform ways, as I will show. Whereas some Wide Bay Mengen sought to attract logging to their areas by setting up landowner companies (LOC), others opposed it for a variety of reasons, long before the Ili-Wawas. Lastly, while the Ili-Wawas project is relatively new, the issues of logging, land use, plantations, uneven development and the integration of the rural population into wider structures are not. In fact the Ili-Wawas, earlier logging projects, resistance to them and social movements more broadly of the inhabitants of Pomio must be understood in a longer historical framework of uneven development and the political and economic marginalization of Pomio District within the province.

This is, therefore, a study of the politics of natural resource extraction in what could be called a frontier area. By examining logging, industrial agriculture and conservation, I attempt to understand something more general about how and by whom lived environments become revalued and converted into "natural resources" that can be sold on the market, made part of abstract territories or conserved, and how these processes are connected to state-making. With the title of my thesis, I attempt to illustrate the connections between the issues. By "historic landscapes" I refer to the various historical processes that have created and changed the lived environment of Wide Bay. By "new actors" I refer to the various actors engaged in these processes and how these actors are elicited and transformed in their engagements with each other and the Wide Bay landscapes. Finally, with "the making of a frontier place", I emphasize that the "the frontier" is not simply a place, but a spatialized process that is the result of people's activity. My approach is grounded in political ecology, which seeks to understand environmental issues and the access to and creation of natural resources in relation to often unequal power relations situated in larger historical, political and economic processes—processes that are not external to the environment, but which unfold in and through it.

However this is primarily a study of the rural Wide Bay Mengen and their lives as I came to know them during the three periods of ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Wide Bay. In this thesis I want to show how the Mengen produced and reproduced social relations that form central Mengen values and how these are then materialized in places that make up a socially meaningful landscape—referred to as place making in my title. By focusing on the everyday life of rural Wide Bay Mengen, I demonstrate that

localized practices play an important part in the localization and unfolding of seemingly large-scale processes—such as state-making and natural resource extraction—in a given context.

With this study I want to contribute to understandings of human-environmental relations and natural resource extraction. I suggest that political ecology combined with anthropological theories of value help us understand how people who have intimate relations with their lived environment engage in a globalized resource economy. The Wide Bay Mengen actively ponder and seek answers to questions such as how to value one's environment or whether forests should be cut down to access sorely needed income—issues that people everywhere are increasingly thinking about in the face of globalized environmental problems.

In this chapter I introduce Wide Bay as an area and briefly discuss the history of natural resource extraction there. From there I move on to examine the research questions in relation to the theoretical framework, which focuses on the concepts of work as socially productive activity, place making, the frontier as a temporal dynamic, struggle over different values and how the rural Wide Bay refashion social relations and groups. I conclude the introduction by discussing my field research in Wide Bay.

1.1 Wide Bay as a frontier and a lived environment

Wide Bay, as its name suggests, is a large bay on the northeastern coast of New Britain Island which separates the large Gazelle Peninsula from the rest of the island. Administratively it is located in the Pomio District which encompasses the southern coast of New Britain and the eastern half of the Gazelle, while the rest of the Gazelle Peninsula is divided into the urban districts of Kokopo and Rabaul and the peri-urban Gazelle District. The Wide Bay Mengen among whom I conducted research live around Cape Orford on the southern side of Wide Bay, in the East Pomio Local Level Government area. Further north along the coast of Wide Bay live Sulka, Tomoip and Baining speakers. The Gazelle Peninsula is inhabited mainly by the Baining and the Tolai. Compared to the rest of the province, Pomio District is marginalized in terms of provincial administration and economic and infrastructural development. This history of unequal development forms the backdrop against which natural resource extraction, state formation and the political activity of the inhabitants of Pomio needs to be understood. I discuss the history of logging, industrial agriculture and conservation in depth in the respective chapters.

Pomio District is the largest and most sparsely populated district of the province containing only about a fifth of the 328,369 inhabitants of the province according to the

2011 National Census. About 40% of the population lived in the rural and peri-urban Gazelle District and about a third in the urban districts of Kokopo and Rabaul, the current and former provincial capital. By contrast, comprising 11,000 km² of the province's total 15,000 km² area, Pomio is by far the largest district with a population density of 6.5 people per km², in contrast to the 35 people per km² in the Gazelle, 220 in Kokopo and 410 in Rabaul. (National Statistical Office 2014: 34). At the time of my fieldwork, the uneven distribution of population was matched by the uneven distribution of government infrastructure and services and, whereas Rabaul and Kokopo, in particular, were relatively "developed" areas in terms of PNG, Pomio was not (Rew 1999: 156). In fact, in 2000, Pomio was still marked as one of the 20 most disadvantaged of PNG's 85 districts measured in terms of land potential, agricultural pressure, access to services, income from agriculture and child malnutrition (Allen 2009: 486).

Pomio was also marginal in relation to the political administration. In the late 19th century, German colonists established their administration in the area around Kokopo and Rabaul (Firth 1972: 361). Since then, it has been the administrative center of East New Britain, first under the German, and from 1914 the Australian colonial administration, and it remained so after the independence of PNG in 1975. Consequently the Tolai, a linguistic group living around Kokopo and Rabaul, have become a dominant group in East New Britain. According to contemporary estimates, the Tolai number about 120,000 people, which makes them the second largest linguistic group in the whole of PNG (Martin 2013: 10). During the colonial era they were important intermediaries between the administration and inhabitants of New Britain, as well as acknowledged cash-croppers and businessmen (Rew 1999: 149; also Fajans 1998; Martin 2013). They also mobilized themselves against the Australian colonial administration and strove for the independence of New Britain (Hawksley 2006: 166; Martin 2013: 14; Rew 1999: 148). The Tolai have held central positions in the provincial administration since self-government commenced in 1964, through the independence of PNG in 1975 until today. This is a result of contingent factors, such as their demographic strength and the historical location of the administration on their lands, but also their energy in establishing political movements and attaining education. This has been interpreted by many inhabitants of Pomio as "Tolai domination" and has led to feelings of suspicion towards the provincial administration (Fajans 1998; Rew 1999; Rohatynskyj 2001).

The inhabitants of Pomio have responded to its marginality in different ways. In the late 1960s the Tolai staged large-scale protests against the Australian administration (Whitehouse 1995: 30), forming the influential *Mataungan* Association, which strove for self-government, the claiming back of alienated lands and empowerment through cash-cropping (Whitehouse 1995: 31, 34, 36). The Mataungan also spread to other groups in New Britain including Baining groups in the north of Pomio who were initially sympathetic to what they perceived as its radical ideas (Whitehouse 1995: 32). Around this time the politico-religious *Kivung* (Gathering in Tok Pisin) emerged in Pomio. Unlike the strictly secular Mataungan, the Kivung was a millenarian movement focusing on ritual action and spiritual transformation (Lattas 2006: 132; Whitehouse 1995: 36). as well as "nationalistic" goals in as much it united different linguistic groups of Pomio from southern Mengen, Kol and Mamusi areas north to the Sulka and Baining. One reason for its support was that it sought to empower the rural inhabitants of Pomio,
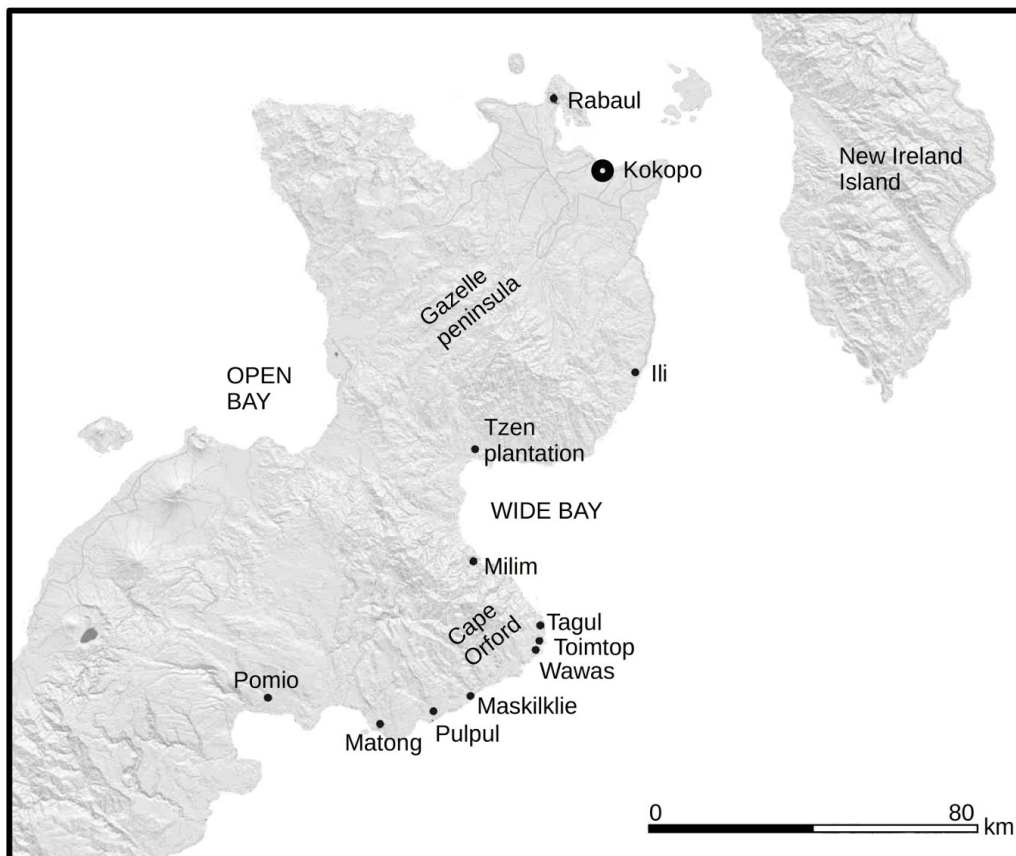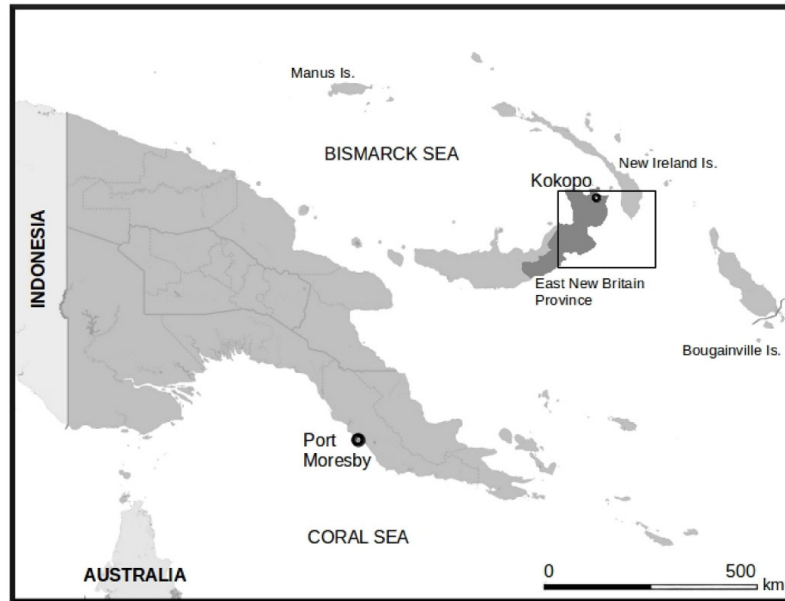
Map 1: Papua New Guinea and East New Britain Province

who perceived themselves to be in a marginal position in relation to the Tolai (Lattas 2006: 132, 139; Whitehouse 1995: 36). The Kivung also became a successful political movement, which held the parliamentary seat of Pomio from the self-government era starting in 1964 until 2002 (Lattas 2006: 32; Rew 1999: 140, 143; Whitehouse 1995: 45).

Through the Kivung, inhabitants of Pomio have pursued development, but not on the terms of Tolai-dominated institutions, as Alan Rew (1999: 152) puts it. The ritual activity of the Kivung was (and is) highly bureaucratized and the movement has imitated government practices, which Andrew Lattas (2006: 130, 133, 136, 148) interprets as the creation of alternative forms of government, modernity and money use. Despite its differences from the strictly secular Mataungan, the Kivung has echoed the same practices as used by the Mataungan against Australian rule in its relations with the Tolai-dominated provincial administration (Rew 1999: 147; Rohatynskyj 2001: 27). The Wide Bay Mengen were on the fringe of Kivung areas, and were less active in the movement than other Mengen groups among whom the movement had formed (Patrol report: Davies 1968; Fischer 1971). However, the Sulka, the northern neighbors of the Mengen, had been active in the movement and during the time of my fieldwork the movement was still active in Baining communities on the north coast of Wide Bay.

Political and ritual activities were not the only way to address the marginal status of the Pomio region. Between the 1960s and 1970s co-operative societies were established in Pomio that were licensed by the Copra Marketing Board to buy locally produced copra and sell it on. The Tolai of the Gazelle had by this time already established themselves as successful copra smallholders and were less engaged in plantation wage labor, a trend connected with establishing economic independence in line with Mataungan ideas. In Pomio, too, cash crops smallholdings and co-operative societies were seen as routes to locally led development, and one of the founding members of the co-operative society in the Wide Bay Mengen village of Toimtop noted that he was inspired to form the co-operative by the example of Tolai societies. However, by the 1980s the co-operative societies had started to decline alongside the deterioration of rural infrastructure and falling agricultural commodity prices (May 2001: 313–15, 317). Around this time, the PNG government began to emphasize natural resource extraction as a source of revenue (May 2001: 317, 321) and many rural people were hoping that logging would bring them income and services.

Thus in the early 1990s, like elsewhere in rural PNG, logging began in Wide Bay. As I will show in greater detail in the chapters to come, many locals hoped it would bring development but others feared it would hamper swidden horticulture and destroy valued places and Sulka and Wide Bay Mengen opposed to it formed conservation associations, which in the Mengen case were seen as continuations of the co-operatives. The Kivung movement also positioned itself against logging (Lattas 2006: 140). In the national elections in 2002, the Kivung lost the seat of Pomio for the first time to Paul Tiensten, who favored natural resource extraction. According to many people I talked to, this was in part due to people's disillusionment with the movement as it had not lived up to expectations of bringing economic development.

The Ili-Wawas Integrated Rural Development project, initiated in 2004 by MP

Tiensten, should be understood in relation to the longer history of efforts by the inhabitants of Pomio to overcome the district's marginal position. The plan was that in exchange for logging concessions and land for the establishment of an oil-palm plantation, private companies would build 135 kilometers of road between the villages of Ili and Wawas thereby linking the existing logging roads of Pomio with the provincial road network. The road would be funded by income from logging, particularly from the area being cleared for the oil palm plantation in the Mevelo River[1] valley in the northern part of Wide Bay. It would improve people's access to services and make cash-cropping more profitable; income from logging and land rents would bring immediate income to customary landowners[2], while the oil palm plantation would bring employment possibilities (Ltd. 2005: 8–9, 12). In 2007, the logging concessions—137,000 ha from road clearance and 10,000 ha for the establishment of the plantation were—awarded to Tzen Niugini, a Malaysian company, which promised to invest K60 million in Pomio (Idris 2014; Kathoa 2005). The oil palm plantation in the Mevelo valley was established on state land, but customary landowners, Simbali Baining, leased 25,000 ha of land to Tzen Niugini for 99 years. The plantation was established in 2008 and in 2014 Paul Tiensten noted that the district would be relying on oil palm to fuel its economy (Laepa 2014).

This context of marginalization and continued attempts to overcome it provides the political-economic and historical background in and through which Wide Bay Mengen livelihood practices and their engagement with foreign actors through logging, the expansion of oil palm plantations and community conservation unfolded.

I have until now referred to the "Wide Bay Mengen", thereby implying that the subjects being discussed are a coherent group of Mengen speakers living in Wide Bay. In the next section I briefly explain the choice of the term and situate the Wide Bay Mengen in the socio-linguistic context of New Britain.

Wide Bay Mengen and other language groups

The people with whom I conducted fieldwork were speakers of the Austronesian Mengen language and lived in the area comprising eight village communities between Tagul village in the north near Wide Bay and Maskilklie village in the south (see Map 2). They referred to themselves as "Mengen" and spoke the North Coast dialect of it. Mengen language is divided into three main dialects: North Coast Mengen (Orford, Maeng), South Coast Mengen (Poeng) and Inland Mengen (Longueinga), although some linguists class North Coast Mengen as a language of its own (Lewis, Simons, and

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[1]The transliteration of the name varies. I have chosen to use the version that appears on official maps. The name of the river is spelled in North Coast Mengen *Mevlou* and means "large (*vlou*) river (*me*)".

[2]Under PNG law, about 97% of the land is under the customary land title, which means that it is communally owned by local kin groups (Filer 1998: 30). The rest of the land was alienated during the colonial era, and is nowadays held mainly by the state. In some areas, like in the Gazelle District of ENBP, about 40% of the land is alienated. Likewise, the often-cited 97% of customary land has been problematized by the recent large-scale land leases under which about 11% of customary held land was leased for up to 99 years—often to logging companies. (Filer 2011)

Fennig 2015). South Coast Mengen is spoken near and around the coast of Jacquinot Bay (Madden 2001: 4) and is the heartland of Mengen, while North Coast Mengen is spoken to the east around Cape Orford and the southern shore of Wide Bay. The North Coast Mengen identified further dialect differences amongst themselves: according to the people living between Tagul and Maskilklie, they spoke a different dialect than that spoken in Pulpul village and futher south-west. Matong village on the eastern side of Waterfall Bay was considered to have a dialect of its own. These dialect differences were recognizable also to me. In this thesis I use the expression "Wide Bay Mengen" to refer to the inhabitants of the area between Tagul and Maskilklie villages. This follows local conceptions of differences, even though the expression is mine.
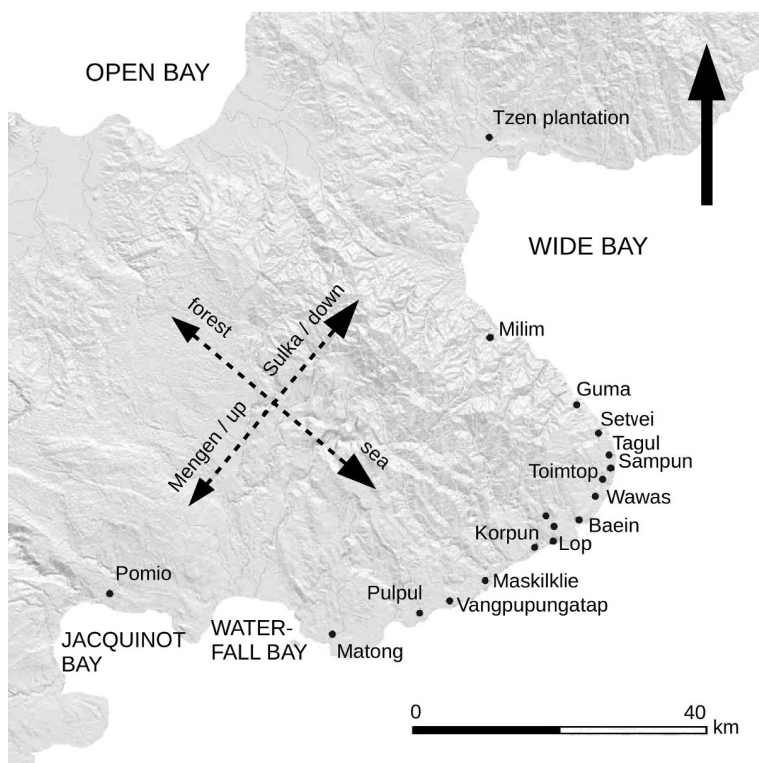
Map 2: Wide Bay

The area between Maskilklie and Tagul was on the northern border of the area inhabited by the different groups of Mengen speakers. Just north of Tagul was Setvei village, whose inhabitants spoke Sulka, a Papuan language. The Sulka settlements and villages continued north along the coast of Wide Bay. Inland and north of them lived the Tomoip, while the Baining inhabited the northern shore of Wide Bay. Emphasizing that they lived on a border zone, the Wide Bay Mengen sometimes referred to their area as *Makluan*, roughly meaning "half-way" (Mengen: *mak*: open road, stretch; *luan*: half). The Wide Bay Mengen also situated themselves spatially according to two directional axis. The first axis was between "Mengen" or "up" (M: *maik*) and "Sulka" or "down" (M: *mning*), roughly following a North/Northeast–South/Southwest axis. "Sulka" obviously referred to the direction where the Sulka were living, while "Mengen" to the heartland of Mengen territory. The other was axis was "forest"–"sea", roughly following an East–West axis. People used these in everyday talk to point out directions, for example saying:

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"Move that fencepost towards the Sulka."[3]

Despite speaking very different languages, the Wide Bay Mengen were in close contact with the Sulka, and had been for a long time. Like the various Mengen speaking groups, the Sulka were also organized into two moieties and a number of exogamic clans. For example, the Catholic missionary Father Matthäus Rascher (1904: 27) mentions the good relations of the Sulka between the Tomoip and the Mengen. His follower, Carl Laufer (Laufer 1962: 448), who worked and lived for a long time in New Britain and wrote extensive ethnographic articles, notes how Sulka and Mengen lived in same villages in Wide Bay. Moreover, by the end of the 19th century Sulka and Baining were on hostile terms and the Sulka were pushed furthermore south and some of them fled to Mengen areas. (Laufer 1955: 34, 37–38, 53; also M. Panoff 1969b: 2; and Panoff 1972: 7). In 1911 the Catholic missionary Ft. Meier visited the Baining with two Sulka catechists and during the visit the warring groups made peace (Laufer 1955: 50). The good relations persisted, as they do until today, and many Sulka returned to their Wide Bay settlements in the 1920s. The Baining even invited them to live on their lands (Laufer 1955: 52) and still today the village of Lamarain, near the new oil palm plantation, is a Sulka and Wide Bay Mengen village. Likewise, some Sulka stayed and for example the village of Lop within the Wide Bay Mengen area was a bilingual Sulka and Wide Bay Mengen village.

The Wide Bay area, like the rest of New Britain, has been an area of lively contacts between the different language groups (see M. Panoff 1969b). The Wide Bay Mengen have however inhabited the area between Tagul and Maskilklie for a long time. Carl Laufer (1955: 35) notes that the Wide Bay Mengen lived between Noait and Rak Rivers, the former being near Setvei and the latter near Pulpul. In the past people lived in smaller hamlets, were more mobile and shifted residence places more often (M. Panoff 1969b: 5). The eight villages currently inhabited by the Wide Mengen have been established at different times. For example, Toimtop was established shortly prior to World War II, while patrol reports from the late 1920s mention Sampun and Baein (Patrol report: Mack 1928). All the current villages have grown in size as during the colonial times as Catholic missionaries and the administration encouraged people from inland settlements to move into existing villages on the coast and along the main trail. The Wide Bay Mengen abandoned the inland settlements gradually and still in the late 1960s some people lived in the inland hamlets, but came to the coastal villages for church services and communal work.

These eight villages were clearly demarcated spatial units located on the coast or a few kilometers inland and they were connected by an old patrol road that had been broadened by logging companies in the 1990s. Tagul village, comprising about 100 inhabitants, was the northernmost of these. It was located immediately on the coast and followed the ideal Mengen layout of a settlement with two rows of houses facing each other and the distinctive round men's houses in the middle. South of it was Sampun, where the local primary school and a day clinic were located. The 300 or so inhabitants of Sampun (M: *Sasampun*; root (*pun*) of the *sasam* tree)[4] were dispersed into several

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[3]See James Fox (1997a: 4) on the significance of ordering of space along directional axis to "locative identities" of Austronesian speaking peoples.

[4]Many of the official names of Wide Mengen villages are colonial transliterations in which the

hamlets that comprised the village. Most of the individual hamlets followed the ideal pattern, whereas the school and Catholic church formed the center of the village. From Sampun, the road turned inland and climbed on top of a mountain, some 300 meters above sea level. On this elevated plateau were Toimtop (Curving (M: *top*) of the Toim River) and Wawas (M: *Wawais*; a grass plant). The 100 inhabitants of Toimtop had laid their houses in two opposing rows, with four men's houses between them and the church in the center. The main village of Wawas followed the same pattern, although it was larger than Toimtop with its 300 inhabitants. The main village of Wawas was fringed by three hamlets with an elementary school on one side of the village and the church on the other. .

From Wawas, the road descended again to the coast to Baein village (M: *Vei'in*; Edge (*in*) of the sand (*vei*)). Like in Sampun, the 500 inhabitants of Baein were dispersed into several smaller, but interconnected hamlets on both sides of a river delta. Likewise, the primary school and church formed the village center. Baein was located inside a small bay sided by mountains and the road turned inland to circumvent them. During my fieldwork I visited the coastal villages of Lop and Korpun (M: *Kaurpun*; root of Bamboo (*kaur*)) only briefly and was not able to carry out research there. However, I met inhabitants of the two villages in other instances, and I was told the two villages were larger than Toimtop, but smaller than Sampun. Some inhabitants from Lop had resettled older inland hamlets of Lokair and Ksalaip, both located along logging roads that had been cleared inland during the logging operations of the 1990s. The hamlets were small and inhabited only by a few households. From Korpun, the road passed over hills and large rivers and reached Maskliklie (named after a tree species), a small village of 150 inhabitants on the coast. South of it was the small hamlet of *Vangpupungatap* (M: The rock (*vang*) that fell (*pupu*) from (*nga*) the sky (*tap*)) and Pulpul village, already inhabited by people speaking a slightly different variety of North Coast Mengen.

A Note on Names and Languages

Throughout this study I refer to places, people and groups with names. I chose not to use pseudonyms for villages or places, unless otherwise stated, because people who might find the information sensitive already know I have visited them and conducted research there. In some cases I refer to an event but do not specify the place where it occurred in order to emphasize its exemplary nature and to distance it from particular people. On the other hand, I use pseudonyms for people in order to protect their anonymity, with the exception of public figures such as high-level politicians and members of the bureaucracy in cases where they have already been named in public reports, previous research and newspaper articles. In my description and analysis I refer to companies that operate or have operated in East New Britain. I use the actual names of both local LOCs and foreign companies because they are public entities referred to in the news and other public discourse. Documents regarding LOCs are publicly available through the Investment Promotion Authority of Papua New Guinea. I do not mention

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original meaning of the name is lost. In this thesis I use the official place names for the sake of clarity, but I have included the original Mengen version as translations. For a more thorough discussion on Wide Bay Mengen place names, see Tammisto (2008: 26–28).

Mengen and Sulka clans by name because I see no need to do so and anonymizing them protects the privacy of individual people; furthermore, the name used for a particular clan group can be a contentious issue and I have thereby avoided taking sides.

Terms and quotes in three local languages are used in the study: Tok Pisin, North Coast Mengen and Sulka. I identify the terms by placing an identifier before them, TP for Tok Pisin, M for North Coast Mengen and S for Sulka. In the text "Mengen" refers to the North Coast dialect of the wider Mengen language unless otherwise stated. I use the standard orthography for Tok Pisin. North Coast Mengen is taught in elementary schools and likewise has a standardized orthography. My knowledge of the new Mengen orthography is limited, however, and my transliteration of Mengen terms is based both on the orthography and my own transliteration from spoken Mengen.

Guide for pronunciation:
a: as the "a" in "car"
e: as the "e" in "tell"
i: as the "i" in "in"
o: as the "o" in "lock"
u: as the "o" in "do"

1.2 Making people, places and environments: research questions and theoretical framework

As I wrote at the beginning of this introduction, this study is built around two main strands of questions:

1) How do the rural Mengen speakers produce their livelihood and, in the process, a socially meaningful environment, and valued social relations?

2) How do the Wide Bay Mengen take part in natural resource extraction, the expansion of industrial agriculture and state territorialization on a resource frontier, where local environments and practices are revalued and new actors elicited?

At first glance these two questions seem to address two different levels: the first looks at apparently local phenomena, how a relatively small-scale society reproduces itself, while the second expands the scope and looks at how rural people in PNG are enmeshed in global networks and processes. The seeming dichotomy is, however, a false one. First, people like the Wide Bay Mengen have always been part of larger networks of people speaking different languages and living in different places. The people of New Britain were involved with each other and people from other islands through various trade networks well before the colonial era (M. Panoff 1969b: 5, 6–14). Likewise, speakers of Austronesian languages, to which group Mengen belongs, migrated to Island Melanesia about 3,500 years ago and mixed with the local Papuan populations (Moore 2003: 35–40). Thinking of the rural people of New Britain as "isolated" would be simply wrong. On a more theoretical level, the dichotomy of "global" vs. "local" is

false in any case, as global processes, like the globalized extraction and trade of natural resources, are always emplaced, that is, they unfold in and through places (Biersack 2006: 16). Just as the social reproduction of Mengen matrilineal clans needs to be understood in relation to PNG's land legislation and the increased emphasis on land as property as a result of commercial logging, so too must commercial logging in Wide Bay be understood in relation to Mengen conceptions of relatedness.

A more fruitful approach is to examine how the Wide Bay Mengen make people, places and relations, and what constitutes value for them. Therefore, I begin by discussing how the Wide Bay Mengen understood "work", something about which people were very concerned.

The Wide Bay Mengen often talked about "work" (M: *klingnan*) or "hard work" (M: *klingnan ti main*). When I first arrived in Wide Bay, the father of my host family took me to see the gardens people cultivated. Swidden horticulture was one of the most local important activities and one in which people were engaged for much of their time. People often noted that theirs is a "hard life" (TP: *hat laip*), especially in contrast to people in towns, who do not have to toil in their gardens for food; gardening is often framed as "hard work". However, I soon learned that these were not primarily complaints about the weight of gardening work, even though it was physically very demanding. In addition to agriculture, the Mengen referred to other kinds of activity as "work" or "hard work". A few weeks into my fieldwork, the last founding member of Toimtop village died. As a part of the mortuary ceremonies, her children gave gifts of food and pigs to people, who were important relatives of the deceased. One gift was given to a young man who worked on the oil palm plantation and had taken care of the elder by bringing her soap and other consumer goods when visiting the village. The children told me that the young man had done "hard work" for the woman and they wanted to emphasize this relation with the gift. During my fieldwork I came to appreciate that for the Wide Bay Mengen "work" did not mean physical activity as such, but actions that produce and maintain valued social relations. Hence the Mengen concept of work, *klingnan*, could be translated as *socially productive activity*.

As I discuss in more depth in Chapter 2, Wide Bay Mengen often talked about "work" or "hard work" especially when talking about social relations. "Work" understood in this sense comprised a variety of activities from parental care to gardening and holding socially reproductive ceremonies (*kastom* in Tok Pisin). Before going to Wide Bay, I had read Jane Fajans' (1997) study of how Qaqet Baining living in northern New Britain conceptualized social relations as based on "work" understood as socialization, and how it was a central source of value for the Qaqet. This made me attentive to seemingly everyday practices, such as gardening and sharing food, but I was still surprised that "work" was a key concept for the Wide Bay Mengen as well. Care and nurture given to others were at the heart of work—or indeed "hard work" as people put it—and feeding someone was the most paradigmatic form of care.

By extension, gardening, namely the production of food, was an obvious precondition for this and hence a central form of socially productive activity (see also Panoff 1977: 17). In Chapters 2 and 3 I focus on Wide Bay Mengen gardening practices, not only because of the central importance of swidden horticulture to people's livelihoods,

but also because central features of Mengen sociality and landholding were expressed and mediated through them. Through gardening people did not only relate to each other, but also to the plants they tended in the garden, as well as to the land. As is common throughout rural Melanesia, sociality among Wide Bay Mengen was not restricted merely to other people; rather, plants and the land were also important entities with which relations were built, as well as central media through which to communicate relations with people (Munn 1992 [1986]: 10, 17; Stasch 2003; 2009; 2013). Likewise, socially productive activity, such as making gardens, establishing villages or burying the dead, left visible traces in the environment, constituting it as a socially meaningful landscape (e.g. Kirsch 2006: 11, 189).

Work, as the Wide Bay Mengen understood it, produced valued social relations, the material means, such as food, through which these relations were maintained and places in which the relations unfolded and which embodied those relations. In my thesis I examine the "hard work" of the Wide Bay Mengen in relation to *production* as understood in Marxian anthropology that focuses on people's activities (Fajans 1997; Graeber 2001; 2013; Munn 1992; Turner 2008). As Terence Turner (2008: 44) puts it, in this tradition production is seen as the most fundamental process in human history and its transformations. Production is a "self-transforming social praxis" that encompasses the production of material means of subsistence, new needs, human beings themselves and different relations of social co-operation (Turner 2008: 44). Or, as David Graeber (2001: 57; 2013: 223) summarizes it, production refers to the production of both material goods *and* social relations and, by extension, to the production of people, who recreate themselves and each other in the process of acting with the world.

In this line of thought, "society" is seen as a dynamic outcome of people's activities, rather than as something external or static (Fajans 1997: 8–9, 11, 272). According to Jane Fajans (1997: 272), society is what people make, and by making it, they make themselves, their ultimate product. The focus on production—as the making of material goods, places, people and the relationships between them—provides analytical tools to examine how people concurrently make their society and their environment, and how both of these change in the process. Rather than claiming that production is *the* driving force of history, it provides a holistic framework in which human-environmental relations as well relations between different actors can be analyzed. Especially useful is the *relational* emphasis, namely, the focus on how people relate to each other and their environment when acting in and on the world. Ultimately, production is a central theoretical concept in my exploration of the key questions posed by the thesis, and in demonstrating how and why they are linked. The concrete productive practices of swidden horticulture, such as clearing forest for gardens and sharing gardens and plants with other people, also illuminate Mengen landholding practices based on matrilineal clans.

Wide Bay Mengen society as a whole is divided into two exogamous moieties, which are further divided into named exogamous matrilineal clans and their subgroups. The matrilineal clans as well as named subclans are the landowning units, with each clan claiming ownership of discrete land areas based on mythical precedence and first

settlement.[5] This means that the clan members communally own the area. However, as marriages within one's own clan or another clan of the same moiety are prohibited, no clan can live alone on its land. (For similar landholding systems in Austronesian speaking Melanesian societies see Eves 2011 (2011); Foster (1995); Martin (2013) & M. Scott (2007).) In his illuminating analysis of the relationship between cosmology, land and matrilines among the Arosi of Solomon Islands, Michael Scott (2007) notes that Arosi matrilines, much like Mengen clans, have independently emerged from the land. As the matrilines are exogamous, true social existence is only achieved when the matrilines intermarry and start living productively on the land. This account applies to the Wide Bay Mengen as well, in as much clans had to marry each other and work on each other's land. Communal existence was then by definition a multi-clan enterprise and thus the actual land-using groups, such as families or villages, always consisted of people from different clans. People actually living on a given area, whether from the landowning clan or not, developed strong user rights as well as emotional ties to the land through their work.

Michael Scott (2007: 33) notes that the mythical emergence of the matriline in a given location and the necessary inter-relations between the matrilines on the land are two cosmological principles as well as ways of relating to the land, one based on precedence and the other on dwelling. On the one hand, each lineage sought to emphasize its relation of ownership to its land. On the other, through communal life, based on intermarriages, people living on the land established strong relations to it as well, and if the owning lineage emphasized its ownership too forcefully, members of other lineages might move back to their own land areas, causing communities to rupture. Due to this, the communal life of the Arosi was a constant interplay between these two principles: the autochthony of the matriline and productive relations between them. (Scott 2007: 33, 201–2, 218). This notion, as I will show, also applies to the Wide Bay Mengen, and the relation between the landowning clan and the land-using communities was a *productive contradiction* in Mengen society. By contradiction I do not mean that it was necessarily one of conflict, but, rather, a fundamental tension which accounted for much of the dynamics in Mengen landholding practices as well as political life more generally. Like the contradiction between labor and capital in capitalist societies, the productive contradiction of landowning clans and land users took many forms and could lead to different outcomes, as I will show in the chapters that follow.

Place making and placed relations

The relation between the landowning clan and the land-using multi-clan group had its spatial equivalent. Each clan had a place of origin from which the apical ancestress had emerged alone—called *plangpun* in North Coast Mengen (*plang*: to emerge, to go first; *pun*: root, cause)—which rooted the clan to its land. Communal life, based on productive relations between the clans, also produced places, burial grounds, villages,

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[5]The emphasis on origin and precedence are central tropes in many Austronesian societies (Fox 1996a: 5).

gardens and orchards, through which the people actually living on the land became rooted in it (also: Scott 2007: 201–2, 213). For the Mengen, these places in the landscape were important historical markers and concrete signs of different kinds of productive relations, as well as personal and communal histories (M. Panoff 1969c: 163; also Kirsch 2006: 11, 189). The Mengen landscape, therefore, constituted the origin of humans as well as being the outcome of human activities. As a result of the practice of swidden horticulture, the Mengen landscape was an ever-changing, but not random, patchwork of gardens, fallows and forests of various ages that indexed different kinds of temporalities and relations (Stasch 2003). To quote Tim Ingold (2000: 193, 198), the landscape was "the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them," and "a pattern of activities 'collapsed' into an array of features". This definition of landscape effectively captures how it becomes meaningful through engagement with it.

Because of the importance of socially productive activities, or "work" for the Wide Bay Mengen, people paid considerable attention to the signs of it in the landscape. When I was walking with people in the forest they would point out the sites of old villages they recognized by the domestic trees planted by past inhabitants, or sites where somebody had recently gathered leaves for roofing and so on. Moreover, as villagers walked along the paths to their daily activities, they often made small cuts on the trees with their bush knives. I was told that the habit had no special significance, and that people did it "just because" but, if nothing else, it helped me to recognize the paths in use. Moreover, it demonstrates that for the Mengen the landscape was not only made up of significant places, but of *visual* signs of people's activities (see also Descola 2016: 5). As noted, the places visible in the landscape were important historical markers (M. Panoff 1969c: 163), especially the origin places of clans and the abandoned villages which were signs of past communal life. In the discussion of swidden horticulture in Chapters 2 and 3 I show how Mengen kinship, based on notions of care and nurture, or "work", was enacted through everyday practices such as sharing food, food plants and gardens. In the process, plants and gardens became visual indexes of the inter-relations between people and clans (see Stasch 2003; 2009).

The importance of places was not a facet of everyday life alone; they were also significant for Wide Bay Mengen clan histories which recounted the emergence of the clan ancestress and then described how she married a man from a different clan, who their children were, which places they inhabited and the villages they established. (For a comparison, see M. Scott (2007: 74, 190)) These *topogenies*, or ordered recitations of place names such as those of past settlements, are a common feature of understanding history in Austronesian societies (Fox 1997a: 8, 12–13). As James Fox (1996a: 10–11) notes, places—as embodiments of history—are also media through which the past is present and can be scrutinized. Places, as outcomes and signs of human activities, were central to Wide Bay Mengen conceptions of history and landholding and, due to this, had political significance. For example, claiming old villages as those of one's own ancestors or making one's presence visible in the landscape by planting trees were often ways to make claims on decision-making power over the land. As I will discuss in more depth in Chapters 4, 5 and 8, places as signs of rooting to the land were consequently often sites of contest for the Wide Bay Mengen. Indeed, as Jerry Jacka (2015: 28)

notes, in PNG struggles over resources are often struggles over relations because, unlike many other rainforest people, Papua New Guineans in general own their land under the national law.

As the literature on production notes, all productive activities are emplaced inasmuch as they happen in particular places and produce them (Moore 2015: 11; Munn 1992: 11). This means that human activities are never outside the environment, but rather happen *in* and *through* it. This is what Jason Moore (2015: 13) calls a double internality of human organization, namely, the two simultaneous processes of humanity-in-nature and nature-in-humanity. This is a dialectical view of historical change understood as humans making environments and environments making humans (Moore 2015: 28). Rather than humanity and nature being two entities acting on each other, they are always "bundled", with nature being the matrix in and through which human activity unfolds—and vice versa (Moore 2015: 29, 36); because human activity produces places and unfolds in them, places are not "inert containers", as Margaret Rodman (1992: 641) notes. Rather, they are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions. Places are socially constructed and they come into being through narratives and praxis. This "multiplicity" or multivocality means that a place holds different meanings and is often experienced differently by different people. (Rodman 1992: 641–42, 647, 652; also Jacka 2015: 37). Space and time also come concretely together in places, and hence are often historical markers (e.g. Basso 1996; Kirsch 2006: 11, 189; Rumsey 2001)—not only "locally" constructed but, as Jerry Jacka (2015: 37) points out, a result of multiscalar interactions that affect social and economic systems. Due to this, "place" is a central term in contemporary political ecology; a place is not a "local" opposite of "global", but the grounded site in which global-local interactions and articulations literally take place, and which as a concept breaks the over-determining role of "the Global" (Biersack 2006: 16–17).

The study of space and place is an established research direction that informs various theoretical directions, from political ecology (e.g. Biersack 2006; Jacka 2015; West 2006) to more phenomenological analyses of being in the world (Ingold 2000; Weiner 1991). Due to the ethnographic significance of rootedness and emplacement, space and place feature in important ways in studies of Austronesian and Melanesian societies (e.g. Bell (2015); Fox (1997b); Harrison (2004); Kirsch (2001; 2006); Rumsey & Weiner (2001) & M. Scott (2007) to name but a few). In addition to these Rupert Stasch's (2003; 2009; 2013) semiotic approach to the study of places is instructive in showing how places both signify and mediate social relations. In his work on the Korowai speakers of West Papua, Indonesia, Stasch (2009: 14) focuses on the concrete media of social relations, specifically the material things and practices through which the Korowai relate to each other and communicate these relations. The Korowai are "spatially focused"; in other words, space and places are important media in this regard (Stasch 2009: 26). For example, the dispersed settlement pattern is a way of emphasizing and communicating the value of autonomy as, according to the Korowai, living close to others often leads people to tell each other what to do (Stasch 2009: 25, 68). Likewise, landownership of the Korowai is based on territories held by distinct patriclans. The boundaries of the clan territories both separate and connect people inasmuch as the different clans are closely tied to their land, while people enact their relations to other

clans by visiting the land of others (Stasch 2009: 26, 37).

In his analyses of Korowai social relations, Stasch focuses on how concrete places, actions and events become signs (see also Munn 1992: 7, 16). Korowai patriclans routinely organize feasts to which people from other clans are invited. The organization of the feast involves the building of a ritual longhouse in which the hosts and guests gather and food is prepared (Stasch 2003). The longhouse that the organizing patriclan members build becomes a concrete sign, or index, of the landowning patriclan (Stasch 2003: 362). Simultaneously, the house is not only an effect of the co-operation of clan members, but also a cause of it. Thus the concrete signs do not just represent relations, but mediate, and to a certain extent also establish them (Stasch 2003: 364). An important feature of the mediation-focused approach is, then, not only what is being communicated, but *how* it is communicated and how the media chosen affects this (Stasch 2009: 16; also Munn 1992: 10, 17). As the longhouse construction progresses, along with other aspects of the feast preparation, it also becomes a sign of the ecological temporalities of sago grove and sago grub development, both of which provide food for the feast and are thus crucial to its success. Thus various human and ecological temporalities converge in the house (Stasch 2003: 369). Finally, the houses, as transient signs, are for the Korowai temporalizations of dwelling and a spatialization of history as a sequence of residential episodes. They are, as Stasch puts it, monuments in and of time (Stasch 2003: 363, 370).

Like the Korowai, the Wide Bay Mengen are in many ways a "spatially focused" society. As noted above, the Mengen place great importance on the signs of people's work in the environment. Places like abandoned villages are both signs of past relations as well as points through which people relate to the past. As with the Korowai longhouses, the Mengen settlements and gardens index a variety of social relations and temporalities. As I discuss in depth in Chapter 2, the individual gardens become visual indexes of the multi-clan, land-using groups. And like the Korowai longhouses, they are not only signs of kinship relations; the sharing of gardens and plants in many ways constitutes them. By emphasizing that gardens and plants are signs for the Mengen, however, I am not claiming they are inert media. On the contrary, they are living entities with which people are in mutual relations. In Chapter 3 I discuss how the productive activities of the Mengen create a deeply temporal landscape in which both people's histories as well as ecological temporalities converge (see Stasch 2003).

That time and space come together in places is an accepted wisdom of the anthropology of place (e.g. Basso 1996). Basing his discussion on semiotics and his notion that places can be signs, Stasch (2013: 555; 2016) shows how certain spatial formations, or places, hold special historical power "because of the multiple relational connections they mediate". This means that certain places embody multiple historical processes and socio-cultural orders that have formed those places (Stasch 2013: 566 560). In other words, certain places are the results of various historical and political processes as well as representing different socio-cultural orders. When multiple elements from a wider cultural and historical field are present in a single place, it becomes "poetical" and the more elements which are present, the more "poetically dense" it becomes (Stasch 2013: 565). In the semiotic approach, "poetical" refers to the possibilities of

linguistic artistry to highlight relations of identity and difference (Stasch 2013: 560). To put it bluntly, when a sign has multiple, and even contradictory meanings, it is "poetically dense". Villages, as relatively new spatial formations, are poetically dense places for the Korowai for whom they materialize, above all, their complex relations with missions, the Indonesian state and the commodity economy. Likewise, the villages in which people live in close proximity embody a different kind of political culture than the Korowai's dispersed forest settlements. Poetically dense places are concrete signs simultaneously representing the different historical, cultural and political processes that have formed them. As signs, they can also be used to conceptualize these different processes (Stasch 2013: 565). For example, villages—like the commodity economy—are ambiguous places for the Korowai, as the principles they embody are simultaneously desirable and oppressive. By comparing villages with other places, the Korowai make sense of these different orders, and by moving between different places, like villages and forest settlements, they integrate the disparate principles in their lives (Stasch 2013: 565–66).

By calling attention to the complex historical processes materialized in places and their ambiguity for people, Stasch comes close to the notions mentioned above, namely, how "global" processes are enacted in and through places (Biersack 2006; Jacka 2015; Moore 2015) and how places are "multivocal" in that they are experienced in different and sometimes contradictory ways, even by the same person (Rodman 1992). As I have noted, the Mengen, too, used places to represent different relations, and not merely those made primarily by Mengen activities. On the contrary, as I discuss in the following chapters, the activities of the colonial administration, the state of PNG and foreign companies have also changed the Mengen environment and made places that signify for the Mengen their relations with these actors and processes, and through which they come to know them. In Chapters 6 and 7 I discuss how wage labor, the commodity economy and state formation become tangible on the new oil palm plantation established as a part of the Ili-Wawas project. The Mengen, both plantation workers and others, often contrasted the plantation with the surrounding villages in their talk, thereby commenting on and comparing the different social orders and relations that characterized the places. Much like the Korowai, the Wide Bay Mengen moved between the plantation and the villages in order to pursue different values and live out or shun the different kinds of relations associated with them.

The creation of value and struggles over it on the frontier

Production, in the sense discussed above, produces not only material goods and social and environmental relations, but also meaning and values (Fajans 1997: 11; Munn 1992: 6–7). Indeed, this notion of production lies at the root of Marxian value theory which, according to Terence Turner (2008: 43), is based specifically on an analysis of capitalist society, on the one hand, and on more general anthropological concepts, such as production, praxis, social consciousness and exploitation, on the other—making it thus more generally applicable. In its broadest sense, value in Marxian theory is seen as the importance of people's activities (Graeber 2001: 55). Depending on the social context and system of social production, it is constituted and represented in

different ways. Value, as a constituent of systems of social production consists of forms of representation by which value is defined, circulated, exchanged and appropriated (Marx 1976 [1867]: 142, 149, 225, 932; Turner 2008: 47, 53). Because of this, the role of semiotic representation in mediating and shaping material activity is central in this line of theory (Munn 1992: 7, 16–17; Turner 2008: 43).

Semiotic media vary from case to case, but they need to be understood in relation to the respective systems of production (Turner 2008: 47–48). In a capitalist society, for example, value is constituted by "socially necessary labor time", the average amount of labor needed to produce commodities, and money is the semiotic medium through which value is represented, appropriated, accumulated and compared (Marx 1976: 129, 199–200; Turner 2008: 45). In other systems of social production, value is produced and represented differently. For example, according to Nancy Munn (1992: 6, 9, 11) on the island of Gawa in PNG, value is produced by extending interpersonal relations in time and space to other islands and thus achieving "fame". This inter-personal "spacetime" is used as a measure of value, in as much extending it creates value and actions that contract it, prevent value creation (Munn 1992: 11). Furthermore, Gawans signify value through specific media, such as practices, bodily qualities and kula shells (Munn 1992: 16–17). Acts of giving food form the basic "template" for the production of value (Munn 1992: 18, 121, 147; also Graeber 2001: 44–45). In a similar vein, among the Qaqet, it is drawing "natural" entities into the sphere of the social, which Jane Fajans (1997: 11, 268) calls the "underlying schema" beneath different kinds of acts such as gardening or caring for children. These semiotic media for representation of value, such as money in capitalist societies, are indispensable as means of its circulation and exchange, and hence tend to become objects of accumulation in their own right (Turner 2008: 53).

Society in this tradition is, on the one hand, the result of people's productive activities; consequently, the most basic forms of inequality and exploitation are rooted in the relations that reproduce society (Graeber 2001: 24). On the other hand, society is not only the product of actions, but the context or framework which makes the actions meaningful, and the "arena" in which values—represented in different ways—are realized (Graeber 2001: 69, 71; Marx 1976: 177). Basing his discussion on the work of Fajans, Munn and Turner, David Graeber (2001: 75, 83) notes that society is the process in which activity as pursuit of value is co-ordinated (also Munn 1992: 12, 20). In this tradition, value is also fundamentally a political question (Graeber 2001: 88). Politics is about the struggle to appropriate value and, more importantly, as Graeber (2001: 88) notes, "the struggle to establish what value *is*" (original emphasis). As I have described above, "work" understood as socially productive activity was a key source of value for the Mengen. It was objectified in and represented through concrete media such as food plants, gardens, acts of care and nurture, as well as visible traces of work and places in the landscape.

It was also objectified in shell valuables, or "shell money", which were passed on within lineages, thus reproducing relations within the clan, and given as gifts to other lineages, thus creating or re-affirming inter-clan relations, in acts of compensation or bridewealth ceremonies. The most valued objects were grooved shell rings, called *paik* in Mengen, literally meaning "value". In addition to being a noun, the term was also

a verb, as in "*Ya paik ngoen.*" ("I value you.") and valuing someone in this way was associated with the act of giving the valuable to someone. In bridewealth ceremonies, a spokesperson of the husband's side gave the paik to a spokesperson of the wife's clan, who passed it on to another clan member, who passed it on to another, forming a human chain. These formalized acts of giving made the matrilineal clans, the giving and receiving one, as well as their inter-relation concretely visible. The discs were also used on special occasions as adornments hung around the neck.

With regards Mengen concepts of relatedness, I noted above how Mengen social organization rested on the productive contradiction between the autonomy of the matrilineal clan and productive relations between the clans. These are two distinct cosmological principles, as noted by Michael Scott (2007: 33) in the similar case of the Arosi. I treat these two features, the importance of the autochthonous clan and the inter-relations between them, as two fundamental values in Mengen society—following Joel Robbins' (2004: 192–93, 195–96) analysis of the complementary tension between different values among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. By doing so I link the discussion of Mengen clan relations to the system of social production, questions of how these values are mediated (e.g. Stasch 2009; 2013) and ultimately to politics—understood as the competition to appropriate and define values.

These two values presuppose each other in the sense that clan divisions are needed so that inter-relations between clans are possible, and inter-relations between the clans are needed to reproduce each individual clan. On the other hand, the pursuit of one was necessarily at the cost of the second. This is one feature of the "productive contradiction": in order to ensure the continuation of the clan and its link to the land, one had to do "the opposite", that is, marry and bring other people to the clan's land. Doing "the opposite" was then seen as productive activity—both in itself and due to its future consequences. (See Nancy Munn (1992: 9–10) on how Gawans give food or *kula* valuables to visitors in order to receive them in the future and in order to achieve "fame".) Roy Wagner (1981: 118) notes that the social life of the Iatmul of PNG was conceptualized on a similar tension between ''the dialectical interaction of the two moieties, which both depend on each other and oppose or contradict one another".

This resembles the case of the Urapmin among whom morality is composed of the related, but distinct values of "lawfulness" and "willfulness"—willfulness being people's individual emotive desires and lawfulness being proper social conduct in the form of constraining these desires (Robbins 2004: 183, 184–86). Moreover, social life, and indeed its structure, is for the Urapmin not the result of preset rules or a structural aim that people strive for, but a result of people acting in both willful and lawfull ways, namely following their willful desires and taking into account how they are restricted by lawful expectations (Robbins 2004: 186). According to Robbins (2004: 195), the law and the will are in a dialectical relation and when they mutually condition each other, the dialectic is *socially productive* (my emphasis). For example, while willful desires are according to the Urapmin the cause of immoral behavior, also new social relations, such as marriages, are the result of people's will. The law on the other hand, is sterile in terms of producing new relations and a person without will would be a non-person, but without law, existing relations would deteriorate. (Robbins 2004: 192–93, 195).

In short, will is needed to make relations, law to maintain them (Robbins 2004: 196). (For similar value antinomies in Oceania, see also Jorgensen (1981: 52, 204), Kulick and Stroud (1990: 295–96) and Myers (1986: 70, 110, 159–60).)

Such productive contradictions can, however, result in unfavorable consequences. For example, as Scott (2007: 245–46) notes, when a lineage places too much emphasis on its ownership of a land area and risks dispersing the community by making members of other lineages feel unwelcome on the land. As Nancy Munn (1992: 3, 11–12, 20) notes, value on Gawa is created in relation to the perception of how it *cannot* be achieved. Certain acts, like not giving food to visitors, thus hold "negative value potentials", inasmuch as they they may prevent the creation of value (Munn 1992: 12). Building on this notion, I attempt to illustrate with the concept of "productive contradiction" that acts, which for the Mengen held the potential for achieving one value, held also the "negative value potential" in relation to the other. For example, excluding people from other clans from income received from logging, because they were not landowners, held the potential of damaging inter-clan relations. Producing and reproducing valued relations both within and between the clans was classed as "work", and consequently producing either kind of value, was "work". As I show in the chapters to come, issues among the Wide Bay Mengen concerning land were about accommodating these two values.

Treating these two principles as values and values as the fundamental content of politics also emphasizes that the Wide Bay Mengen were not a homogeneous group. On the contrary, as I discuss in detail, they did not agree on what values to pursue, how best to pursue them and what in fact counted as values and valuable activity. The issues raised by logging, industrial agriculture and conservation, for instance, in many ways comprised questions and struggles over value and how it should be appropriated and defined. In Chapters 5, 7 and 9, I focus on how Mengen discussions of money received from logging, wage labor and conservation were about how to reproduce social relations and, to quote Keir Martin (2013: 3), about the appropriate limits of reciprocity. In these chapters, following Martin (2013: 7), I analyze how people attempted to assert and destabilize competing definitions of reciprocity and value through the subtle use of language. Logging, industrial agriculture and conservation were not only ways of using resources, but also of defining what counts as a resource. In other words, they were ways to re-evaluate the environment.

Redefining lived environments as resources opens up new frontiers of value. Logging companies came to Wide Bay in the early 1990s because they regarded PNG as a new frontier where they could utilize seemingly unused timber resources. As defined by John McCarthy (2013), the frontier is a physical place in rapid transformation, where population density tends to be low, the rate of in-migration usually high and organs of the central state weak, meaning that the law is an abstract concept (see also Lounela, in press). In this context natural resources are up for grabs, so to speak, and different actors compete to establish claims over them (McCarthy 2013: 183). Furthermore, on the frontier different actors do not only compete over resources, but over varying definitions of what constitutes a natural resource. Natural resources, then, are always both natural and social, that is, products of contingent socio-cultural definitions. (McCarthy 2013:

184; also Bridge 2011: 820). As Jason Moore (2015: 145) notes: coal is coal, but it is fossil fuel only under very specific historical and social conditions. Meanwhile, when different actors assert claims over resources, they are also advancing different definitions of the value of local environments, local practices and different forms of land tenure (McCarthy 2013: 184). The frontier is thus a spatialized process in which resources, practices and their values are defined, and this often involves struggle, which reflects the notion that the greatest political struggles are not only over who gets to appropriate value, but who gets to define it (Graeber 2001: 88).

Pomio has for a long time been a frontier area, because of its marginalized position in relation to the rest of the province and because of the resources of land, labor and forests perceived as "unused" (see also Section 1.1). Logging came to Wide Bay and other parts of PNG in frontier conditions. In the 1990s, after depleting forests in Sarawak and Sabah (Filer 1998: 57, 60), Malaysian logging companies were looking for new forests. At the same time, the government of PNG hoped to gain revenue from increased natural resource extraction, while many rural people hoped that logging would bring them income, infrastructure and services. Before logging in Wide Bay actually began, it was preceded by complex negotiations between the Mengen themselves, forestry officials and company representatives, as I discuss in Chapter 4, which included territorializing practices such as the establishment of logging concessions and the revaluation of the Wide Bay forests as resources to be exploited. This process was not abrupt; the commodification of Wide Bay forests had already begun in the early colonial era when the colonial administration, commercial companies and the missions started to utilize the forests commercially. Yet even though the Mengen came to regard their forests and land as potential commodities, this did not displace other meanings and values. As I show in the chapters on logging (4 & 5) and conservation (8 & 9), the Wide Bay Mengen emphasized their relations to the forests and the meaningful places in different ways while engaging in resource use. For example, Mengen men named LOCs after significant places in order to mobilize the groups associated with those places and to make claims to the land areas that the places signified. Conservationists, on the other hand, sought to protect significant places in the forests by opposing logging altogether.

A frontier of the kind being discussed here, and resource-making within it, is often accompanied by a state discourse of imagined wilderness and unexploited resources (Eilenberg 2014: 160). The area is presented as "empty", which often means that local practices are—deliberately or otherwise—not recognized (also Tsing 2005: 27, 30). Joshua Bell (2015: 131) highlights this by noting that frontiers are places where resources are made and unmade and histories and relations erased. The notion of wilderness and unexploited resources can, of course, be advanced by other actors than the state, such as companies or NGOs. If the actors manage to make the notion of "unexploited resources" reality, perhaps by ignoring local forms of resource use and introducing new ones, the frontier can provide opportunities for accumulation and profit. Frontiers are places of desire (Eilenberg 2014: 160; Li 2014: 13–15) where great profits can be made, but which may become sites of great inequalities (Jacka 2015: 46). The notion of opportunity draws attention to the temporal aspect of the frontier, namely, to the time window when resources can be exploited and grabbed. This situation does not last forever; at some point the frontier closes and other dynamics set in.

The frontier can, however, also re-open: new resources can be developed, old authorities, rules and actors can be challenged and a given location can become what Nancy Peluso & Christian Lund (2011) call a new frontier of value and land control. Michael Eilenberg (2014: 162) notes that frontiers can be cyclical processes. This dynamic is well illustrated by Chris Gregory's (1982: 119) analysis of the plantation economy in PNG. During the period of the so-called "Pacific labor trade", recruiters sought cheap labor for Queensland plantations from Melanesian islands. When people in a given area became familiar with plantation labor and its hardships, they became reluctant to work under the initial conditions and drove harder bargains or refused altogether, which prompted the recruiters to seek out new "labor frontiers" (Gregory 1982: 119). In what became the independent state of PNG, New Britain was the first labor frontier and thus also the first labor frontier to close (Gregory 1982: 129). Plantation agriculture depended on cheap labor and an open labor frontier, which moved across different areas of PNG (Dennis 198-: 244; Gregory 1982: 124, 131). Soon after the last labor frontier in the Highlands closed in the 1960s, plantation capital departed from PNG (Gregory 1982: 135). In Chapter 6 I show that the decline of cash cropping due to deteriorating infrastructure and falling prices re-opened the labor frontier in Pomio, because people who had previously gained monetary income from cash crops went to work on plantations. Similarly, the possibility of leasing land for up to 99 years re-opened the land frontier.

In the coming chapters I examine these different temporal frontier dynamics by looking in detail at the history of logging, plantation agriculture and social movements in New Britain, relating these histories to more contemporary events in Wide Bay.

Making actors on the resource frontier

The frontier is a place where different actors compete not only over the control of resources, but also over different definitions of what constitutes a resource and how local environments and practices are valued (McCarthy 2013: 184). The frontier is also somewhere that actors themselves are elicited, changed or unmade, because the frontier transforms histories and relations (Bell 2015: 131). Through productive activities people relate to each other in certain ways, and through these relations people are made into certain kinds of persons (Munn 1992: 15) and incorporated into different groups and social formations which may become actors in their own right. For example, it sounds reasonable to say that a company (or a state or a clan) performs this or that action or activity. Social groups are, however, not unproblematically actors; rather, as Robert Foster (2010: 99) notes, their "identity as autonomous units periodically emerges with effort out of a field of relations". The notion that "collective actors", such as "the state" or "the locals" are not simply pre-existing, but are formed in encounters that unfold in a given time and place, is a central insight of modern political ecology (Biersack 2006: 25–27; Golub 2014; Welker 2014). Based on this notion, I look at how the Mengen of Wide Bay have taken part in state formation, as well as in creating various kinds of collective actors such as LOCs and clans. Indeed, a central theme of this thesis is how the Wide Bay Mengen reproduced their society in the context of large-scale natural resource extraction.

The making of resources is, as Gavin Bridge (2011: 825) notes, fundamentally about territorialization and hence also about state formation. Territorialization, as defined by Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso (1995: 388), is the attempt by an individual or group to influence or control people, phenomena and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. In the chapters on logging and conservation I show how the rural Wide Bay Mengen took part in various territorializing projects that sought to establish new forms of territorial organization and control, such as logging concessions or conservation areas, on their land. As these projects operated within the framework of state legislation, they affirmed or contested the authority of the state. Questions of landownership are, therefore, central instances where state power is affirmed, because when people accept the allocation of land by a given institution or even the definition of land ownership by it, they also recognize and legitimate the authority of that institution (Lund 2011: 886). Or to put it more simply: when people accept a legal definition of landownership, they also recognize the power of the institution which made the definition.

According to the legislation of PNG, most of the land is communally owned by local kin groups, dubbed clans in the legislation (Filer 1998: 30; Lakau 1997). The legislation, however, does not specify to which group a given area of land belongs, and hence recognizing or "finding" the landowning groups is an integral part of any project that has to do with land. The land legislation of PNG is in many senses unique and innovative inasmuch as it sought to give official recognition to local landowning practices (Fingleton 2007). Yet, as many studies have shown, the legislation has not only given recognition to "traditional landowning groups" but, in pre-supposing their existence, it has created them (Ernst 1999; Golub 2007b; 2014; Weiner and Glaskin 2007). Thomas Ernst (1999) aptly calls this process "entification", meaning that through it local and often fluid kin groups become represented as lasting and clearly defined entities. In the most extreme cases, as among the Ipilli of PNG's Highlands, people have decided to divide themselves into landowning clans, based on prior kinship categories, because the state and mining companies were expecting to find such clans (Golub 2007a). Whereas kin groups or clans are more stable in the matrilineal societies of Island Melanesia than in the fluid groups of the Highlands, state legislation has often "entified" the groups and locals have then taken state law into account in their local land tenure arrangements (Eves 2011; Martin 2013: 79, 94; Wagner 2007).

The question of landownership and the composition of landowning groups were also central in Wide Bay Mengen engagements with logging and plantation companies and the state of PNG. As noted, the landowning unit was the matrilineal clan among the Wide Bay Mengen but questions of land and resource use often involved issues such as which clan owned a given territory, who the clan included and how to take into account the land-using rights of non-clan members living on the land. In the chapters on logging I discuss in detail how in the early 1990s Mengen men formed LOCs to act as contractual partners with logging companies which wanted to operate on Wide Bay Mengen lands. As I show in Chapter 4, the formation of LOCs was not straightforward, nor were they simply based on Mengen clans. Rather, they were attempts to accommodate the productive contradiction between the landowners and land users as well as being vehicles for making claims over land areas. While the LOCs

were forms of corporatized governance (Lattas 2011), they also offered the means for certain Wide Bay Mengen men to take part in territorializing logging schemes. The corporatized form of organization was based on a different logic than Mengen sociality based on generation (Bear et al. 2015). The complex politics of setting up and managing these companies also reflected Mengen power struggles and they became a new arena in which relations within and between clans were re-configured.

As I have noted, Wide Bay Mengen formed and reproduced kin groups through material media and practices such as sharing gardens and food plants. Social groups are also reproduced and re-shape themselves through language and speech (Martin 2013: 77; Merlan and Rumsey 1991: 56; Stasch 2011: 163–64). As Keir Martin (2013: 83, 89) writes, kin groups are made and defined using certain kinds of language, and this often happens in land dispute cases in PNG when the existence and definition of groups comes to the fore. In Chapter 5 I examine in detail such a speech event, namely, a meeting to settle a land dispute brought up by the expansion of logging to Wide Bay in 2013.

The logging and plantation projects in Wide Bay were connected to state making in other ways as well. Through the Ili-Wawas project, the local politicians of Pomio sought to expand infrastructure and services, and thereby state coverage, by shifting the provision of these to private logging and plantation companies. Drawing on recent work in the anthropology of the state, I do not regard "the state" as a monolithic actor, but examine state power as "contingent relations and practices rather than isomorphic with any singular state" (Fisher and Timmer 2013: 153), looking at "the multiple sites in which state processes and practices are recognizable through their effects (Trouillot 2001: 126). One such site where"state effects" or processes unfold was the new oil palm plantation. In Chapter 6 I demonstrate that plantations in general are not only sites of agricultural production and exploitation, but also political projects of ordering the people and landscape, as Michael Dove (2012: 30) puts it. Historically in Melanesia they have been the means of occupying, pacifying and bringing land under development (Dennis 198-: 219). In this sense the new oil palm plantation established in Wide Bay as a part of the Ili-Wawas project did not differ from earlier plantations, becoming a state-like space containing certain kinds of structured order. As I show in Chapter 6, the remarkable feature of this organization was that it was in part created by the plantation workers themselves, who organized the plantation along the lines of a government ward. This was a way of empowering themselves as well as making claims about what the state *should* be like (e.g. Timmer 2010). Thus on the oil palm plantation both bottom-up and top-down processes of state formation were present and, indeed, converged (also Jansen 2014; Oppermann 2015).

The Wide Bay Mengen took part in various ways in a number of state-making and territorializing practices. Mengen laborers on the plantation sought to influence its governance by enacting state-like order. Through the corporatized mechanisms of LOCs some Mengen men attempted to overcome the frontier-like conditions of Pomio and gain access to income, infrastructure and services. Involvement in logging did not only raise disputes over the ownership of land and distribution of compensations, but some Mengen rejected logging from the very beginning. Older women in particular

were concerned that logging would harm local livelihoods and destroy important places in the landscape and were the first to voice their opposition to it, often disagreeing with brothers and male kin who wanted to engage in it. This exemplifies the competing valuations of local environments that occur in frontier spaces, demonstrating that the Wide Bay Mengen were far from unified on the issues of natural resource extraction. While the older women faced opposition from their male and female kin alike, some of their children and younger kin supported their position. Often highly educated, these younger relatives turned to conservation in order to protect their lands and forests from logging. As I show in Chapters 8 and 9, this too involved territorialization, or "counter-enclosure" (Akram-Lodhi 2007: 1445; Baletti 2012: 578), through the creation of conservation areas and attempts to have them officially recognized.

As conservation among the Wide Bay Mengen was initiated by members of a single landowning clan who first closed their lands to logging and then, later, to swidden horticulture, the productive contradiction between landowners and land users was as pertinent to conservation as it was to LOCs. In Chapter 9 I discuss how Mengen conservationists turned to commodified forms of conservation, not because dictated to do so by outside actors such as transnational NGOs, but in order to participate in socially productive exchange relations. The conservationists had to mobilize and out-maneuver their fellow clan members in order to conserve their clan areas and compete for clan leadership with logging-minded members of their clans. As in the case of logging, the definition of the landowning group and its area became a highly controversial issue in conservation initiatives. Conservation did not, however, only involve "entification" of local matrilines and new territorializing ways of defining their land areas. Like involvement in logging, or state-emulation by plantation workers, Wide Bay Mengen conservation must also be understood in relation to the marginalized position of Pomio in the wider political economy of the province.

Like co-operative movements and the Kivung before them, the Wide Bay Mengen conservationists sought to improve the position of the rural people, politically and economically, within the province. They did not only oppose logging and turn to commodified forms of conservation, but positioned themselves within a longer tradition of social movements in Pomio. Explicitly framing conservation as a continuation of the village co-operative movements, they argued for "locally led development" and small-scale cash cropping alongside conservation. The local conservationists also provided legal training for their fellow villagers, educating them more broadly regarding their legal rights. When the land leasing boom was at its height (Filer 2012: 599), Wide Bay Mengen communities rejected the option, in part because the conservationists had explicated their implications. Because of their work in educating their community members, I discuss the role of the local conservationists in Chapter 8 in relation to environmental activism in PNG, but also in light of Antonio Gramsci's (1971: 5–7; also Crehan 2002: 132) notions of intellectuals as people engaged in "organizational and educative" activities. Intellectuals are thus defined by their social role and are, in Gramsci's formulation (1971: 5), tied to particular classes from which they emerge and whose interest and "worldview" they advance. Yet, according to Gramsci, intellectuals also play a crucial role in determining whether the class from which they have emerged is even able to become conscious of itself as a class (Crehan 2002: 144). Taking

these insights into account, I argue that, as the conservationists sought to advance the position of rural inhabitants in the larger political-economic structures of the province and country as rural cultivators, they can be regarded as *peasant* intellectuals.

Because the Wide Bay Mengen were small-scale rural cultivators who also produced commodities for the market, I refer to them as "peasants". According to Michael Watts' (2009: 524) definition, peasants are rural people distinguished by their direct access to land as a means of production, their predominant use of family labor, their partial engagement with markets and their subordinate position in larger political economies (see also Meillassoux 1973: 81; Meggit 1971: 208–9; Wolf 1966: 8, 18, 25). Moreover, peasants are between social groups, or classes, which have lost all or most of their access to the means of production, namely proletarians and semi-proletarians on the one hand and farming households fully engaged with the markets on the other (Watts 2009: 524). More precisely, the rural Mengen with whom I worked were food-producing peasants, who gained monetary income from cash cropping, supplemented it with various forms wage labor as well as occasional compensations from logging, but were not solely dependent on money for their livelihood (Bernstein 1979: 429; Grossman 1984, xviii, 13-14). This gave them a relatively high degree of security and autonomy in comparison to migrant plantation laborers relying only on wages or the urban poor with more limited access to land.

By using the term peasant I emphasize the importance of focusing on the *relations* of rural people with state actors and the capital, as well as on questions of class and changing historical conditions (Watts 2009: 524). The peasant-studies framework is particularly instructive because of this temporal focus. Writing on different rural communities in PNG, Mervyn Meggit (1971), Lawrence Grossman (1984) and Robert Foster (1995) have utilized the peasant-studies framework in their analyses of the impacts of a globalized commodity economy on rural communities over long periods of time. When people become dependent on commodity production for their social and physical reproduction, they often lose some of their autonomy as they rely more on external services (Meggit 1971: 208–9) and become more vulnerable to external pressures over which they have less control, such as changing state policies and "boom and bust cycles" commodity cycles (Grossman 1984: 10, 15). While cash cropping or other involvement in commodity production as such does not erase local autonomy (Grossman 1984: 16), when it becomes a necessity this fact is often more important than the relative ratio of how much time and energy is devoted to commodity production versus "subsistence" production (Bernstein 1979: 426; Foster 1995: 26). Likewise, the commitment to the commodity economy and its effects, like land enclosure for cattle projects or economic differentiation, may be hard to reverse (Grossman 1984: 253). Tania Li (2014) makes the same argument, and shows how the transition of peasants from relative autonomy to greater dependence on commodity production can happen gradually and without dramatic events, but can lead to stark social differentiation, poverty and dispossession.

By analyzing the Wide Bay Mengen as peasants, I examine how the relations of Wide Bay Mengen to outside actors changed over time and how the histories of natural resource extraction and wage labor were affected by the shifting frontier. Meanwhile,

by conceptualizing Wide Bay conservationists as peasant intellectuals, I can show that the conservationists took part in state formation, but in very different ways from their fellow villagers engaged in logging. I do not claim that the conservation associations of Wide Bay are equivalent to better known peasant movements elsewhere, or even that they self-identify as peasant movements. Rather, I emphasize how the conservationists in Wide Bay have emerged from the rural, or peasant class, of the area and that they work *for* their fellow villagers *as* rural cultivators.

With this emphasis I do not mean to imply that peasants in general or the Wide Bay Mengen in particular have no agency of their own and are passive parts of the capitalist world system, as James and Achsah Carrier (1989: 10) note in their constructive critique of the model of peasants' subsidizing capital. More fundamentally, as Henry Bernstein (1979: 142) notes, "peasant" is a descriptive term, not an unified trans-historical category, because peasants, or rural cultivators, have existed in very different social and historical contexts. Nor do I mean that the position of Wide Bay Mengen, as peasants, in wider political economies and ecologies, important as it is, fully describes their lives. On the contrary, I devote considerable attention to Wide Bay Mengen swidden horticulture in order to show that, while it is the most important form of livelihood activity, it is not merely a question of subsistence, but—as a Maussian (2002) [1925] "total social fact"—it also exemplifies a variety of Mengen institutions from "kinship" to "landholding". Indeed, as a "total social fact", these institutions cannot be separated from each other and, to paraphrase Jerry Jacka (2015: 83), to talk about land is to talk about kinship—and vice versa.

1.3 Doing fieldwork in Wide Bay

This thesis is based on three periods of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in Wide Bay: three months for my MA thesis in 2007, 12 months between May 2011 and April 2012 and a three month follow-up visit between January and April 2014. During my stay in Wide Bay, I lived in Toimtop village, a small Wide Bay Mengen settlement a few kilometers inland from the coast on an elevated plateau, some 300 meters above sea level. When logging had started in the Wide Bay area in the early 1990s, members of one clan group in Toimtop had opposed logging on their clan land, which they decided to turn into a conservation area (see Chapters 8 & 9). In addition, they established a conservation association, intended as community project for all Toimtop's inhabitants, with which my fieldwork and life in Wide Bay was thoroughly entangled. Initially, in 2007 when starting my MA thesis on the political effects of logging in PNG, I contacted a Papua New Guinean environmental lawyer who had given a talk in Helsinki on natural resource extraction, and asked if she knew a suitable place for doing preparatory fieldwork on logging. She put me in contact with a Papua New Guinean NGO which worked with communities that were affected by land and resource questions. The NGO had worked with the conservation association in Toimtop village and asked them if they were willing to put up with an anthropology student for a few months. Soon after, I received a positive response from Toimtop and the association and traveled to Wide Bay (after receiving all the formal permits, of course).

As I had come to Toimtop through the association, I stayed with the family which had initially established it, and in time formed close relations with them. Indeed, in many ways, I became the youngest child of that family. My adoptive brothers, who had formed the association, were particularly supportive of my stay and research, but they also wanted to make sure that it was regarded as a village project. While I stayed with the family, the association (with representatives of most of the clans present in Toimtop) decided that I should eat each night with a different household and pay the association for my keep, funds which would be distributed after I had left. By doing so, the association obviously took on the role of representing the community and its will in relation to me, made sure that I came to know the people of Toimtop and also that I did not have to handle matters of paying my way informally. The latter was a great relief, and in 2012, after I left Wide Bay, the association distributed my contributions. Neighboring communities in which I had stayed for extensive periods were paid; the women's group of Toimtop received a part of the money for cooking for me; the association held a part; while the bulk of the money was used to renovate the church of Toimtop. When I returned in 2014, it seemed to me that the community was happy with the decision, as renovating the church was a project which had been planned for some time and a project on which the nearly uniformly Catholic community could agree.

Even though I was associated in many ways with the conservation association, the people of Toimtop and other Wide Bay Mengen communities did not regard my work a part of the conservation activity as such. Rather, people saw me as a student (TP: *sumatin*) who had come to study the life of the communities, and especially everything that had to do with land. As I had stayed in Wide Bay in 2007, people had a good grasp what I was doing, namely, asking about everything and constantly writing in my notebook. Likewise, in 2010, a volunteer from New Zealand had come to work with the conservation association in Toimtop, and he too lived with the same family. The people of Toimtop and other villages also differentiated between his work in the association office and my much more diffuse mode of accompanying people and asking questions. As land questions are often contentious issues in PNG, and as logging and conservation had caused land disputes in Wide Bay, I feared my association with the conservation cause would raise suspicion in people who had disputed conservation or were associated with logging. In some cases people were wary of me but, more often than not, they were keen to tell me their sides of the story, especially regarding past land disputes. I also emphasized that I was not studying land disputes as such, nor that I was trying to establish who owned which areas and so on. Rather, I was regarded as a—somewhat eccentric—student, forever asking people about seemingly ordinary things like food and customs and seemingly never satisfied with an answer.

On a typical day of fieldwork in Toimtop, I would accompany the household with whom I was eating that day to whatever tasks they were doing. This was a way to become familiar with, and participate in, the everyday life of the community. Most often people were engaged in different aspects of swidden cultivation (see Chapters 2 & 3): clearing gardens, making fences, planting, weeding and so forth. These, like the tending of cash crops, were tasks that each household often did by themselves. In addition, there were different kinds of communal projects including government-appointed work,

such as the maintenance of schools, day clinics and the main road. In addition, Toimtop community had allocated certain days for communal tasks like tending the village, repairing the houses of elderly people and dealing with requests by individuals, for example, for help in gardening. These tasks were arranged on Monday meetings during which community members involved with institutions such as the church or schools informed others of their affairs, village officials talked about local-level government decisions and the people raised communal issues. These ranged from the co-ordination of feasts or communal events to settling everyday problems, from complaints about men drinking and making noise to more severe disputes, such as those over land. Most often, these meetings were about co-ordinating the daily life of the village. The Monday meetings were a remnant of colonial times when villagers were assigned work but, during my stay, they were self-organized community gatherings in which people quite freely took part or chose not to, attending to their own private tasks. Toimtop held such meetings regularly, as did other Wide Bay Mengen communities—although the frequency varied from community to community.

While accompanying people to their tasks and taking part in them, I constantly took notes both of my own observations and of informal discussions I had. During these I learned a lot, while my constant note-taking became a running joke with people. To start with, taking part in heavier work was not easy: people were reluctant to let me work, both because they feared I would injure myself or become ill, and because I would have slowed them down. Women in particular, who daily traveled between their gardens, sometimes over long distances, were initially reluctant to let me accompany them to far-away plots. This was at first a great cause of frustration, because I wanted to know as much as possible about swidden cultivation, and also to ensure that I accessed women's perspectives, because as a man and a researcher interested in topics like logging, which were on the surface very much a male sphere, getting a one-sided view would have been easy. In my interpretation, the reluctance of women to let me accompany them was based mainly on my slowness in heavy terrain and their fear of my becoming ill. While gender was an obvious and important divide in Wide Bay Mengen society, daily interactions between men and women were relaxed. Work was gendered, but men often did female work (less often the other way around), and men and women worked together in gardens, in the forest and in the village. Likewise, women often let me accompany them to nearby gardens, taught me about weeding and planting and, in time, also let me carry food—an exceptionally physically demanding task.

In addition to everyday tasks, I took part in and sought to observe communal events, such as dispute settlements, village court gatherings and ceremonial occasions—also visiting other villages in order to attend meetings or take part in festivities. Socially reproductive rituals like initiations and marital exchanges were organized so that each village held them on different days during the festive season (see Chapter 3), while mortuary rituals were performed immediately after death and secondary rituals during other festivities. I took part both as a guest and in the preparations, helping people make food, carry pigs and so forth. The ceremonies and their preparation were for me a source of crucial insights into many aspects of Mengen social life. The rituals taught me a great deal about Mengen concepts of relatedness and especially relations between clans. As ceremonial gifts were a central part of them, questions of exchange,

reciprocity and value rose to the fore and, as garden food was an integral element of gift giving, I learned a great deal about swidden horticulture through the rituals and vice versa. Despite their being a central source of insights, however, I do not deal explicitly with the rituals in my thesis because, as socially, culturally and aesthetically rich events, they deserve a thorough description of their own—save for the parts that are considered secret. Due to this, and more as a token of my admiration for the rituals than anything else, I merely stress that the insights gained from observation and people's exegesis and explanations of the rituals underlie my analysis of the diverse themes I discuss in the thesis.

While I lived mostly in Toimtop, I paid almost daily visits to other villages and lived for extended periods in the villages of Tagul, Sampun, Baein and especially Wawas. During a lengthy stay in Baein, I traveled with a friend from Baein to Maskilklie and Pulpul villages where we stayed for several days. At the time of my fieldwork, the logging companies were based in Pulpul. During this trip to the southern Wide Bay Mengen areas, I visited smaller inland hamlets. While I passed through Lop and Korpun villages, I never stayed there for long, but met their inhabitants in other instances, such as during my travels to the provincial capital of Kokopo. I took regular breaks from fieldwork in Kokopo, but also conducted research there: interviewing local NGO and government representatives, perusing archives and staying at a *transit haus*, an old copra storage facility which had been turned into a boat station for the inhabitants of Pomio. I also traveled to the new oil palm plantation where I stayed for several days to conduct research, mainly among Wide Bay Mengen workers. In addition, I visited Sulka villages along the coast of Wide Bay. During the period I was taking part in everyday life in the Wide Bay Mengen villages, I gathered basic census data as well as focusing on particular topics that were especially prevalent in the area. For example, in Baein and Wawas logging and LOCs were of particular interest as people had been active in these areas, whereas in Tagul I focused on migrant labor, as many of its inhabitants had moved to the new plantation.

As I have already mentioned, I kept detailed records both of the events around me and the informal discussions I was having with people. I also regularly conducted interviews on specific topics, especially plantation labor, logging and the establishment of LOCs, cash cropping and community conservation. As I became more familiar with people, informal interactions proved more fruitful than formal interviews which felt awkward for both parties. A major topic of my research was, as noted, swidden agriculture, which I sought to learn about by taking part in it, through discussing its features with exponents and recording discussions in which women taught me the names, growth seasons and yields of particular crops, both in the village as well as in the gardens. I recorded use-histories of specific gardens—by whom and how many times particular areas had been cultivated—and mapped particular garden areas and the plants cultivated in them. In 2014, on my follow-up visit, I conducted a more thorough survey of the gardens in Toimtop (summarized in Appendix 11.3).

Along with rituals, another "invisible" corpus of material were Mengen wailing songs (M: *tandaning, tandan*: to cry), songs composed mostly, but not exclusively, by women to express the emotion felt because of the death, injury or departure of a relative.

This ranges from intense anger, perhaps caused by sorcery or corruption accusations, to nostalgic longing for someone who has left the village. The language of the *tandaning* is poetic, and the composers use metaphors to describe their relatives—most often plant metaphors. The songs—whether newly composed or dating back generations—were publicly performed by women at initiation ceremonies but could also be sung in the course of everyday activities. I became interested in the genre for its historicity and emotional content and during my fieldwork collected some twenty songs and translated them, with either the composers themselves or with those who remembered them explaining the context of the song or the event it referenced—though much of the nuance is lost in my translation. Through the wailing songs people turned private emotions triggered by particular events into publicly performed and remembered texts or, indeed, into shared history (see also Maschio 1994).

In my thesis, I have cited these songs and referred to them briefly, saving a thorough analysis for another publication. However, as with Mengen rituals, the songs, and the explanations provided by their composers and performers of context, metaphor and logic, imparted insights that run throughout the analysis. For example, the plant metaphors of the *tandaning* made me appreciate the close analogies between people and food plants, and how concrete things such as plants and gardens become signs—both icons and indexes—of people and groups. Likewise, the strong emotions of loss, grief, anger and nostalgia expressed for and about relatives underlined the social importance of specific aspects of life, such as the opposition to logging or leaving one's child in the care of relatives when taking up wage labor on a plantation.

Finally, the songs, often composed by women, offered a female perspective on issues like logging that were, on the surface, very male spheres in Mengen society. While this study is not explicitly about gender, I have sought to be sensitive to gender as an aspect of social life that affects different people in different ways. I have stressed here that I have endeavored to "get the women's perspective", particularly because, in the course of my fieldwork and especially in the beginning, I was often referred to male elders when inquiring about land use, logging and so on. I want to stress here that I do not equate "gender" with "women", but rather have sought to understand the male sphere to which I was directed as highly gendered, rather than the baseline of Mengen society.

Like all studies, this too has its limitations. The gravest of them is that I never became fully conversant in North Coast Mengen. During my fieldwork I actively practiced the language and learned to conduct basic conversations; however, my competence was never enough to carry out actual research and to understand the nuances of speech. On the other hand, practically all Wide Bay Mengen speak Tok Pisin, the *lingua franca* of PNG, in which I became fluent during my fieldwork, up to the point that I had a good grasp of its social nuances. Nonetheless, Mengen was the everyday language, and my lack of fluency in it is a limitation. While I sought to be aware of gender as well as internal differences in Wide Bay Mengen society, my point of view has probably been influenced more by a male and dominant "official" view of Wide Bay Mengen society. In focusing on certain topics, I have omitted others and I do not claim this study is by any means a full or all-encompassing description of "Wide Bay Mengen culture". On the contrary, it is a partial account. A few months into my fieldwork, my adoptive brother

suggested, "Your research will be a historical document of how you saw us during your time here." His observation summarizes in one sentence what I have struggled to say in this section.

Finally, in order to highlight the historicity of my argument, I have chosen to write this thesis in the "ethnographic past tense". By choosing to do so I do not mean to imply that the Wide Bay Mengen life I describe is a thing of the past; rather, the goal is to emphasize that my analysis is situated in a specific time and place. Yet, despite the limitations and partiality, I firmly believe the analysis presented here is sound. Future research and Wide Bay Mengen readers will ascertain whether my belief is correct.

Part I: Land and Locality

2. Gardens, plants and land: socially productive work and the media of relatedness

> Gardens, gardens—work of the village.
>
> TP: *Gaden, gaden—wok bilong ples.*

As if commenting on his own thoughts, a Mengen man in his forties said this as we were walking along a logging road lined by fenced gardens and fallows. He was seemingly complaining that life in the village is all about gardening. My Mengen friends often made similar comments, noting, for example, that theirs is a "hard life" (TP: *hat laip*) and contrasting it with mine and those of other town-dwellers who do not have to toil in their gardens for food. The Mengen, like other rural people of PNG, often referred to their work in gardens as hard and all-consuming (e.g. Bashkow 2006). And this was no exaggeration: men felled large trees and dragged the heavy trunks to where they were building fences while women cleared plots with fire, weeded and carried weighty baskets of plants to and from the gardens across the hilly terrain. The hard labor left its mark on people's bodies: my friends showed me how the skin of their shoulders was hardened from carrying; middle-aged women often started experiencing knee-pains and problems caused by the heavy loads and steep gardens. Yet the references to "hard work" (M: *klingnan ti main*) were ambivalent, and in fact often expressed the pride and interest people took in their work and its products. Moreover, "hard work" was a central Mengen idiom for socially productive activity, which was the basis of Mengen conceptions of relatedness and value.

Gardening, or swidden horticulture, was the prototypical form of work for the rural Wide Bay Mengen. It was their main livelihood activity and something with which they were concerned most of the time. Plants grown in gardens were the products of this work and the very staff of rural life—or, to put it simply, the food that kept people going. The numerous tasks related to gardening, gardens and plants, however, were invested with meanings that go beyond questions of subsistence. They were, as I will show, "total social phenomena", as defined by Marcel Mauss (2002: 3), in as much as "all kinds of institutions are given expression one and the same time": from the religious, juridical and moral to the political economic and familial—not forgetting the aesthetic, as Mauss cautioned. By examining the myriad meanings condensed in gardens and plants, I have two main aims: first, to describe Mengen gardening practices, gardens and food plants because of their central role in Mengen life; and secondly, through the discussion of Mengen horticulture, I introduce key concepts and dynamics that are central for understanding how the Mengen related to each other and their land.

One of these central themes was the Mengen concept of *klingnan*, or "work" in English. The term does not simply mean physical activity, but could be translated rather cumbersomely as *socially productive activity*. This means that "work" is what produces and maintains valued social relations and contributes in recognized ways to the social life of the rural communities. Thus the Mengen concept of work is very similar to that of the Qaqet Baining of East New Britain, as identified by Jane Fajans (1997). For the Qaqet all activities that transform "natural" entities into social entities are work

(Fajans 1997: 7, 268). For example, care turns "natural" children into social persons and gardening turns the forest into a social space. Even though the physical activities of child-rearing and gardening are different, the underlying schema—socialization through human activity—is the same (Fajans 1997: 11, 80). Moreover, work is a key source of value among the Baining (Fajans 1997: 8, 80). For the Mengen, too, work produced and maintained social relations.

Gardening, as socially productive activity, produced most obviously the food crops people ate, but also environments and people. Just as gardening was the prototypical form of work, so food plants, especially taro and yam, were the prototypical forms of food. Feeding and the act of giving food were for the Mengen—like for many other Melanesian peoples—the basic forms of care and nurture (see also Fajans 1997: 69). As I will show, they were constitutive of kinship and other social relations. Care and nurture, manifested as acts of giving food, were classed by the Mengen as work, or indeed as "hard work". For example, when a young Mengen man was to be ordained as a priest, his relatives planned festivities in connection to his first mass. The biological mother of the priest wanted the festivities to include the proper gift giving of food and pigs in accordance with Mengen ceremonial traditions. The priest's other mothers (the mother's sisters, MZ), on the other hand, wanted to limit the festivities in order not to draw attention away from the religious character of the celebration. This caused a long argument between the mother and her sisters, with the mother once remarking to me that it was up to her to decide, because she had taken care of her son, while her relatives had not even contributed to his school fees. The mother maintained that her opinion should override the others, not automatically as mother, but because she had undertaken the hard work of raising her son.

Discussing various concepts of work among the Jacquinot Bay Mengen in the 1960s, M. Panoff (1977: 11–12) notes how "suffering" was a central concept in relation to various activities. For example, because people had "suffered" in clearing gardens, they could pass the tenure rights to it to their children. Likewise, the harvesting of food was seen as compensation provided by the land, which had absorbed people's "suffering", while people gave parts of the first harvest to spirits and ancestors, who made the food grow. According to M. Panoff (1977: 12) "suffering" demanded compensation and in all their relations, the Jacquinot Bay Mengen strove to an equal outcome, or the eradication of debt. Moreover, the Jacquinot Bay Mengen did not regard gardening as "production", understood as production of wealth through work, let along by the conquest of "nature", but as a "contractual relation" between partners (people, spirits, land), which should end up in an equal outcome between the parties (Panoff 1977: 12, 17). Gardening was for the Jacquinot Bay Mengen thus also a moral question and expressed people's moral virtues, and so a model of "all productive activity", as M. Panoff (1977: 12, 14) puts it. (The translation into English is mine.) Jacquinot Bay Mengen does not have a word that is equivalent to the Wide Mengen term *klingnan*, but in many ways, the term "suffering" has similar connotations as the Wide Bay Mengen expression of "hard work". Moreover, in the Jacquinot Bay Mengen were concerned over the maintenance of proper and equal exchange relations, which resembles the Wide Bay Mengen focus on the creation and maintenance of valued social relations.

Socially reproductive rituals such as initiations, marriages and mortuary rituals—in Tok Pisin *kastom*—were referred to as "work". These included ceremonial exchanges of food, pigs, shell valuables and money. In initiation ceremonies, the parents of the initiates presented gifts to persons who had been formative for the initiates, that is, who had worked hard for them, or were the offspring of people who had cared for the initiates or their parents. The recipients included members of both the initiate's clan, people from affinal clans and, as noted, people who had otherwise shown care. Part of the bridewealth given by the clan of the husband to the clan of the wife was given to the wife's father, who is of a different clan, for the "hard work" of caring for his daughter (see also Jacka 2015: 118). Thus, for the Mengen, work was any activity in which the "underlying schema" (Fajans 1997: 11, 80) of producing social relations through care was the same. Because the Mengen concept of work encompassed actions that produce valued social relations, it resonates with Marxist-inspired anthropological theories of value which emphasize that production is ultimately about making people (Fajans 1997: 272; Graeber 2013: 223; Munn 1992: 15). Through their productive activities, people do not only produce material means of subsistence, but also new needs, the human beings themselves and different relations of social co-operation (Turner 2008: 44). In this chapter I look closely at what kinds of relations Mengen produced through the practices of swidden horticulture.

Systems of social production also produce value, which in turn needs to be represented in order to be circulated, exchanged and appropriated (Turner 2008: 47, 53; also Marx 1976: 139, 225). This, as Terence Turner (2008: 47–48) notes, happens through semiotic media (also Marx 1976: 932). Besides being central to people's livelihood, food plants and gardens were also important *media* through which the Wide Bay Mengen related to each other and their environment (e.g. Munn 1992: 17; 74-75; Stasch 2009: 14). Food plants that people grew were inherited and received from kin and friends and they indexed the web of social relations of the holder of those plants. The same applied to gardens: rights to clear gardens were passed on in accordance with complex kinship relations, and individual gardens were divided among kin and friends. As will be shown, gardening practices both made visible and constituted land-using groups. Gardens and plants were not only passed along to others according to social relations, but the acts of giving food and sharing gardens established and strengthened such relations.

I start this chapter from the very ground, by focusing first on the food plants the Mengen cultivated and by discussing how they were simultaneously both objects of care and concrete media for caring for others. From the individual food plants I widen my focus to the gardens in which the plants grew and where they were tended by people. Like plants, the gardens were also media through which Mengen related to each other by sharing the gardens and working together in them. In the final section I broaden my focus even further to the institutions of land holding, namely the inter-relations between land-owning matrilineal clans, and how gardening land was distributed between them. I conclude the chapter by showing how land-holding and swidden horticulture express the productive contradiction between the values of clan autonomy and inter-clan relations.

2.1 Main food crops: care, continuity and history

Gardens, both newly cleared and those which were mature and abundant with plants, dotted the surroundings of Wide Bay Mengen villages. Within the village area, which women kept meticulously clean, people planted a wide variety of fruit trees, various palms and decorative plants. In addition to the large gardens circling the village, there were also a number of backyard plots for minor supplementary food plants and spices. Sometimes these plots were kept merely to experiment with new plants, like that of my adoptive brother who told me that he wanted to see how cabbage grew in the village. It soon became clear to me that most of the villagers were very interested in plants and cultivation techniques, and proud of their skills in this field. (See also F. Panoff (1969; 1972) & M. Panoff (1977) on Jacquinot Bay Mengen in the 1960s or Philippe Descola (1996: 166) on the Achuar of the Amazon for discussion of the joy and pride horticulturalists take in their work.) The Wide Bay Mengen interest in plants is clearly demonstrated by an ethno-botanical workshop the local conservationists conducted in Toimtop village (see Chapter 8). The resulting study contains about 400 identified trees and plants, most which have a vernacular name.

People cultivated a great number of edible and useful plants in their gardens, but each garden was dominated by the main food crop of the season, taro (*Colocasia esculenta*, M: *ma*, TP: *taro*) and two species of yam: the greater yam (*Dioscorea alata*, M: *klaip*, TP: *yam*) and the lesser yam (*Dioscorea esculenta*, M: *mis*, TP: *mami*). Sweet potato (*Ipomea batatas*, M: *konge*, TP: *kaukau*), the third central staple, was planted either in its own gardens, bridging the taro and yam seasons (see Chapter 3), or along with taro and yam. Out of the main staple foods, taro and yam were also the most valued foodstuffs and subject to the most elaboration. They were central components of any ceremonial gift, given as part of initiation rituals, bridewealth exchanges, mortuary gifts or acts of compensation. These ceremonies (M: *klingnan* ("work")[6], TP: *kastom*) could only performed, or "played" as the Tok Pisin idiom goes, with taro or yam. Sweet potato could be included as a supplement, but no gift could consist solely of it.

Many of the foods planted by the Mengen were divided into several named subvarieties. During my fieldwork I recorded 66 for taro, but this is probably far from exhaustive since it was based only on interviews I conducted with women from Toimtop; inquiries in other villages would probably have resulted in a longer list. For both species of yam I recorded twelve named subvarieties and for sweet potato, which is considered an ancestral food, ten[7]. Women distinguished the varieties by paying attention to subtle differences in the color and structure of the leaf, stem and the tuber itself. This was gendered knowledge in as much as men with whom I spoke knew the varieties by name but were often not able to identify them as well as women, who usually did the planting

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[6]Initiation ceremonies during which bridewealth presentations were also made, were called *pnaeis*, roughly meaning "feast" in Mengen.

[7]As a historical and regional comparison, Françoise Panoff (1969: 22; 1972: 73) mentions 150 named varieties for taro, 19 for yam and none for sweet potato which she recorded during the 1960s among Jacquinot Bay Mengen. Joseph Schneider (1954: 287), who worked from 1915 to 1947 as a missionary among the Sulka, notes that the Sulka had 450 named varieties of taro, 50 of which were of Mengen origin. Michel Panoff (1969b: 11–13) recounts how the peoples of New Britain traded plants with each other using local trade-networks.

and weeding. Note also that names of the taro subvarieties were not included in the list made during the ethno-botanical workshop.

This, like many aspects of Mengen agriculture, is not an unchanging tradition: a woman whom I interviewed told me that in the past men had had their own, more valued, taro varieties and did the planting, but over time the planting and tending of food plants had become a mostly female endeavor. I was not told precisely why or how this change had occurred. The gendered division of labor was, however, flexible and men both planted and weeded if required (see also Schneider 1954: 286 on the absence of a strict gendered division of work in gardens). Yet, while men could and did help, the repetitive tasks of planting, weeding and carrying food from the gardens fell more heavily on women. The repetitiveness of the tasks made them tiring and carrying food baskets from the gardens across steep slopes was extremely arduous. Men, on the other hand, performed tasks like felling and fencing which were also very heavy, but less repetitive (see following section).

The relationship between people and the plants they tended was personal and one of direct interaction. Women told me that the taro feels their hand when they weed it and this makes the plant grow. Likewise, one could directly interact with plants through spells. Garden magic was widely, but not universally, practiced by both men and women. Spells were personal—they were inherited from kin and friends and their power was based on secrecy, that is, if too many people knew the spell, its power waned. However, spells were not known to all and one older woman told me that her ancestors had never taught her spells, but that her food grows well all the same. The relationship between plants and people was one of mutual nurture. The Mengen verb *pnge* refers to the growing and tending of plants, but also to caring for children and domestic animals. A male friend of mine told me that *pnge* can be used only for caring for pigs and children, while plants grow by themselves. A female friend noted that this was unsurprising, since men usually do not tend plants.

The relationship was mutual, because people gave care and nurture to the food plants and then used the food plants to provide care and nurture for each other. Acts of giving, especially of food, were the prototypical forms of care for the Mengen. This care, often conceptualized as "hard work" (M: *klingnan ti main*), was a central component of kinship. While Mengen kinship was based on notions of shared blood (M: *svul*), giving food and care was also a constituent part. For example, a father who had not cared for his children was not considered a real father, while adoptive parents who had done so were without question real parents. Jane Fajans (1997: 22) has shown that, for the Qaqet Baining of New Britain, kinship was based on similar notions. Work in the Qaqet context was any socializing activity which transforms "natural", or non-social, entities into social ones, for example wild forest into gardens and children into social persons. This "transformative schema"—that is, socializing—forms the "structural frame" of Qaqet society and is a key source of value. (Fajans 1997: 11, 80). In a similar fashion, "work" for the Mengen encompassed all socially productive activities: gardening, feeding, caring for others and holding socially reproductive rituals.

As food plants were tended and cared for by women, much like children, it is no wonder that the plants were closely associated with their tenders. This was evident, for

example, in mortuary practices. When a woman died, her taro was sometimes uprooted and placed on a platform (M: *songom*) and left to rot. This emphasized the absence of the deceased: as she is not there to care for her relatives anymore, her taro, with which she used to care for others, also rots away (see also Fajans 1997: 69; Laufer 1962: 450). (The *songom* was the inversion of *chli*, a make-shift platform like the *songom* on which taro stems were left to "soften" before planting them.) It was also common for people to taboo valued foods as a sign of mourning—often when the deceased was someone who used to provide the mourner with that food. The taboo then emphasized the relation of care that had existed between the deceased and the mourner. Such a relation of care was both constituted and reproduced by the acts of giving food, and the food plants came to signify that relation indexically.

Food plants and domestic trees were not only associated with those who tended them, but also served as metaphors for people in Mengen song and poetry. I once toured a number of gardens with a Mengen woman who was teaching me the names of distinct subvarieties and how to recognize them, as well as stories associated with them. As I was writing down a name she had just mentioned—*Ukonekwa* (the black (*kwa*) Ukone)—I noticed she was quietly singing a song. I asked her what it was, and she told me that the taro had reminded her of a wailing song (M: *tandaning*; *tandan*: to cry) composed for a man who was likened to the *ukonekwa*. The Wide Bay Mengen did not generally refer to each other with personal names, but rather with technonymns and nicknames as a sign of respect. In wailing songs, people were often referred to as plants, metaphors that followed two main logics: first, the plant's physical qualities were said to resemble those of the person iconically. For example, the dark plants, like the *ukonekwa*, were used as metaphors for people who were regarded as having dark complexions. Secondly, people could be likened indexically to plants that belonged to their matriclans. As I discuss in more depth in the next chapter, due to the close association with persons and their productive activities, plants and trees elicited emotive reactions from people—by reminding them of deceased relatives, for example (see also Maschio 1994: 162, 181).

Some of the named subvarieties of taro, yam and sweet potato were associated with specific persons who had in one way or another contributed to the variety—if only by buying it from a town market and introducing it to the village. Others were associated with deceased persons who had appeared in dreams to the living and told them where new, wild varieties could be found, while certain sweet potato varieties were named after women who had found wild varieties, taken them into their gardens and domesticated them (see also Schneider 1954: 287). This is obviously a concrete instance of socializing through caring and nurturing. According to Françoise Panoff (1969: 28, 30), Jacquinot Bay Mengen in the 1960s regarded taro as nutritional because it had a spirit, as did people, which it acquired through domestication and care, that is, when it was brought into the social sphere (see also Battaglia 1990: 94; Bashkow 2006: 164–65; Fajans 1998: 17; Jorgensen 1998: 102). When inquiring about the spirit of the taro or other plants, I was explicitly told that plants do not have spirits; nevertheless, the socializing effect of care was evident in how people related to their plants.

Each woman, and many men, had their own distinct "collection" of plants of

different subvarieties. Some were associated with specific matrilineal clans and others, as noted, with specific persons. The food plants were inherited from parents; upon marriage a woman usually received plants from her affinal kin, and new varieties were received as gifts from friends, brought back from travels, bought in town and so on. A Mengen woman explained to me how plants were given:

> So this [name of taro variety], previously I didn't use to plant it. So Mary, she's a woman from [name of clan], she knows that my cousin Margaret's father is from [that clan]. So she gave the taro to her. And now, my cousin, she went on and gave it to me, because their uncle [MB] is my father, so she acknowledges me and gave me this taro. . . .

> And this [variety of taro]: she [another woman] went and named the daughter of Glentou . . . so with us, if you name someone, you'll look after them. So when she got the new taro, the one that is black [purple] inside, she went on and gave it to her [younger namesake] and said, plant this for my namesake. . . . So, it became popular and people began requesting it. –woman in her 40s, 2012-01-07

> TP: *So desla* [taro], *pastaim mi no save planim. Nau Mary, em i meri* [clan name], *na em i save kasin bilong mi Margareth, em i papa bilong en i* [name of clan]. *So em i givim en, em i givim Margareth. . . . na nau, kasin bilong mi i kirap na givim mi. Bikos kasin bilong mi Margareth i save olsem mi kasin bilong en bikos uncle bilong ol long papa bilong mi, so em i luksave long mi na givim mi desla taro. . . .*

> [*D*]*esla* [name of taro] *ya: em i nemim pikinini bilong Glentou . . . , so mipela, sapos yu nemim man, bai yu lukautim em. So taim em i kisim nupela taro, olsem insait bilong em i blek, em i kirap givim wan nem bilong en nau. Em nau, em i kisim taro na tokim yupela planim long wan nem bilong mi. So em nau, em i givim long pikinini bilong Glentou nau, em i popular na ol man i wok long requestim nau.*

The first part of the quote illustrates one way of mediating the productive contradiction: a woman gives her clan's taro to her cross-cousin, whose father is of that clan. The cross-cousin in turn gives the taro on to her cross-cousin—belonging to a third clan. Through these transactions, the women maintained and emphasized their inter-relations as cross-cousins as well as the relations between their respective clans. Simultaneously, as all the women acknowledged that the taro was given, because it belongs to one of the clans, the transactions emphasized clans as entities. Even though this was a mundane transaction between three persons, the logic and outcome resemble formalized gift-giving during initiation and mortuary ceremonies, where both intra- and inter-clan relations are highlighted with gifts. Finally, the account is an example of how in most cases, the tension between the two values of clan unity and inter-clan relations does not amount to disagreements or conflict.

More generally, this account shows how the plants became signs of social relations. The different varieties of taro, yam, banana, sugar cane and sweet potato acquired

through different connections in an individual collection of crops were a materialization of the owner's social relations to other people, or, in more technical terms, one of the material media through which these relations were communicated (Stasch 2009: 22). The personal stock of foods was then an index of the person's relations to others (see also Stasch 2003: 362, 365). The diverse plant species and varieties cultivated by a given woman on her plot were, to paraphrase Nancy Munn (1992: 121), both an outcome and a sign of her relations to others. Moreover, the diversity of plants in the plot and in her collection were an *icon* of the diverse relations (see Munn 1992: 121). In this sense, food crop collections resembled individual gardens, which were also concrete manifestations of relations between individuals and between matrilineal clans. Food crops did not just materialize personal histories and continuity, but were also tied to a more general conception of social continuity. When interviewing one of my friends on the reproduction of taro, she explained that great care is taken so that the taro varieties of the ancestors do not die out. As noted, there were tens of named subvarieties of taro and several named subvarieties of other food crops. The specific histories of many varieties were—to varying extents—known. People were keen to adopt new varieties, which could be highly valued for their taste, growth or other aspects; however, ancestral taro varieties were often valued more and their dying out would constitute not just the loss of a good crop, but also a break in historical continuity.

2.2 Clearing and dividing a garden

Clearing gardens was a many-phased process which started with the clearing of undergrowth, a task often assigned to children and youths. This was followed first by the cutting of young trees with bush knives and later the felling of large trees. The garden was then left to dry and a few days later the felled trees were cleared of branches. After the trees have been felled and the branches cut and left to dry in the sun, the clearing resembles a chaotic pile of branches, twigs and trunks through which movement is laborious at best. (At least this was my experience.) The cleared areas were, however, only seemingly chaotic: when cutting felled trees, men were already starting to align young tree trunks and larger branches into piles with further steps in mind. This all dawned on me when I was helping a friend to clear a garden at this stage, using fire. As the twigs and dried leaves burned, neat piles of trunks emerged. Most of the piles were aligned along the borders of the cleared area ready for fence building. This was characteristic of Mengen gardening and swidden horticulture in general: what to an outsider may seem unorganized or even random acts were, in fact, highly sophisticated techniques and part of a well-organized process. (See (Panoff 1972: 44) on the organization of Mengen gardening and (Bird Rose 2001: 109–10; Geertz 1970: 24; Scott 2012: 48–52; Wagner 2008) on the sophistication of swidden horticulture in general). Some of the tree trunks and larger branches were piled into one or two rows that cut the cleared area lengthwise, usually from the "head of the garden" (M: *ngurkun*, *kun*: head)—the elevated side if the garden was located on a slope—to its "leg" (M: *ngurkain*, *kain*: leg). This row, called *kip*, divided the cleared area that would later be fenced into gardens (M: *ngur*), each held by an individual household. Figure 1 shows the prototypical division, or plan, of a garden.

The individual garden, demarcated by the fence (M: *savnu*) and the *kip*, was divided further into neat rectangles with small tree trunks and branches. These rows consisting of single trunks were called *roung* (boundary in Mengen), and individual plots (M: *mkop*, *ngurmang* (lit. part of a garden)) (see Figure 1) demarcated by the man who had cleared the garden. If it was cleared in secondary or fallowing forest, meaning that the area had been cultivated before, the division of the garden followed the old *kip* and *roung* which were visible as slight elevations, as people placed garden debris and rubbish on top of them. Yet this use of tree trunks, branches and debris was not only a way of making the division of a garden visible; it also had an ecological function. If the garden was located on a slope, the *roung*—and in some cases the *kip*—running across the slope formed an embankment which prevented erosion and fertile matter from being washed off by rain. (See F. Panoff (1972: 41) for slightly different conceptions and practices during the 1960s in Jacquinot Bay.)
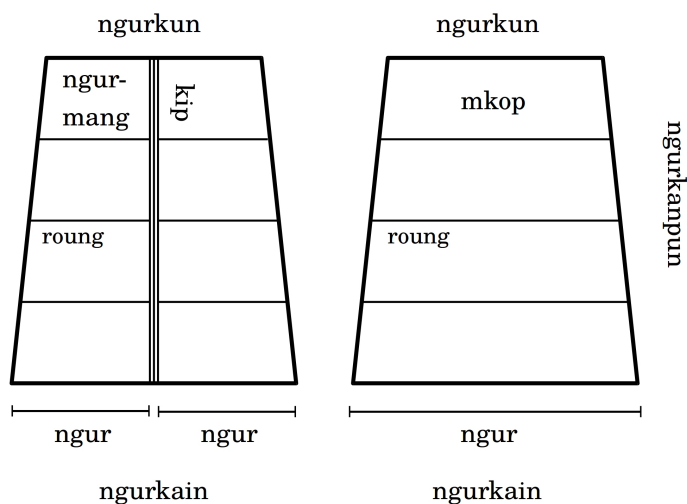
Figure 1: Mengen garden divisions and parts

After a man had divided his garden into plots, his wife—or, in the case of an unmarried man, his mother—assigned the plots to individual women. How the plots were distributed principally depended on the household composition of the "mother" and the "father" of the garden. In the case of a married couple with children, most of the plots were divided between members of the household. The mother of the garden usually held the greatest number of plots along with the unmarried daughters, while married daughters would only have individual plots, as they had husbands to clear gardens of their own. The distribution of plots was, however, not confined to the household; plots were distributed according to a wide array of kinship and friendship ties. The mother of the garden ensured that widows or unmarried women close to her, who did not have men to clear gardens for them, received plots, although married women were also given plots in gardens other than their own.

Women regularly asked for plots from others, so that the food they cultivated was not concentrated in a single garden as a safeguard against marauding pigs. If a pig

raids a garden, "outside" plots ensure that not all the food is lost and also promotes the continuity of plants in different ways. Absent people, like young women who had gone to work on nearby oil-palm plantations (see Chapters 6 & 7), were also assigned plots, which were then cultivated by their mothers or sisters to ensure that the plants of the worker did not die out. Even if it was not explicitly formulated by the women themselves, here again there was a close analogy with children. Women who went to work on plantations had to leave their children in the care of others—often with the very same relatives who took care of their food plants while they were gone. Unmarried male children could also be assigned plots, usually cultivated by female relatives, but in case of young children this was done so that they learned how to work in gardens and learned to "know" their food by taking care of the plants.

Keeping the stock of taro (and other plants) alive was not just a matter of subsistence but, as noted in the previous section, the food crops had emotional and historical value. Moreover, as Françoise Panoff (1972: 32) has noted, gardening among Jacquinot Bay Mengen in the past was necessary for the social success of men, that is, the gaining of prestige and supporters in the quest for leadership through displays of skill, strength and the distribution of food. An abundant garden was the sign of one's skill and the strength of one's magic and allowed for spectacular ceremonial gifts—which still feature the display of garden food. During my fieldwork, distributing large amounts of food as part of ceremonial gift giving was highly valued and was certainly noted by others. Likewise, gardening involved moral evaluation: it was regarded as the prototypical form of work, and it was work because it allowed socially productive activity, like taking care of others and tending the crops. Conversely, men who spent more time tending their cash-crops—for the purposes of generating income, for example—were called lazy, because they "did not work", and following Nancy Munn (1992: 3, 11, 20) generated "negative value potentials". In my interpretation, however, if the income was used for socially productive activities, cash-cropping would be classed as work (see Chapter 7). Keeping an absent person's plants alive was important, because food and its distribution were—as noted—central media through which the rural Mengen related to each other. With her food plants dead, the woman returning from a plantation would find it hard to participate fully in the social life of the village and care for her relatives. Losing the plants would also be an emotional loss as they link the owner to other people, both past and present.

Even though gardens were dominated by one of the main staple foods, the plots were planted with an abundant variety of plants. Most of them were food plants, but decorative and ritual plants—most notably cordyline (M: *el*, TP: *taget*)—were also planted amidst the food. Mengen gardens were diverse environments , effectively represented by Clifford Geertz's notion (1970: 16) that swidden gardens emulate the diversity of the forest in which they are cleared. Indeed, swidden gardening—rather than dominating nature—has been described as creating the favorable conditions for plants to grow (Ingold 2000: 86), also called "coaxing" (Maschio 1994: 141) or "generation" (Bird Rose 2001: 109). Mengen gardening was based on intimate knowledge of the various plants, their inter-relations, the soil and climate; the different plants were not planted at random but, rather, after considering the properties of the individual plant and how well they grow together. For example, the greater yam (*Dioscorea alata*) and

sweet potato (*Ipomea batatas*), both crawlers, were not planted close to each other; plants that produce shade were put on the borders of plots and so on. (See Appendix 11.1 for an example of the plot division and plant diversity of a taro garden.)

Individual plots were usually even-sized and the division into plots was also a way of keeping track of the number of plants cultivated in a garden—thus the mother of the garden also divided the area she occupied into individual plots. Women had to learn to estimate (M: *klingtot*: to estimate, to distribute [food], TP: *badjet*) how much food they could extract from a garden without depleting it too early. Sometimes the mother of a garden assigned or named the plots she cultivated after her husband and sons, again to keep track of the amounts of food being grown and required by the family. While women had intimate knowledge of their gardens, plots and plants, and could accurately estimate how much food they could extract at a given moment or under surprising circumstances—such as a mortuary feast—individual plants were not counted.

If the garden was intended to provide food to be distributed in ceremonial exchanges that were part of life-cycle rituals, such as marriages and initiation, or *kastom*, the division into plots was even more crucial for keeping track of food. In the case of a *kastom* garden, the women who received plots were not allowed to harvest without the permission of the owners and were obliged to help the owners of the garden with food, an obligation that consisted of 20 tubers (M: *parun*) per plot. After this requirement had been met, food could also be used for everyday reproduction, although in order to have a successful feast, women often wanted to see their gardens "empty" after it was over—as a sign that distribution had been abundant (see also Munn 1992: 88). While those distributions made during initiation and marriage ceremonies were planned well ahead, and entire gardens were cleared for this purpose, death was a "surprise element". Mortuary feasts were held immediately after death and all the women in the village of the deceased provided food for the relatives to distribute. As death can occur at any time, women had to estimate how much food they might be able to provide and take this possibility into account beforehand as well.

As noted, the division of gardens into plots had several functions, including keeping track of food, decentralizing crops and preventing erosion in hilly terrain. Divided in this way, the garden stood for individual persons both on the level of its parts and also as a whole. In the case of the latter, the area delimited by the *kip* and the fence stood for, or was homologous with, the man who cleared it. On a more abstract level, the analogy between a garden and a person was evident in the anatomical imagery of the garden with its head and leg. Scaling down to the level of parts, the individual plots, on the other hand, were associated with the women who cultivated them. The plot was also a whole in its own right as it was the smallest unit of the garden containing—in theory at least—the same plants as all the other plots. Even though not explicitly conceptualized by the Mengen themselves in this way, the garden can be taken as an example of self-scaling totalization, or fractal imagery, in which the part is always a whole and the whole a part (Rio and Smedal 2008: 242). Referring to Roy Wagner's work, Knut Rio and Olaf Smedal (2008: 242) argue that the so-called Melanesian sociality is founded on this kind of cyclic process of creating wholes and taking them apart again, and that the "crowning measure" of this process is the achievement of

totality, but in the form of holographic images. (See Appendix 11.2 on fractal imagery in Mengen ceremonial gifts of food.)

In light of this it is tempting to assume that Mengen conceptions of sociality conformed to the model Melanesian sociality characterized by the absence of "a priori" units, and in which persons are nodes in a pre-existing field of sociality (Scott 2007: 26). In this conceptual model persons and collectives become individuated through human action by processes of "partition", "fractation" or de-composition (Scott 2007: 26). As Michael Scott (2007: 27) notes, carelessly applying this kind of notion in contexts such as that of the Arosi of Salomon islands, or of the Mengen, where at the core of the person is an unchanging matrilineal essence, is problematic (see also Martin 2013: 79). By taking up the fractal imagery—which is, nonetheless, my interpretation based on examples given by Rio and Smedal (2008: 242)—I have a much more pedestrian aim, namely to show how certain aspects of Mengen sociality and kinship became materialized in gardens and how this can be, at least from an outsider's perspective, represented by fractal imagery. By "certain aspects" I mean inter-clan or lineage connections, to which I turn in greater detail in the next section.

2.3 Gardens and land-use

Land ownership among the Wide Bay Mengen was vested in exogamous and named kin groups, nowadays known as clans (TP: *klen*). Mengen society as a whole was divided in two exogamous moieties, which were called vines (M: *val*) in the vernacular, whereas clans were vine branches (M: *valmtan*; *mtan*: kind, type) and each clan belonged to either moiety. Named subgroups were usually referred to simply as subclans (M: *sinpun*; "small root"; TP: *sabklen*). The moieties were a way of classifying people and clans in terms of marriage, but they did not form groups. The clan and its possible sub-branches provided the basis of land ownership. In terms of landholding practices, the Mengen closely resembled other Austronesian-speaking matrilineal societies of Island Melanesia. (See Eves (2011: 353), Foster (1995: 68, 72, 84) on the Lelet and Tanga of New Ireland, Goodenough (1962: 6), Martin (2013: 31, 37) on the Lakalai and Tolai of New Britain and Scott (2007) on the Arosi of the Solomon Islands).

According to Mengen clan histories, the apical ancestress of each clan had autonomously emerged in an area, often from a plant or a topographical feature, and the Mengen landscape was scattered with such origin places (M: *plangpun*, *plang*: to emerge, *pun*: root). The clans claimed land areas both on the basis of this mythical precedence and also first settlement in a vacant territory, as is common in Austronesian societies (Fox 1996a: 9; Panoff 1970: 177; Scott 2007: 7). Named subclans had branched off from the "mother-clan" in the course of clan history (see Chapter 3), and their relations with landholding varied. In some cases, they held and managed their respective areas and were largely autonomous in terms of land, as noted by M. Panoff (1970: 178) for the Jacquinot Bay Mengen. Hence the qualities of clans could also apply to subclans, as Eves (2011: 353) has noted in relation to the Lelet of New Ireland. In other scenarios, clans had decided to "act as one" and were downplaying possible subclan divisions; different subclans were all claiming to represent the senior group and were in fierce

contests with each other; and members of the mother-clan were seeking to downplay the authority of subclan members regarding decisions over land. John Wagner (2007: 28) has noted this tendency elsewhere in PNG, namely, how landholding can shift simultaneously to larger and smaller units.

Yet, because of clan exogamy, strictly practiced by the Wide Bay Mengen,[8] no clan-group could live alone on its land. Therefore, real social existence was only achieved when lineages intermarried and dwelled together on the land (Scott 2007: 223; also Eves 2011: 359), and the land-using entities were necessarily composed of members of several clans; in practice, the most obvious land-using entity was the village or settlement (M: *mankun*). Michel Panoff (1970: 178) recounts how in pre-colonial times new villages were established either because a more favorable site was found or because a village split—perhaps due to sorcery accusations. The founders of the new village would have had some connections to the land on which it was sited: for example, a man leaving his natal village as a result of being accused of sorcery could establish a new settlement on his clan's land and some of his relatives would follow him to the new site. Villages were necessarily were multi-clan polities, to borrow Scott's (2007: 218) expression, since the founder's children belonged to his wife's clan and subsequent migrants to the group would enlarge the village's "clan-base". This was especially the case in the present era as many villages have grown considerably in size due to the colonial policy of encouraging people to abandon small hamlets in the forest and move to villages on the coast or along main trails.

M. Panoff (1970: 182) noted that among the Jacquinot Bay Mengen land rights in hamlets were passed on "corporately" from generation to generation—not strictly based on descent, but to children of native residents who were members of the founding descent groups. At the time of my fieldwork land rights in the villages followed similar relationships of filiation; that is, married couples built their houses on the same or adjacent sites as the parents of either spouse. Gardening rights were passed on similarly. Each village had a territory of its own and commonly recognized boundaries with neighboring villages. Gardens were usually located on this village territory and gardening rights were passed on according to similar ties as hamlet rights. First gardens were usually collectively fenced, with plots given to individual households due to the small size of the initial hamlet, but in time, as the village grew, gardening areas also expanded (Panoff 1970: 185). While "administrative rights" were vested in the local descent group, the individual gardening rights were passed on from father to son (Panoff 1970: 186; 1976: 184; see also Eves 2011: 359; Scott 2007: 61).

Figures 2 and 3 describe a typical succession of gardening rights and the allocation

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[8]During my fieldwork I recorded only a handful of cases where the exogamy rule was broken. Most of these were marriages between people from different clans, but of the same moiety. One case was unclear to begin with, since the wife came from another Mengen group, which assigned her clan to a different moiety than did the Wide Bay Mengen. Hence, according to the wife's group, the marriage did not break the exogamy rule, whereas according to the Wide Bay Mengen it did. I encountered only one case in which siblings, that is, a man and a woman whose mothers were sisters, had married—to the dismay of their clan and village members. People assigned the troubles of the couple to the incestuous quality of the marriage, noting it was doomed from the start. Aside from openly expressing their dismay and opposition, however, the relatives and community members could not prevent the couple living together.

of plots. (In the genealogy, the different shadings represent different named clan groups. No shading means that the clan affiliation is not known.) The site was originally cleared by three men (marked with a "1")—two brothers[9] and their sister's son—of the same subclan, which also claimed to be the owner of the land area, with one of the men commonly being regarded as the founder of the village in question. The complexity and occasionally contingent manner with which the garden rights were passed on emerges clearly from analysis of the subsequent clearers of the garden. As one of the original clearers had no sons, his garden was cleared by his brother's son on the second gardening round. During this second round (marked with a "2"), the son of the second founding member and that of the third original clearer—the nephew of the two brothers—also took part in clearing the garden; that is, they exercised their rights to clear it.

In the "third generation" of the garden (marked with a "3"), the garden "moves" even further away from the original group. The brother's son, who cleared the garden for the second time, had left the village, but his former wife decided to cultivate the garden again, or "remembered the garden" as the Mengen expression goes, and gave the task of clearing it to her ex-husband's sister's son. In the second case the garden was cleared again by a son of the original founder—although this time by a junior brother of the second clearer. In the third case, the original clearer passed rights to the garden to his son-in-law, who had moved to the village after marriage. While the passing on of the rights to clear the garden followed multiple connections vertically, the distribution of plots followed similar connections horizontally. For example, in the case of Maispnolin, the ex-wife, plots were given to her daughters, the wife of the man who actually cleared the garden and to a woman who is the daughter of the ex-husband's cross-cousin. Likewise, the daughter of the original clearer, Gelmais, gave plots to her younger unmarried sister as well as to the wife of their brother.
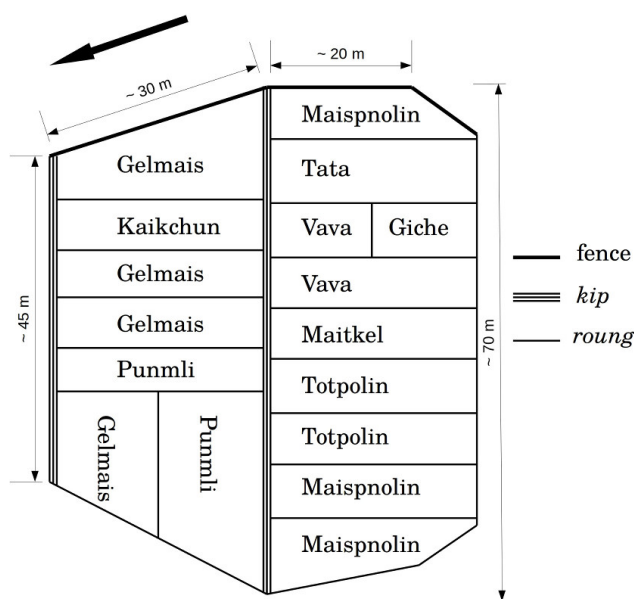
Figure 2: Division of a garden

The history of the garden was told to me by Gelmais, whose father was the youngest of the original clearers. I had accompanied a young woman who held a plot in the garden

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[9]People of the same sex, generation and moiety were sisters or brothers. In the case at hand, the men's mothers were sisters with a single mother, and hence the men were "true brothers", i.e. of the same clan and lineage. People of the same sex, but of different moieties were "cross-cousins" or *ruvung* in Mengen (TP: *kasin sista*, *kasin brata*). "Cross-cousins" of different sexes referred to each other as sisters and brothers.
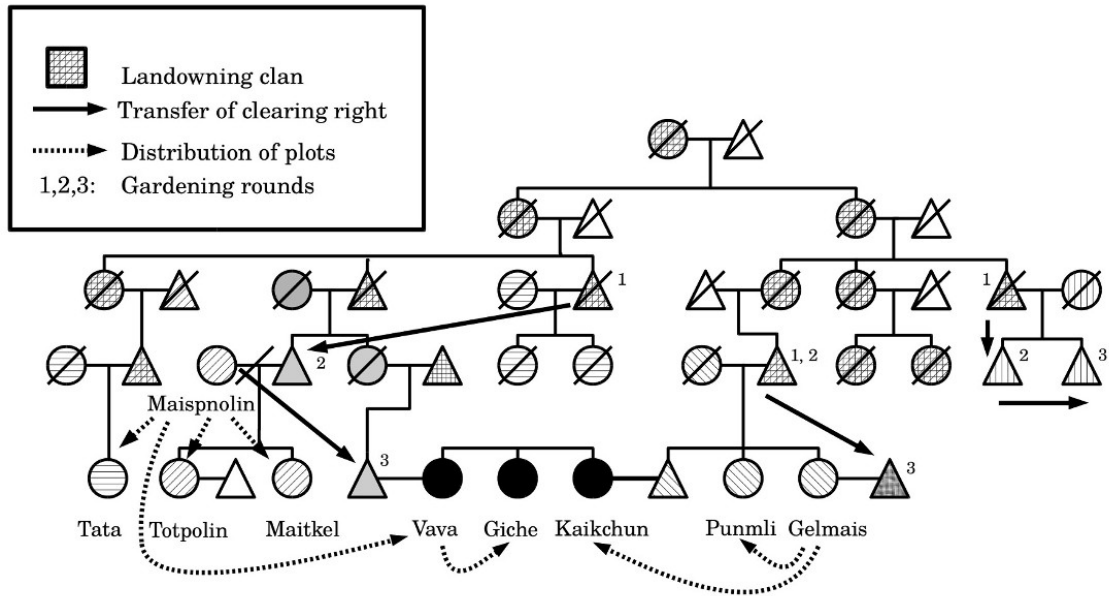
Figure 3: Transfer of gardening rights and distribution of plots

to help her plant taro and to measure the garden and inquire about plot distribution. The young woman knew who held the plots in her garden, but did not know the specific history of the garden area. As she planted her taro on the steep slopes, I wandered off to talk to the other women tending their plots, and the daughter of the original clearer gave me a thorough, on-the-spot history of the garden. It was not unusual for people to remember who had first cleared a garden they were cultivating, but the longer the garden had been in use, the fewer the number of people who remembered the specific succession of land rights and who had cleared gardens in the intermediary periods. In this case, the fact that one of the original clearers was still alive was the reason his daughter knew the history in detail. This does not mean that this case was atypical; on the contrary, it illustrates the distribution of gardening rights and plots rather well.

In this case the original clearers of the garden belonged to the landowning group—or at least the subclan claiming the area—but this does not need to be so. The original clearers could have been original residents of the village, affines of the founder, for example, or other people who had moved to the recent settlement—perhaps following old neighbor-ties. They would have been allowed to clear gardens and so the passing on of rights would still be similar to the case outlined above. The above example also clearly shows how user-rights to the land move away from the landowning group. Michel Panoff (1970: 193) makes an interesting observation when noting that "in the process of time, the right-holding unit comes to be different from the original descent group". According to Panoff (1970: 193), this new group resembles what Ward Goodenough (1962) called a "nodal kindred" characterized by a core consisting of the original descent group and surrounded by affines, patrilineal descendants and "various protégés". Panoff (1970: 193) notes that the Jacquinot Bay Mengen called this group *galiau*[10] ("shield"),

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[10]The term *rglie* (M: shield) was used occasionally as a translation for the English word "relative". The word is the same as the Jacquinot Bay Mengen word *galiau*. My Wide Bay Mengen interlocutors

and that it was this precise group that was mobilized for warfare and feasts. In North Coast Mengen *galiau* abbreviates into *rglie*, which I will use henceforth as the name for the "nodal kindred" group.

Central to the formation of the *rglie* group was the rule of exogamy as well as the flexible inheritance of gardening land and hamlet sites according to descent, filiation and residence. Contingent factors, such as the number of female children who continue the descent group, were important as well and affected the "outcome"—namely, the composition of the land-using group. Note how, in the example above, the original descent group is represented by only two male elders and the current users of the garden represent seven distinct named descent groups, out of which five are subclans of two distinct clans. The same applied to the composition of villages in general—albeit on a larger scale—in as much as the clan composition of a single village was largely determined by how many children the women of the different clans had, and whether they stayed in the village and so on. So in practice—as in this case—the "core" based on the matrilineal descent group can be nearly non-existent (if counted in terms of the number of living members), while the members "gravitating" around this core—to borrow M. Panoff's (1976: 187) expression—dominate in numbers. This is confirmed in my survey of garden-land use in one Mengen village, which shows that in the vast majority of gardens several women held plots and the "clan-base" of the land-users comprised several clans in most cases. (See Appendix 11.3.)

The way in which gardens were passed on and individual plots distributed, invoked the *rglie* or nodal kindred. The gardens, divided into plots, were also visual indexes of the land-using group, much as the Korowai longhouses are indexes of their owners (Stasch 2003: 364). Panoff's (1970: 193) notions of how certain tendencies, specifically the importance of patrifilial ties and residence, along with matrilineal exogamy, invoke a new group can be taken further to note that mundane practices did not only constitute groups, but kinship as well. While kinship and residential ties formed the blue-print on the basis of which gardens were passed on and divided, contingent factors and personal friendship ties played a crucial role as well. Not all cross-cousins were "remembered" when a women distributed plots in her garden, and a man might clear a garden with his brother in-law instead of a brother from his clan. While certain proclivities, or "rules", in Mengen sociality—such as patrifilial inheritance—were put into practice and produced certain kinds of groups such as the *rglie*, mundane practices also produced kinship on a more general level. Gardens were inherited and distributed according to relevant kinship ties, but the sharing of gardens also produced the relevant kinship ties by differentiating them from a "mass of relations", because in Mengen society everyone could trace some sort of kinship connection to everyone else. (Relatedly, see for example Jacka (2015: 127) on how "quotidian practices" of everyday life make kinship in Porgera, PNG.)

The Mengen landholding system consisted of different layers of claims and types of ownership, a common feature of many Melanesian landholding systems which John

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noted that in North Coast Mengen words are abbreviated from other Mengen dialects. For example: origin place is *plangpun*/*palangpuna* and the sea is *plei*/*peleau* in the Wide Bay dialect of North Coast Mengen and Jacquinot Bay Mengen respectively.

Wagner (2007) calls mixed property systems. The basis comprised the communal ownership of land by the clans and subclans—justified by mythical emergence or precedence of settlement (Fox 1996a: 9; also Eves 2011; Scott 2007). The first clearing of primary forest, irrespective of the clan affiliation of the clearer, turned a patch of forest into a garden privately owned by the clearer (also Wagner 2007: 30). Precedence of emergence and settlement legitimized land-ownership, whereas the precedence of clearing gardens established strong user rights over the gardens. As noted, this is typical for Austronesian societies, and notions of precedence can simultaneously justify contradicting tendencies—in this case clan ownership vs. multi-clan use of land (Fox 1996a: 9). The first clearer then had more or less exclusive rights to clearing that garden, because he (as gardens were cleared by men!) conducted the initial "hard work" of clearing the large trees. This exclusive right, however, was vested only in the original clearer. After his death, the right to clear that garden again could quite flexibly be claimed by both his children and younger members of his descent group, like sister's sons—as seen in the example above. Likewise, the "ownership" of a garden means the right to garden on the particular site, while the land is owned by the respective clan-group.

During one of the regularly held communal meetings in Wawas, a man asked who had "closed" his recently cleared garden by setting up a pole—a sign indicating that someone wants to halt the work. A middle-aged woman came forward and noted that she needed a large garden and that the land belongs to her clan. The man, remaining calm, noted that his the garden was his father's and more so, his father was of the same clan. He concluded by saying: "I am not an outsider." (TP: *Mi no narapela man.* Lit. "I am not another man.") I did not witness the end of the conversation, but the question of two people wanting to use the same site was an ordinary matter and a settlement satisfying both parties was very likely.

Gardening practices and land use point to an important dynamic in Mengen society, namely, relations between the landowning clan and the people from different clans cultivating and dwelling on that land. In the Introduction I noted that besides comprising two cosmological principles (see Scott 2007), which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, they were also two central values that presupposed each other (e.g. Robbins 2004: 195–96). Each clan sought to emphasize its relation to its land and the autonomy of the clan. But in order to reproduce the clan, its members had to establish productive relations with members of other clans through intermarriage, sharing land and holding ceremonial exchanges. These two values, which are also modes of relating to the land, were necessary to the reproduction of Mengen society, but could at the same time be in tension with each other. The relation between these two is a *productive contradiction*, because in order to pursue one value—such as the continuity of the clan—one has to pursue the other: establishing productive relations, such as marriage, with members of other clans. However, pursuing one value too strongly—over-emphasizing one's ownership of the land, for example—might put at risk the other: peaceful communal life on the clan's land (e.g. Scott 2007: 201–2, 223 and Wagner (1981), 118). "Contradiction" then, does not automatically mean conflict, but refers to an underlying source of tension between the conditions of the clan's existence that accounted for much of the dynamics in Mengen land-use practices as well as social

and political life in general.

2.4 Conclusions

In this chapter I have focused on the Mengen concept of *klingnan*, "work", or *klingnan ti main*, "hard work". For the Wide Bay Mengen work was essentially socially productive activity: that is, activity that produced or maintained social relations through care and nurture. This hard work lay at the heart of Mengen conceptions of kinship and relatedness. Yet motions of shared blood were also important to Mengen notions of relatedness. People from the same clan were regarded as sharing the same blood, and this should not be mixed, hence marriages within a clan were forbidden and considered incest. People shared their father's blood as well, however, and consequently marriage with one's father's sister's children was also considered incestuous, even though purely in terms of clan-belonging they would be ideal marriage partners. Yet shared blood alone did not constitute relatedness in its full scale and with all its moral connotations: a father who had not provided for his children's needs was not really a father, whereas adoptive parents who had taken care of their children were without doubt real parents.

This and the numerous other examples mentioned in this chapter demonstrate how central the notions of care and nurture were to Mengen kinship, manifested most concretely in the acts of giving food and providing for someone's needs. If acts of giving food were the prototypical forms of care, cultivated food plants were the prototypical food; gardening, moreover, was the prototypical form of work. Food plants and gardening were therefore not only central to the livelihood of people; their meaning extended well beyond that, constituting them as central practices and media through which the Mengen related to each other, and indexing people's relations with each other. For example, a woman's stock of taro, to which her relatives and friends had contributed, illustrated the socially productive relations that had been formative for the holder. Likewise, as the food plants have been tended for generations, they also materialize people's links to past. The same applies to gardens. They were shared among kin and friends in acts that emphasized certain relations within the vast web of relations that constitutes Mengen society. Not all relatives were given plots and not every cross-cousin was remembered. By working together in the gardens, people strengthened their mutual relations. The gardens and their divisions into neat plots were also visual indexes of the land-using group in the landscape.

Gardening exemplifies the central dynamics of land use and its ownership among the Mengen—specifically the relationship between the landowning clan and the land users. As the example of the passing on of gardens showed, land was owned by a matrilineal clan based on the precedence of emergence or settlement in the area. However, due to clan exogamy, the land-using group of necessity was always a multi-clan group whose members become rooted in the landscape through their hard work. This relation was a productive contradiction in Mengen society, although by this I do not mean that the relation amounted to conflict. On the contrary, that people cultivate land belonging to other clans was analogous to productive inter-relations between the clans, most notably marriages and ceremonial exchanges, but also the exchange of personal names. Rather,

by a productive contradiction I refer to a central tension that accounted for many of the dynamics of Mengen land-holding and political life in general. As I will make clear in the following discussion, these dynamics were at play in Mengen engagements with natural resource extraction projects in different ways.

Gardening did not only produce food and relatives, but also distinctly temporal environments. The close environment of the Wide Bay Mengen consisted of gardens and fallows in different stages. The work people did on the land created places and a thoroughly social landscape in which the actions and histories of people—both past and present—were materialized. In the next chapter I turn to the place making activities of the Mengen.

3. Making temporal environments: work, places and history in the Mengen landscape

For the Mengen the landscape was an important materialization of personal and group histories. People saw in the landscape traces of each other's productive activities, namely "work" as the Mengen understood it, and this made it socially valuable (see also Kirsch 2006: 11). In this chapter I examine how through their productive activities the Mengen created a thoroughly historical landscape, and how places that comprised it were also important expressions of value.

Work, as activity that created and maintained valued social relations, was at the basis of Mengen conceptions of relatedness. Conversely, all activity that produced and maintained valued social relations, was classed as "work" and hence work was a key source of value for the Mengen. Care and nurture, expressed especially in acts of giving and feeding, were important, if not the most important, forms of work. As I described in the previous chapter, food and gardens were important media through which these relations were acted out, as well as key expressions of value (e.g. Stasch 2009: 14, 19–20; Turner 2008: 47, 53). The socially productive activities of people, such as gardening, establishing villages or burying the dead, also left visible traces on the environment. Thus, in the course of their social life, people made places (see also Scott 2007: 167, 213). Given the importance of "work", it is no surprise that people were very attentive to the signs of it (also Kirsch 2006: 11, 194–95), which were also important materializations and expressions of value.

The near environment of the Wide Bay Mengen villages was a patchwork of gardens, fallows and secondary forest in its different stages. What to an outsider looked like undifferentiated forest was, for those who lived there, an environment made by, and speaking of, human activities. These places constituted the Mengen landscape, which was indeed "the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them", and "a pattern of activities 'collapsed' into an array of features", to borrow Tim Ingold's definition (2000: 193, 198). Abandoned villages were visible to the attentive onlooker in the shape of domestic trees planted by former inhabitants, although the sites had returned to primary forest. Even old and more distant forests were full of signs of past and present activity: paths, old burial sites, places where people had gathered house materials and so forth. These signs of work were "memories" (M: *rnagil*, *gil*: to know) of people, bringing to mind the persons associated with them. There was an importantly visual aspect in this (see also Descola 2016). The existence of places was proof of the events that were said to have happened there (Rumsey 2001: 27) and to see was to know, as in similar Austronesian societies (see Foster 1995: 175). This came nicely together in the Mengen term for landscape, *glanpapa*, translated to me as "how things draw themselves out clearly when you look at them."[11]

In this chapter I examine how the Mengen made their landscape, how time and place intersected in it and how places became one of the concrete media through which

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[11]The term may very well be a neologism. Nonetheless, it illustrates well the visual aspects of the Mengen landscape. (M: *gel*: to see, to look; *pa*: to draw, to write.)

the Mengen related to each other (see Munn 1992: 17; Stasch 2009: 19–20). I start by focusing on how the Mengen organized their horticulture in time by following the cycles of particular trees, thus dividing the year, dominated by the dry and rainy seasons, into several seasons during which different gardening tasks were done. The "tree calendar", as the Mengen called it, is a concrete example of the temporality of the Mengen landscape. It shows how various ecological temporalities, such as the growth of certain trees and food plants, intersected or converged with human temporal trajectories (see also Stasch 2003: 369, 381). During my fieldwork, the tree calendar was an important part of Mengen daily life, as people conceptualized and coordinated their task according to it. Moreover, it is based on careful observation of plants and their interdependencies and an example of the extensive botanical and ecological knowledge of the Mengen.

Rural Wide Bay Mengen did not only coordinate their gardening activities according to a temporal landscape. Through their gardening activities they also created it. In the second section of this chapter I examine how gardening practices created different types of forests and how the Mengen conceptualized these. Mengen forest terminology was closely related to gardening and illustrates how the relationship of the Wide Bay Mengen with their forest, or different kinds of forests, was a thoroughly social one. Gardens, new fallows and fallows that have turned into robust secondary forest and primary forest did not only form an ecological continuum in which cultivated gardens became forest again, but also a continuum of human presence. Gardens and villages primarily indexed contemporary relations, while the fallows as well as old places in the primary forest were signs of older relationships that people had with each other and the land. These places reminded people of deceased relatives and thus they held emotional value. In this sense, the places indexing old relations were also concrete points through which people related to the past.

People's relations with these places of importance were not static. In their daily activities people engaged with them, for example by clearing the sites for gardens, all a part of people's ongoing relations with each other and the land. Therefore they were not neutral acts: planting trees or clearing gardens could be seen as productive acts in themselves and as orientations towards future productive relations—for example when clearing a garden for food to be distributed at rituals. However, the same acts could also be seen as claims to the land or, in some cases, even as attempts to erase other people's claims to it. Engagements with the places that constituted the Mengen landscape were often expressions of productive contradiction, namely that between the values of clan autonomy and inter-relations between the clans. These two values also had their spatial equivalents in the Mengen landscape. Clans were rooted in the land, especially through their places of origin, while villages, abandoned settlements and gardens emplaced both the landowning clan as well as other inhabitants. The productive contradiction of pursuing these two values accounted for the dynamism of Mengen landowning practices, and Mengen political life generally. In the final section of this chapter I examine how these two categories were emplaced and how they featured in both Mengen clan histories and questions of landholding.

3.1 The Mengen tree calendar

The tropical climate of Wide Bay is most notably divided into two main seasons of about equal length, the dry and the rainy. The Mengen called the dry and rainy seasons *kae koureta* ("only sun (*kae*)") and *windfa* respectively.[12] The seasons were most strongly associated with their extreme periods, namely November to January for the sunny season and June to August for the rainy season. The intermediary times were characterized by more or less gradual shifts from one extreme to another. The seasons dominated activities in as much planting was not possible during the height of the rainy season and the rough seas caused by the strong winds of the period make traveling by boat difficult—and dangerous. However, there was no major shift in activities or dwelling corresponding with the contrast of seasons (M. Panoff 1969c: 154).

The two seasons provided the most general division of time, but the Mengen conception of seasons was much more sophisticated. Specific gardening activities were performed according to the so-called tree or village calendar (TP: *kalender bilong ples*), in which the yearly cycle is represented according to the flowering and leaf phases of five index trees. (The notion of "index tree" is Michel Panoff's (1969c: 156), who documented this calendar in use in the 1960s among the Mengen of Jacquinot and Waterfall Bay.) During my fieldwork, the Wide Bay Mengen coordinated their gardening work according to this schedule, having systematized their calendar in the early 2000s so that it could
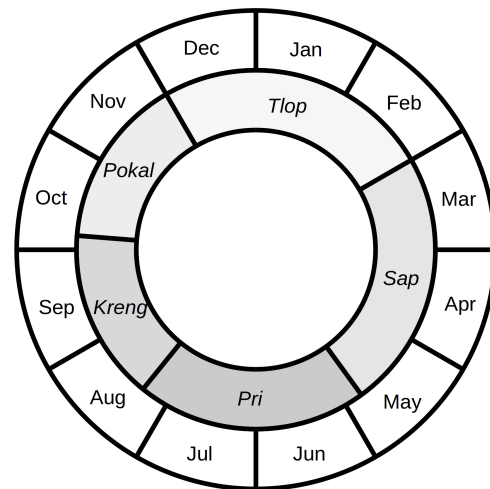
Figure 4: The index tree phases

be taught in elementary schools. This was part of a national education reform initiative in which elementary schools began teaching in local languages. In this version the phases of the index trees were adjusted in terms of Western calendar months, which were more generally used for time reckoning. However, people followed the index tree phases in their day-to-day gardening work and spoke about their work in terms of them—in Wide Bay Mengen known as *vekmein* (*vek*: tree, *mein*: phase, "round"). People noted for example that a garden being cleared was to be planted with taro of the *sap*, one of the index trees, or that during another tree, *pri*, the yam harvest would begin, and so on.

- *Tlop* (*Euodia elleryana*; also *Melicope elleryana*): The phases of the *tlop* tree indexed the time roughly between December, when its distinctive red flowers appear, and February. The height of the dry season, occurring in January, was sometimes called *tlop maengngan* (heat of the *tlop*), while the end of this period around February was called *tlop kan*, as the seed (*kan*) of the *tlop* is clearly

[12]See M. Panoff (1969c: 154) for comparison with the Jacquinot Bay Mengen.

visible. During the flowering of the *tlop* lesser and greater yam was planted and the harvest occurred around September–October. Later in December–January taro was also planted. This constituted a "slow" season for the taro, which was ready for harvest around October and lasted until December. Yearly festivals (M: *pnaeis*, TP: *kastom*, also *lukara*) were held during the season of *tlop* as the main food taro was ready for harvest.

- *Sap* (*Alphitonia marcocarpa*): *Sap* was used as an index for the period lasting from March to April, with *sap lvun* (the leaf of sap) referring more specifically to April. The sap phase was still part of the dry season although characterized by light rains. During *sap* taro was planted and these would be ready for harvest around October–November. The taro planted during *sap* was often transplanted from yam gardens planted during December–January (*tlop*).

- *Pri* (*Erythrina indica*): the start of the *pri* phase was identified differently by people, either starting in May or June, but in most accounts *pri* was associated with June and July, which could also be referred to as *pri chu chumtan* (*pri* is leafless). The rainy season starts at this time. Both taro and yam could be planted during the beginning of *pri* although it was regarded as a "minor" season for both. The taro-planting season of *pri* usually merged with *sap*. Yam planted during the *kreng* phase in September started to ripen and became ready for harvest. During the height of the rainy season no planting was usually done.

- *Kreng* (*Pterocarpus indicus*): *Kreng mukmguang* means that the *kreng* starts to flower and "leads" (*mukmguang*) other trees, which start to flower later. This occurs by the turn of August–September, when rains are diminishing. The season of *kreng* continues to October when the rainy season is over and the weather is "good", that is, moving towards the dry season. *Kreng* was the main season for planting yam. The yam gardens were readied during August and September and the seed yam brought from the *kreng* gardens of the previous year. Yam planted during *kreng* was ripe around June–July (see *pri*). While the yearly ceremonies were usually held in January, *kastom* could also be "played" with yam and if this occurred, the ceremonies were held in September–October. Sometimes minor prestations were held with yam at this time, anticipating the actual ceremonies in December–January. In this case the minor prestations were "shadows" (M: *koun*, shadow, spirit, image, reflection) of the actual ones.

- *Pokal* (*Albizzia falcataria*): The flowering of the *pokal* tree occurs during November when the dry season is well under way. While identified as one of the index trees, many people with whom I spoke tended to leave *pokal* out of their accounts and merged the season with *kreng* and *tlop* respectively. During *pokal* yam and taro could be planted and gardens were cleared for the yam and taro seasons of *tlop*.

The index trees flower once a year at different times and in particular phases of their cycle, meaning that flowering coincided with, and thus indexed, the Mengen's 12 lunar months (M. Panoff 1969c: 156). The calendar was not, however, strictly lunar and the phases of the index trees corresponded only very roughly to the lunar

months, due for example to the late flowering of certain trees for meteorological reasons (M. Panoff 1969c: 156, 158). It is precisely this flexibility that has, according to Michel Panoff (1969c: 156), made the addition of a thirteenth month to the calendar unnecessary. In the Wide Bay Mengen calendar, the *vekmein* merged into each other and overlapped. This also explains my interlocutors' different accounts, which at first startled me. Because the main food crops also had several planting season, different interlocutors could explain the system in a variety of ways. Thus the planting of yam, occurring in November–December, could be indexed with two trees.

Variations of the "tree calendar" were used by all the Mengen groups (M. Panoff 1969c: 156) and similar systems were common throughout New Guinea. The Rauto of Southwestern New Britain had a division of lunar months and a system for coordinating gardening activities, which could—if needed—be correlated with the growth phases of three tree species (Maschio 1994: 179). The Rauto index trees also featured in the Mengen system (M: *tlop*, *kreng* and *pri*), indexing roughly the same periods (Maschio 1994: 179). The northern neighbors of the Mengen, the Sulka, used the same index trees as well (Schneider 1954: 284) (Schneider only mentions only two species.) Even though similar tree calendars were used throughout New Britain, they did not seem to form a large system of interdependencies, as Fred Damon (1990: 11, 13) has claimed for the societies of the northern Kula ring. While the different New Britain societies have been and are still in close contact with each other, their "tree calendars" did not form an overarching system, by prescribing certain ritual sequences or a "division of labor" related to it in the different societies (c.f. Damon 1990: 13). Nor did the differences between the tree calendars seem to be a set of "systemic transformations" developed in relation to each other (Damon 1990: 13, 226). Rather, the differences between the systems seemed to stem from adaptation to the local environments. M. Panoff (1969c: 156) mentions how in the mountain areas the succession of seasons was more gradual, which is why the inland Mengen seasons were slightly different. Similarly, my friends noted how during the same tree seasons different work phases ought to be carried out in the coastal and elevated areas.

The division of the year into *vekmein* constituted a sophisticated way of dividing the principal meteorological seasons into distinct phases for the planting and harvesting of the main food plants. My interlocutors did not know how the system had evolved, nor were there any accounts of its emergence, but it is clear that it is based on very careful observation of trees, their relation to the growth of food plants and the yearly cycle. It is an example of the impressive knowledge the rural Mengen had of their environment. People noted that if observed carefully—and nothing unusual such as droughts occur—food would be abundant throughout the year. When a garden was being planted, the clearing of new ones for the next season or crop should be started, as the clearing and fencing of gardens might take considerable time—usually at least a month. The need for seamless continuity in the flow of gardens was also used as an explanation for the gendered division of labor. One man noted that women—who usually did the planting and weeding of the gardens—disapproved of men doing this, because by the time one garden was being weeded, men should be clearing a new area for the next planting season.

Besides the tree calendar, people used plants more widely to conceptualize time. In an interview on the history of a village, a man in his 70s used the growth of coconut palms to recall how, for many years, the villagers hid 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 fruit. - man, in his 70s, 2007-07-06

> TP: *Pait 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*

While trees were a way of counting the flow of time and conceptualizing seasons, they also served as metaphors for history for the Mengen (M. Panoff 1969c: 164). Like the growth of a tree, history was seen by the Jacquinot Bay Mengen as progressive, and events, such as branching, as irreversible. This conception also applied to the histories of clans which, as already noted, were called vines and vine-branches in the vernacular. This kind of "botanic metaphor ... that combine[s] notions of growth and succession", as James Fox (1996a: 8) observes, is common among the Austronesian peoples to which the Mengen also belong. The index cycles of the index trees, visible to the skilled observer in the landscape, were used by the Mengen to conceptualize time and organize gardening.

3.2 Gardening & place making

The Mengen landscape had other temporal features besides the yearly cycle as indexed by particular trees which were also connected to the practices and work of the Mengen, but in a different way. Gardening and dwelling practices, as active engagements with the environment, created places that were visible in the Mengen landscape—and constituted it. Gardens were left fallow after one harvest and the near environment of the Wide Bay Mengen villages was a patchwork of differently aged fallow-forests. Along with gardens and fallows, there were also abandoned villages, burial sites and other signs of people's productive activities that had created a temporally many-layered landscape. (For "landscape" as the deliberate transformation of the visual features of the environment, see Descola (2016).)

There were several temporal trajectories in Mengen gardens. The food plants in the garden required weeding and pruning at different times and stages of growth. The time-span of a given garden was largely determined by the main food plant and its maturing for harvest. After the harvest, the garden was left to fallow, and this created an ever-changing landscape of gardens and fallows in their different stages. For example, when a yam garden matured, the taro planted in it were uprooted and transplanted into newly cleared gardens. Later the yam would be harvested and seed-yam left in "bush-houses" (M: *rabail*) near the fallows which were to be cleared for yam gardens. Like the *vekmein*, which seamlessly merged into each other, there was no absolute distinction between a mature and an abandoned garden, but letting the garden become fallow

was a gradual process. Gardens were never planted with only one crop and different foods matured at different times and were thus harvested at different periods. Final harvesting took place as the fences started to deteriorate and the species associated with bush fallow started to take over the garden.

The importance of horticulture was evident in the forest terminology of the Wide Bay Mengen. The general term for forest, *gurlon*, covered both primary and secondary forest of different kinds. *Gurlon* however, was divided into four terms referring to forests of distinct types and ages:

1. *papli*: encompassed mature gardens, a garden left fallow and secondary forest that begins to grow in abandoned gardens. *Papli* was recognized as a former gardening area. No new gardens could be cleared at this stage.

2. *mlap*: secondary forest growing in abandoned gardens. *Mlap* was distinguished from *papli* by the size and type of trees. Certain tree species start to grow in size and thus kill species typical to immediate secondary growth or *papli*. In contrast to *papli*, *mlap* starts to resemble "real forest" and trees grow into substantial specimens. *Mlap* was still recognized as former garden and traces of human work, such as tree stumps and ax marks, were visible. *Papli* becomes *mlap* in about seven to twenty years, depending on various factors that influence the growth of trees. At this stage new gardens could be cleared. There was no rule after how many years *mlap* could be cleared for gardens, but it depended on the size of the trees and this varied from area to area. To my knowledge, fallows younger than five years should not be cleared.

3. *lom*: primary forest. *Lom* was not regarded as a former garden, but some of my interlocutors noted that if left unused for a "very long time", *mlap* will turn into *lom*. The *lom* was distinguished from *papli* and *mlap* through the type and size of the trees: the trees are of different species and considerably bigger than in a secondary forest. Traces of work, such as gathered plants, but also trails (*gue*), abandoned villages (*knau*) distinguished by domestic plants or earth oven stones, and burial sites (*o*), were visible in the forest.

4. *lom son*: the definitions for this category were somewhat vague, but it referred to forest growing on mountain ranges, with poorer vegetation due to the less fertile land and poor fauna. In some definitions *lom son* was distinguished from other types of forest due to the lack of any (visible?) human action. One person noted that if people were to start using this kind of forest, it would change into *lom*. Another considered the main distinction to be the different flora. The distance from the everyday environment was also a factor. Some people noted that *lom son* are the "blue ranges" visible far away (as opposed to the more proximate forest characterized by a different shade of green[13]). The counterpart of *lom son*—in the opposite direction, namely toward the sea—is *mail son*, the far away ocean—characterized similarly by another shade of blue.

[13]Note that in Mengen "green" and "blue" are referred to with the same word.

As is evident in the forest terminology, the Mengen emphasized the importance of work (see Chapter 2) and its visibility in the environment. The two terms for secondary forest referred to gardening areas and were directly linked to horticulture, as these types of environments would not exist without human action. The terms *ngur* (garden), *papli* and *mlap* were partly overlapping and formed a gradient. A garden where harvesting had started may be called *papli*, while a secondary forest ready to be cleared again (*mlap*) could be also referred to as somebody's *papli*. People thus emphasized that fallows were always *somebody's* fallows (see Chapter 2 on landholding). In contrast, secondary forest that had been logged, but not cultivated, was not *papli* or *mlap*, but called *tlanglis* (M: *tlang*: to fell, *lis*: to decompose), forest cleared for no apparent reason (TP: *katim bus nating*). While *lom* was not an anthropogenic forest type, it incorporated a wide range of visible human action. However, in terms of horticulture *lom* was "empty" and whoever cleared a garden in it retained further rights to cultivate the area. Botanists' classification and description of the forests near Toimtop village overlap with Mengen classification. Pius Piskaut and Phille Daur (in Mack, Ewai, and Watson 2007: 21) distinguish between early secondary forest with tree heights of up to 10 m, and advanced secondary forest with the canopy layer at 20–25 m and trees occasionally as high as 30 m. In primary forest the canopy layer was generally at 20–30 m with trees occasionally as high as 40 m (Mack, Ewai, and Watson 2007: 20). Botanists divide the primary forest into three types: upper and lower lowland hill forests (at elevations of up to 220 m asl) and *Dillenia* (230–400 m asl) and Mixed *Castanopsis* forests (400 m asl and upwards) that grow on ridge tops with shallow and nutrient-poor brown forest soils (Mack, Ewai, and Watson 2007: 20).

lom son	*lom*	*mlap*	*papli*	*ngur*	*mankun*	*pleit*
primary forest		secondary forest		garden	village	sea
		recognized as gardens				
gurlon: "forest"				* domestic plants		
◄ decreasing signs of humanity						►
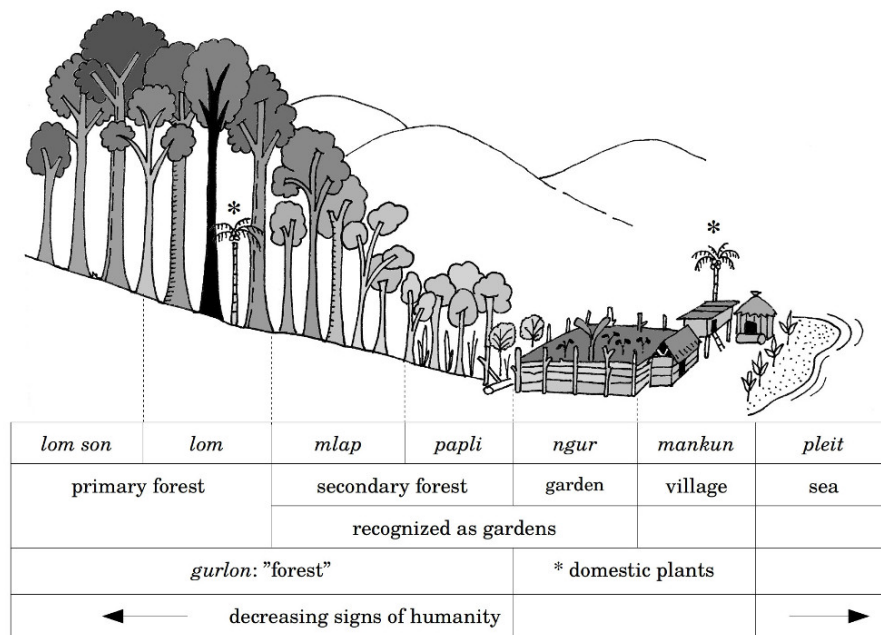
Figure 5: Schematic representation of Mengen forest terminology

Taking the village as a starting point, the fallow succession and the different types of forests can be schematically represented in relation to time and the gradual diminishing of the signs of human presence (see Figure 5). The village and the surrounding gardens were the most evidently human areas. As the gardens start to become fallow, signs of human activity decrease. In the primary forest (to which the fallows return if left uncleared), signs of human presence decrease: the forest itself is not anthropogenic in the same way as secondary forest, but domestic trees, oven stones from abandoned village sites and so on provide evidence of past usage. Finally, the far-away forest, the *lom son*, was characterized by the absence of human signs. In this sense the gradient of human presence is also temporal. The *papli* is young bush which, over time, grows into more robust secondary forest and finally back into *lom*, primary forest, a temporal gradient that is connected to the signs of human presence and the social relationships they index (Thomas Strong 2008; personal communication). The villages and gardens index contemporary and present social relations, whereas older fallows and abandoned villages highlight past relations. Moreover, ancestral origin places in the forest relate the origin of the matriclans (see next section).[14]

Like the taro associated with people who tended them, the signs of people's socially productive activities, or work, in the landscape materialized personal histories (also Maschio 1994: 180; Kirsch 2006: 189). These places evoked memories of those people, both past and present, who had through their activities created them, and were thus not just about recollecting past activities; remembering other people had often a strong emotional component to it. As a Mengen woman in her 50s told me:

A grandfather of mine, once we were clearing a garden on an abandoned village, he sat down and cried. It's bush now! But people still know this area. ... And he said he thought about his mothers and uncles from before, because when I felled that tree, a *rin*[15], it smelled. ... He asked me: "Do you smell that? That tree they planted in front of the men's house." And he said to me, "You go and plant that garden." And once I had done it, I ... gave him a piece of shell money, a pig and a heap of food. And another one I gave to an old grandmother of mine. Compensated the two like that. I made the two cry, made them worry and think back, because in the past they lived there, then the government came and we came down [to the coast] and now we go back to work our gardens there.—woman in her mid-50s, 2011-08-14

TP: *Wanpela tumbuna bilong mi, taim mipela i go wokim gaden long olpela ples, em i sindaun na krai. ... Em bus pinis! Tasol ol man i wok long save long desla hap area yet! ... Na i tok, em i tingim ol mama, ol uncles bipo,*

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[14]I have consulted a biological survey (Mack, Ewai, and Watson 2007: 20, 47–49) conducted in Toimtop village as a reference for tree profiles and relative heights. The sections on forests and botany were written by botanist Pius Piskaut and plant ecologist Phille Daur from the University of Papua New Guinea. My schematic representation is not an accurate natural scientific depiction, but I have sought to represent the changes in tree heights in careful accordance with the biological survey.

[15]The *rin* (*Euodia anisodora*) is a fragrant plant often planted in villages, because it had ritualistic uses and because of its aesthetic and decorative properties. In time the shrub grows into a tree.

bikos mi katim desla samting i smel, rin *ya. Askim mi, yu smelim desla diwai, . . . desla samting ol i planim long ai bilong haus boi. Na em i tokim mi, yu planim desla gaden. Na taim mi wokim gaden . . . mi givim wanpela hap shell mani na pik na hip kaikai i go long tumbuna bilong mi, narapela i go long lapun tumbuna meri. Stretim tupela olsem. Mi mekim tupela i krai, mekim tupela wari, tupela tingim bek bikos bipoa ol i stap long hap na nau gavaman i kamap na mipela kam daun . . . na wok gaden bek.*

The quote brings up several important issues. First, while the visual aspects of places were central in the visual epistemology of the Mengen (see Foster 1995), other senses were also important. In this story it is the smell of the *rin*, a domestic plant and an index of people's activities, that triggers the memory of the abandoned village, the men's house and the people who had lived there. A young man told me how he had gone to look for an abandoned village his grandmother had told him about. Knowing the approximate location, he finally found the village because of the scent of the domestic plants. This raises the other important feature: the places in themselves were not the whole story, so to speak; their full social significance unfolded only when people knew the area and its history. This knowledge was passed on both by visiting the places and through narration—in these two cases by the elders telling their younger relatives about the abandoned hamlets, where they were located and who had lived there. This intertwining of places and history is common for Austronesian societies (see Fox 1997b): for the Rauto the recitation of place names and the stories connected to them are a social history (Maschio 1994: 182), and this is also the case for the Mengen.

Thomas Maschio (1994: 181) notes that among the Rauto the trees people had planted could be called memorials, as indeed they were by the Mengen. Signs of people's productive activities, such as trees, were called *rnagil* (M: *gil*, to know) and were points of active remembering—to paraphrase Debbora Battaglia (1990: 10). When I was preparing to leave Wide Bay, a friend of mine suggested that I plant a fruit tree, so that people could remember me by it. In Wide Bay Mengen, like in Rauto, remembering used spatial imagery (Maschio 1994: 182), as the word for it, *longlili*, literally means "going (walking) back in thoughts" (*lomtan*: thought, *la*: to walk; *glili*: to return). In the extract above, the woman says that she "compensated" her elders for making them cry and "worry". (The Tok Pisin idiom "*wari*" means here sorrowful, nostalgic longing (see also Maschio 1994).) "Compensation" does not imply that the woman had done wrong. On the contrary, her grandfather had approved her family's clearing the garden on the site of the abandoned village (which was, moreover, located on land that their clan claimed). Rather, it was an acknowledgment of their sorrow and the work of past people.

Finally, the short quote illustrates how, in the pursuit of "legibility" (Scott 1998), the colonial government wanted the Mengen to leave their small, dispersed hamlets and move into existing hamlets along the coast and main trails. This process took place gradually and people continued to move between their inland settlements and coastal villages, coming down to the coast for church and the government-appointed communal work day on Monday and then returning. Likewise, in some cases people who had already permanently settled to the coast, returned to their inland hamlets to

perform their children's initiations—on their own clan land. The last bush villages of the Wide Bay Mengen were abandoned in the 1970s. While the gathering of people on the coast increased the size of the villages, the logic of their composition—a mix of people from several clans—did not. At the time of my fieldwork, people in the southern Wide Bay Mengen areas had resettled old inland villages as new roads were established in the area in the course of logging operations (see Chapter 4). This resettlement was most probably also a way of enforcing claims to land in disputes over ownership of the area that had arisen in consequence of the logging.

Given that the Mengen highly valued socially productive activity, as noted in the previous chapter, it is not surprising that the traces of people's activity made the landscape socially valuable (see also Kirsch 2006: 11). As the quote by the Mengen woman shows, the relationship with the socially meaningful landscape and its scattered places of significance was not static or confined to the past. On the contrary, it was one of active engagement. In the above example, an abandoned village was cleared for a garden and the appearance of the place was transformed. Moreover, after the harvest, the garden was left to become fallow and turn into forest again. With the ceremonial gift prestation, the clearers of the garden publicly acknowledged the emotional and historical ties of their relatives to the place—thereby also upholding the memory of the site as a past village.

The productive activities of people rooted them in the land and left a testimony of their lives on the landscape. This was an inevitable result of Mengen social life, but like all social life, it had also its tensions. Rootedness in the land was not only about emotional and historical connections to it, but for the Mengen there were also claims of various kinds over it (see Chapter 2). Because of this people occasionally hoped that others would not be attached to the land they themselves coveted and that their presence would not be visible in the landscape. As Simon Harrison (2004: 147) has noted for the Avatip of the Sepik area, sometimes the landscape remembers too much. In a society where knowledge of the past is a value whose circulation should be controlled and carefully restricted, people do not want the landscape to remember more than they do (Harrison 2004: 147). Because of this people sometimes also deliberately sought to erase the traces of others. In the following section, I turn more closely to these questions of placed histories and land-holding.

3.3 Placed histories & relating to the land

Along with the histories of individual persons, important categories such as the autochthonous clan, and the land-using group were inscribed in the Mengen landscape. In the final section of the previous chapter I noted how landownership among the Wide Bay Mengen was vested in matrilineal clans, which were associated with their places of origin (also Panoff 1970: 177). This cosmological link between the people and the land, however, did not translate into a clear-cut local community. Both members of the land-owning clan and those who actually inhabited its land were emplaced by the work performed in villages and gardens. Few people lived on their own clan land, and thus land-use was conceptualized as a reciprocal relation between the clans, much like

intermarriages or ceremonial gifts. This is a common dynamic in the Austronesian matrilineal societies of Melanesia (e.g. Eves 2011: 353; Martin 2013: 31, 37; Panoff 1970: 177, 194; Scott 2007: 223). As already mentioned, the autonomy of the landowning clan and socially productive relations between clans were also two central values. Pursuing these two values, as noted in Chapter 2, produced both a productive contradiction in Mengen society and the dynamism of Mengen landowning practices and Mengen political life generally. The two categories, land-owners and users, had their spatial equivalents, namely origin-places and abandoned villages.

According to the Mengen clan histories, the apical ancestress of each clan had autonomously emerged in a specific area, often from a plant or a topographical feature. The clan names referred either to the environmental element from which the ancestress was said to have emerged or the circumstances of her emergence. The landscape was scattered with such origin places (M: *plangpun*, *plang*: to emerge, *pun*: root). The clans claimed land areas both on the basis of this mythical precedence and first settlement into a vacant territory, as was common in Austronesian societies (Fox 1996b: 9; Scott 2007: 7). Some Mengen clans also had a *vtongtata*, or "adobe of the dead" (Panoff 1970: 177; also Laufer 1955: 62; Rascher 1904: 26), namely, places to which spirits of clan members were said to return upon death. The term *vtongtata* refers to a thunder-like bang that marked and revealed the return of the spirit to its place. According to some this meant a return to the clan's spirit place, although one elder denied the existence of these and noted that the word refers to the bang which is heard upon the death of a sorcerer. Cosmological notions and beliefs are, of course, not universally shared anywhere. People also evaluated clan origin stories differently, some noting that they were ancestral lies, others holding them to be largely true, while many noted that ancestral stories, the Bible and modern science give differing accounts of the origin of humans. More important than what people did or did not believe was the fact that these were values which people consciously pursued and which informed their actions (see especially Graeber 2013: 230–31).

Each clan had its own history which recounted the emergence, movement and intermarriages of the clan. Those I was told followed a similar pattern: they began by describing how the apical ancestress emerges from the *plangpun* in an area devoid of other people. She resides alone on the land until she meets a man from a clan of the opposing moiety who has ventured into the area while hunting or because he had seen smoke from the woman's fire and was inquisitive. The two inquire about each other's marriage status in a roundabout way and, realizing that both are single, they pair up. After this, the clan histories list the children of the apical ancestress and whom they marry, in other words they become genealogies listing the members of the matriline. The histories also recounted where the apical pair and later generations moved, the villages they founded, the locations of their gardens and so on. (See Michael Scott (2007: 74, 190) on very similar lineage histories of the Arosi of Solomon Islands.) In other words, the clan histories were also listings of places, or *topogenies*, which are a common Austronesian "means for the ordering and transmission of social knowledge" (Fox 1997a: 8). When attached to specific locations in an inhabited landscape, topogenies are "a projected externalization of memories that can be lived in as well as thought about" (Fox 1997a: 8). In the Mengen case, the topogenies were intertwined with genealogies

(c.f. Fox 1997a: 13). (See Appendix 11.4 for an example of a Mengen clan history.)

Many of the Mengen clans also had named subclans whose histories recounted the fission from the "mother clan". There were three types of reasons for this: the first is a fight between sisters resulting in one expelling the other from the clan; the second is twin-birth. Twins were a taboo in the past and one would be killed. Since birth was a women's secret, however, some people said that an older women would hide one of the twins in the forest and a later bring the child into the village claiming that it had been born of the rock or plant. The child was then given into the care of the nursing mother. If the "found" child were a girl, she would start a new subclan named after her "place of birth". Finally, some subclans claimed their ancestry stemmed from "wild women" of the forest. In these stories, villagers found children in the forest and took them under their care. Later, the wild woman would come to the village and announce the clan-status of the child, who then started a new subclan within that clan.

The relationship of a subclan to the mother-group and land varied from case to case. Some subclans recognized their junior position, but held their own territory, which was either adjacent to the territory of the mother-group or claimed on the basis of first settlement. These subclans resembled to all intents and purposes clans (also Eves 2011: 353). In other cases, some people regarded a named group to be a clan in its own right, while others considered it a subclan of another group. In yet other clans, each of the lineages attributed junior status to the others and claimed to be the mother group. Some clans on the other hand, had decided to "act as one" and downplayed the existence of subgroups—up to the point that the subclans had merged back into the mother group (something which, according to M. Panoff (1969c: 164), did not occur among the Jacquinot Bay Mengen).

The Mengen clans claimed land areas basing on their histories of emergence, settlement and place making. The area around the origin place was called *mgalpun*, the root (*pun*) of the land (*mgal*) and it was usually bordered by topographical features such as rivers, streams and ridges, which were perceived as immutable. The members of the landowning clan were called fathers or mothers of the land (M: *mgal tman/nanme*). However, clans and subclans also claimed land on the basis of first settlement and thus a clan could claim several land areas. According to one male elder, these were "reserve lands" (TP: *riserv graun*) or *mgal na pouch*, literally "land on the outside". In the story cited in Appendix 11.4, for example, the son of the apical ancestress established a village in what the story claims was uninhabited land and settled there with his wife.

Among the Arosi of the Solomon Islands, who have very similar notions of lineage emergence and relations, the pre-social emergence of the ancestress forms the basis of landownership. Yet, because of clan exogamy, no lineage can live alone on its land. Therefore, real social existence is only achieved when lineages intermarry and dwell together on the land (Scott 2007: 223; also Eves 2011: 359). This is also the case in Mengen clan histories: the apical ancestress meets a man from a different clan (both are often named), they start having children and start to inhabit the land. So in order for real social life to be achieved, the clan had to "bring" others to their land (c.f. Scott 2007: 223). Michael Scott (Scott 2007: 201–2) notes that among the Arosi there are two ways of relating to the land, what he terms *utopic* and *topogonic*. The "non-placed"

or *utopic* refers to the separate emergence of the various lineage ancestress in areas which are devoid of others and "non-placed". The *topogonic* relation is based on place making and dwelling (Scott 2007: 201–2); in Mengen clan history uninhabited land is "land nothing" (TP: *graun nating*), until the ancestress emerges. Through place making activities, both the original lineage and people from other lineages are rooted in the land (Scott 2007: 225). The Mengen had distinct spatial categories for the two ways of connecting people to the land. The place of origin only referred to the clan that had emerged from the place, whereas villages (M: *mankun*), gardens (M: *ngur*) and abandoned settlements (M: *knau*) created a link between the land and all its long-standing inhabitants and their progeny. As a Mengen man noted, "Once you have cleared gardens, made *kastom* and buried your dead, your blood is in the land." These two spatial categories are an important part of Mengen conceptions of history (M. Panoff 1969c: 163).

The histories of the different Mengen clans intertwined: the intermarriages mentioned in one clan's histories were affirmed, at least in theory, by the histories of the other clans. In fact, the recognition of land boundaries and histories by other clans, especially those who shared borders and had intermarried, was central to the constitution of Mengen landownership. (Indeed, is not all property based on the recognition by others?) However, the histories of two clans could differ in small, but important details. For example, in the story cited in Appendix 11.4, the son of the apical ancestress settles on uninhabited land with his wife from another clan. However, according to the history of the other clan, the son in question met his future wife on that land—which explicitly makes the claim that the other clan was already there and that the land was theirs. Because of the long histories of inter-marriage and dwelling together on the land, several clans could regard themselves as its "original owners". With increased logging and other resource development programs, there was also a new interest in controlling land, which in turn raised disputes over its ownership that touched on the specific locations of boundaries, the ownership of entire areas and who should have a say in matters concerning them.

The knowledge of clan histories was often unevenly distributed. In some cases, the history of a specific clan was widely known, at least in its roughest outlines. In other cases, clan histories were regarded as knowledge restricted to clan members. Clans involved in disputes were especially interested in restricting who had knowledge of their histories, for the fear that the disputing clans might modify their stories accordingly, in order to present a more convincing case of ownership. In these cases, histories should be kept secret and revealed only at appropriate times, such as during formal dispute settlements in order to convince others. This dynamic of hiding and revealing at appropriate times, is constitutive of power in many Melanesian societies (Foster 1995: 194, 207; Slotta 2014), including that of the Wide Bay Mengen where knowledge of the clan histories was also constitutive of authority over the land *within* the landowning clan. In some clans the knowledge was distributed among its members who would come together before dispute settlements to brief a selected spokesman. According to one woman, in these situations, when the histories were recounted the children and youths of the clan learned the stories. In other clans, this type of knowledge was held only by certain members and strategically passed on. In the following chapters, I will return in

more detail to the issues of disputes and clan histories.

As place making rooted people in the land and as signs of the work of others should be respected, the planting of domestic trees can become a loaded issue. During a land dispute, a friend of mine cut down cacao trees planted by a man of different clan on land my friend's clan claimed. The man had a long-standing right to clear gardens there, but gardens are temporary. Trees on the other hand have a long life-span; they "fix" land-use in a different way (see Dove 1998) and leave its permanent mark. And it is precisely this that my friend wanted to avoid by erasing the other man's traces from the land (see also Li 2014: 92). Conversely, a man I was accompanying to his newly cleared garden had cleared it in primary forest held by a different clan close to the village in which he lived. He did not bother with asking permission, as it was near his home village and nobody had used the land for gardening. However, he was careful not to clear abandoned villages claimed by landowners—because the work of others should be respected, as he noted.

3.4 Conclusions

Various human and non-human temporalities converged within the Mengen landscape. I borrow the notion of "convergence" from Rupert Stasch (2003), who describes how different human temporal trajectories and intentions converge with ecological temporalities of plant and animal development in the feast-preparation of the Korowai of West Papua. As I have shown in this chapter, the Mengen coordinated—individually and in groups—their gardening work according to the leaf and flowering cycles of specific trees, which indexed lunar months and the growth-seasons of the food plants the Mengen cultivated. The "tree calendar", as people called it, was based on intimate knowledge of plants, meteorological cycles and the environment in general. During my fieldwork people used the months of the Western calendar for time reckoning, but conceptualized and co-ordinated much of their work according to the tree phases.

The Mengen did not just co-ordinate their work—or socially productive activity—according to the phases of the trees visible in the landscape, but through their work, they actually produced the landscape. Swidden horticulture, as practiced by the Mengen, created an ever-changing, but not random, environment consisting of a patchwork of gardens, fallows and forest in its different growth stages. As I described in the chapter, this landscape was a both a result, as well as visual testimony, of people's work—both past and present. Indeed, the differently aged forest patches indexed differently aged relations: the robust secondary forest, as a sign of previous gardening activity indexed relations of the fairly recent past, while abandoned villages that dotted the primary forests of the inland area and the coast alike, were indexes of older activity. In the previous chapter I showed how the concrete practices of swidden horticulture constituted kin relations and land-using groups. Building on this notion, I showed in this chapter how the places—villages, gardens, orchards and so on—that were the result of people's activities, become signs of people and their relations as well as points through which people related to the past.

The temporal landscape produced in this way was, however, not only an embodiment

of personal and group histories. People's activities were oriented towards the future and anticipated future relations. As cultivators of their own food, the rural Wide Bay Mengen organized their work in order to ensure plentiful and continued harvests. Women, who tended the plants, sought to make sure their families had enough to eat, but also that in unanticipated situations—such as the death of a village member—they had enough food to contribute to the mortuary ceremonies. When a family cleared an exceptionally large garden and invited important relatives to plant it, people knew that they were preparing for a ceremony—an initiation or a marriage gift. Indeed, people's work—which created both social relations and a temporal landscape—consisted not only of routinized activities concerned with ensuring a livelihood, but also of acts connected to wider questions of social life. A newly cleared garden might be a preparation for a ceremony or a way of re-establishing one's presence on the land and claiming rights established by one's parents. Likewise, clearing a garden on a place of significance such as an abandoned settlement was, depending on who did it, a continuation of people's engagement with the land or an attempt to erase the signs of other people's activities from the landscape.

These activities were also pursuits of the values of clan autonomy and its ownership of the land on the one hand and the inter-relations between clans on the other. Forbidding others to clear forest at one's clan's origin place, or clearing a garden in order to claim user rights on land belonging to another clan, are examples of pursuing these values. Similarly, clearing a garden for a future initiation both reproduced the clan of the initiate and recognized productive relations between the clans by giving gifts to relatives of the initiate across clan boundaries. These two values also had their spatial equivalents: the clans were rooted in their land through their places of origin, while both the clans and the land-users were rooted in the land by places established through socially productive activities, such as villages, gardens and burial sites. Abandoned settlements (M: *knau*) that dotted the landscape were especially important, since they were historical signs of people's dwelling. Because of this they were an important feature of clan histories, but because settlements were always multi-clan communities, they emplaced other clans to a given area as well.

In these two chapters I have focused on swidden horticulture as practiced by the Wide Bay Mengen. Swidden horticulture was not only their main livelihood activity, it also expressed and constituted Mengen conceptions of relatedness as well as central values which were expressed and circulated through material media such as food plants or socially significant places. Likewise, people's socially productive activities produced a deeply temporal and socially significant landscape. In the two chapters that follow I will discuss how the Wide Bay Mengen engaged with large-scale logging that began on their lands in the early 1990s and how the rural Mengen reproduced and renegotiated their relations with each other, their environment and foreign companies through logging.

Photo 1: Toimtop village: note the men's house in the middle
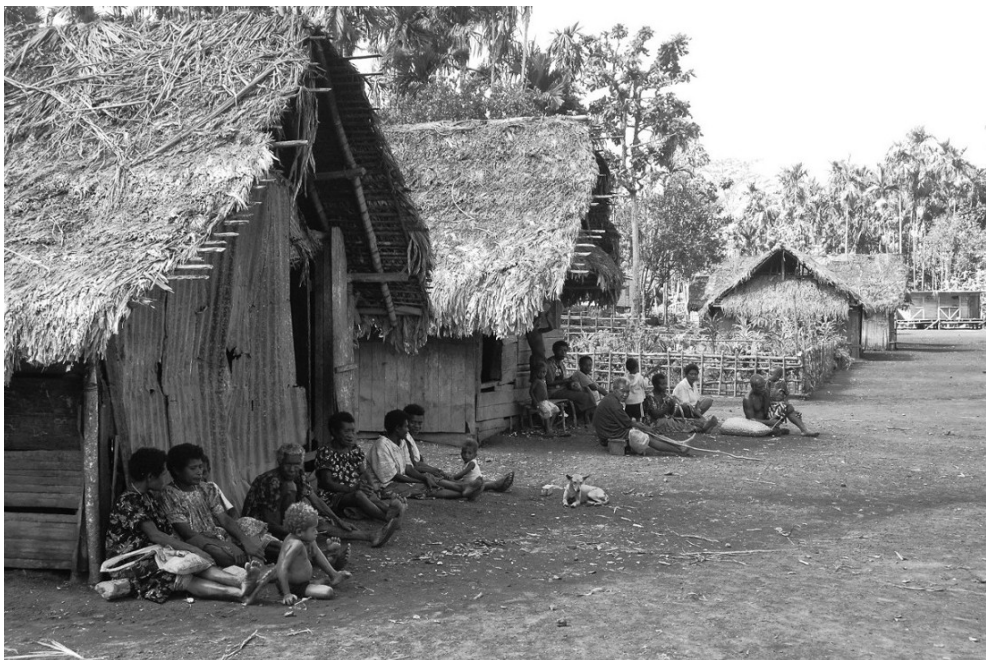
Photo 2: Inhabitants of Wawas at a village meeting

Photo 3: A woman meticulously cleaning her plot for planting

Photo 4: A woman in her taro garden

Photo 5: Men help their relative to build a house

Photo 6: Inside a typical Wide Bay Mengen cooking house

Photo 7: A man in his newly planted taro garden

Photo 8: Hard work: a father caring for his son

Photo 9: Cash cropping: a cocoa block

Photo 10: Cash cropping: a couple inspecting their coconut palms

Part II: Logging and Landowner Companies

4. Logging in Wide Bay

Baein village, or Vei'in "the Edge (*in*) of the Sand (*vei*)" in Mengen, near Cape Orford, is a large Mengen village on the south side of Wide Bay. It is surrounded by forested hills that at the time of my fieldwork were patchworks of swidden gardens and fallowing forests. Tall primary forest grew atop the hills on terrain that was too stony for gardens. In contrast, on the shore at the foot of the hill was a grassy plain taken over by spiky vines. Next to it, in the sea, were remnants of a wharf. Niugini Lumber, a Malaysian logging company, had had its camp on the site from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. During its operations the company cleared logging roads to the inland forests and widened the coastal road that now connects Wide Bay Mengen villages to regional centers such as Guma and Marunga in the north. As part of the deal made with the locals, the logging companies provided cocoa seedlings which people planted in smallholdings around the villages. Like abandoned villages or fallows, the logging roads, cocoa blocks and defunct logging camps are materializations of histories in the landscape, signs of often unequal relations with logging companies and global resource capitalism, as Joshua Bell (2015: 127) puts it in his description of debris left by logging operations in the Purari Delta of mainland New Guinea.

In the early 1990s people from Baein and the neighboring villages of Lop, Korpun and Maskilklie formed a landowner company (LOC), Balokoma, to which the state of PNG awarded the rights to the Cape Orford Timber Rights Purchase (TRP)—the logging concession covering the area. Through their LOC the Mengen subcontracted logging to Niugini Lumber, which operated in the Cape Orford and Wide Bay area, initially from Baein and then from Pulpul until June 2012 when the permit expired. Logging, like other human activity, changed the Mengen landscape. Besides causing drastic physical changes by cutting down forests and building roads, logging companies also revalued the Mengen landscape as a natural resource and a potential source of commodities. The local people had to be transformed and transform themselves into landowners (see Filer 2006), and their areas needed to be conceptualized as timber concessions. Logging, therefore, involved a set of complex territorializing and de-territorializing practices, its concessions establishing new abstract territories and prescribing specific activities within them (see Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 388), while local residents were encouraged to take part in the global resource economy as landowners or territorialized corporations. In PNG this often involved the establishment of LOCs in which local landowners were ostensibly represented.

In this chapter I examine how and why some Wide Bay Mengen men organized themselves as resource-controlling corporations as a part of logging operations and the commodification of their lived environment, establishing LOCs with the help of the forestry administration and foreign loggers. LOCs were both a symptom of the commodification of the Mengen environment as well as an important vehicle through which the process of commodification was advanced; they were also mechanisms whereby locals were brought into the resource economy. They were also highly gendered spheres of action. While women voiced their opinions on logging, the men took lead in the public and official spheres of decision-making—sometimes by excluding women. Consequently, it was mostly men who operated in and through the LOCs. A key motivation for the

Mengen to allow logging on their lands was the real and perceived marginality of the Wide Bay area in comparison to the areas around Kokopo, the provincial capital of East New Britain. Rural areas had no telephone or electricity and relied on boat transport for access to markets. Some Mengen were initially receptive to logging in the hope that logging companies would provide public services, such as roads, aid-posts and schools, as well as monetary income, much like in other remote rural areas of PNG (Bell 2015: 137; Leedom 1997: 44; May 2001: 321; Simpson 1997: 24).

Along with a promise of monetary income, becoming connected to the urban centers, markets and state services were important motives for many rural Mengen in allowing logging. Logging also helped the Mengen to imagine trees as a natural resource evenly spread across their landscape, and created a new interest in controlling land. However, the Mengen still do not imagine their landscape solely as a resource, or nature as something purely physical and detached from the human realm. People in PNG often do not imagine themselves as participants in a commodity economy but as partners in exchange (Kirsch 2006: 89; Robbins and Akin 1999; West 2006: 46) and, as long as actual development is not delivered, it is just as "fictive" as the commodities in Polanyi's scheme (2001 [1944]: 76). But it has consequences for society that differ from the commodity fiction. Instead of being atomized into individuals, as in European capitalist development, local society is "entified" and represented as comprising lasting groups (Ernst 1999) because, under PNG law, land is communally owned by undefined kin groups under customary land titles (Filer 1998: 30). In resource extraction, the formalization of these groups is central to establishing contractual relations with them and, indeed, to making them "legible" to companies and the state (Barlow and Winduo 1997: 9; Jorgensen 2007; Scott 1998).

In the years following the arrival of logging companies, new LOCs proliferated among the Wide Bay Mengen. In addition to contracting commercial companies to cut wood on their land, the Mengen LOCs also began to make contracts with each other, even as new companies emerged or broke away from the existing ones. As local landowning groups are turned into companies and corporations that operate as contractual partners with foreign companies, organizations and the state in a spirit of seemingly "democratic joint venture" (Lattas 2011: 91), they become detached from local meanings and re-territorialized as part of larger order. By combining together representatives from several local groups, LOCs in PNG often created—or failed to create—new levels and scales of political integration and action (Filer 1998: 287; Lattas 2011: 102; Simpson 1997: 30). In the Mengen case, too, logging and LOCs created a new arena where men forged alliances with each other in their pursuit of economic development and infrastructure. On the other hand, the emergence of new and smaller LOCs and their internal disputes points to ways in which people sought to emplace the newly created companies and justify their claims to the forests.

The beginning of logging in Wide Bay was preceded by intense negotiations between the Mengen, state officials and company representatives. The state's institutional structures and the political economy of logging formed the wider framework in which Mengen actions were situated. I start the chapter, therefore, by discussing the history of logging in PNG in order to describe the conditions under which foreign logging companies

came to the Wide Bay area. The first Wide Bay Mengen LOC was established by local men who navigated institutional possibilities and constraints with the help of forestry officials and logging company representatives to become the holder of a Timber Permit (TP), which gave the LOC control over logging performed in the area. In the next section I discuss how the Mengen operated within this company and how new companies were set up in the course of logging, established because Mengen villagers wanted to control logging in their own areas. While the LOCs are mechanisms through which local people are transformed into partners for foreign loggers, the proliferation of LOCs among the Mengen also reflects the central dynamics of Mengen land-holding practices. Setting up new companies shows how the Mengen active in logging sought to emplace themselves and legitimate their actions by appealing to meaningful spatial categories and local political units.

4.1 Historical and institutional background

The amount of commercial logging in what is now PNG during the early colonial period was limited (Bird et al. 2007: 10). The first appraisals of timber resources were made by the British colonial administration in 1908, followed a year later by the first timber ordinance in the territories of both Papua and New Guinea (Saulei 1997: 26). In New Britain, the Catholic Mission, which had established itself in 1888 in the Gazelle peninsula near Kokopo, contributed to the commercial use of forests. The leader of the mission, Father, and later Bishop, Louis Couppé, was instructed by Rome to establish an economic base which could sustain the mission locally, because with the increase in missionary activity provisions from Europe might be reduced or cut off completely in the case of a war. (Baumann 1932: 115). During his explorations in New Britain, Couppé had noticed the impressive eucalyptus trees, which the mission decided to utilize. The establishment of sawmills was important as the mission could then produce building materials for mission houses and churches, thus reducing the cost of building materials, and also generate income (Baumann 1932: 116); the first sawmill was constructed in 1901 a few kilometers inland along the Toriu River on the west coast of the Gazelle peninsula. After the eucalypts nearby Toriu were exhausted, a plantation was set up and the mill moved to Kurindal, some 23 kilometers north along the coast. The Kurindal mill operated for 13 years from 1915 to 1928 until it was moved to Ulamona. (Baumann 1932: 117). The mission then established a plantation in Kurindal as well. This pattern of forest use based on logging followed by the establishment of plantations was taken up on a large scale in the 2000s as a development strategy for the rural areas of East New Britain (see Chapters 6 & 7).

Australia—given control in 1914 of both the British and German territories that later became PNG—surveyed the forest resources of the territories briefly in 1908, passing a new Forestry Ordinance in 1937 to establish a forestry industry and to acquire and manage forest estates. The export of logs started that year and nine saw mills were operating in New Guinea in the period before the Second World War. (Saulei 1997: 27). In New Britain, colonial patrol officials, or *kiaps*, were instructed to pay attention to natural resources, among other things, during their patrols (Patrol report: Mack 1926). During the war the Allies made increasing use of timber resources and 188,000 m³ of

logs were produced between 1943 and 1945—compared to the 16,500 m^3 exported in 1940–41 (Saulei 1997: 27). According to Simon Saulei (1997: 27–28), post-war forestry was based on reconstruction through two government-run saw mills; until the 1960s the rate of expansion of forestry was cautious, because the colonial government considered inventory data to be insufficient. Up until the 1960s the main forestry activity was surveying and inventory-making (Saulei 1997: 28).

Period	Number of TRPs	Total area in ha
1950–1959	5	20 970
1960–1969	7	162 970
1970–1979	6	60 400
1980–1989	6	166 147
1990–1998	5	118 320

Table 1: Timber Rights Purchases issued in ENBP (based on figures given in PNGFA 1998, 22)

At the end of the 1950s, the administration announced a new forestry policy that was based on the establishment of training centers, a research institute, reforestation and the promotion of the timber industry (Saulei 1997: 27). Both the Department of Forests and the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development recommended large-scale and industrial development of timber resources in the reports of 1964 and 1965 respectively; in this model the involvement of capital-intensive and skilled foreign companies was deemed necessary (Bird et al. 2007: 10). As Bird et al. (2007: 10) note, this trend is reflected by the increase in Timber Rights Purchase (TRP) arrangements, in which the state buys timber rights from the customary owners; this increased from 317,000 ha in 1961–62 to over a 1.1 million ha in 1967–68, while the volume of harvested logs increased by 230 % (also Filer 1998: 179). The increase of TRP areas in East New Britain during this period is even more marked. During the 1950s five TRPs covering an area of 20,970 hectares were issued, while the seven TRPs issued during the 1960s covered 162,970 hectares (Papua New Guinea Forest Authority (PNGFA) 1998: 22) (see also Table 4.1). The objectives of a five-year development plan for the period 1968-73 were an increase in processing, the promotion of local participation in the industry, the creation of a fully integrated forest industry with industrial complexes within forest estates and increased employment in the industry (Saulei 1997: 28).

Even though in the late 1960s the intensity of forest industry was dramatically increased, it was still based on lumber production, reforestation and tree plantations. During this period PNG shifted towards greater autonomy with the establishment of the House of Assembly in 1964 with elections in 1968 and 1972 (Hawksley 2006: 166). The government elected in 1972 started, in the following year, a process designed to lead to self-government, resulting in the independence of the country in 1975 (Hawksley 2006: 166). By the end of the 1970s PNG's forestry policy shifted to the export of raw logs (Bird et al. 2007: 12). In 1979 the government revised its forest policy, calling for

the use of natural resources to generate revenue and the expansion of opportunities for wage labor and self-employment in the rural sector (Bird et al. 2007: 12; Saulei 1997: 29). While the policy included increasing the efficiency of existing processing, it also relaxed the formerly strict limits on log exports in order to create a profitable industry and generate income for the newly independent country. This opened PNG to foreign logging companies at a time when Malaysian logging companies were looking to move on to new territories because of the ban on logging in Sabah and Sarawak (Filer 1998: 57, 60). The export of raw logs rose at a pace which is now widely regarded as unsustainable and large tracts of forest were destroyed. On the other hand, the export of processed lumber was not profitable, due in part to the hard-currency policy influenced by more important non-manufacture industries such as mining, the surplus of processing in South East Asian countries and decreased demand for processed products in the Japanese market—to which PNG was closely tied—due to the oil-crisis in 1973–74 (Saulei 1997: 29–30).

Widespread public concern for PNG's forests led to a Commission of Inquiry in 1987, led by an Australian member of the PNG judiciary, Thomas Barnett (Holzknecht 1996: 7). The widely cited results published in 1990 painted a grim picture of PNG's forestry industry: corruption was endemic, monitoring inadequate, logging practices unsustainable and the manipulation and cheating of resource owners persistent (Holzknecht 1996: 7). The findings of the Barnett commission led to a two year moratorium on log exports as well as the revision of the national forest policy and the existing *Forestry Act* with support of the World Bank, reform-minded bureaucratic sectors and environmental NGOs. (Filer 2000: 11; 2013: 308; Holzknecht 1996: 7). The new Act tried to close an avenue whereby the loggers could negotiate their own agreements directly with the resource owners with reduced state supervision. Much of the logging was conducted according to the TRP mechanism under which the state could gain rights to the forest on customary land without any changes in the ownership of the land itself by receiving the consent—at least in theory—from all the landowners concerned, and by making installment payments to them until the area was given to an investor to be logged (Bird et al. 2007: 7; Filer 1998: 179). The TRP Agreement formed the basis for the Timber Permit (TP), which regulated the exploitation of forest resources (Filer 1998: 183). Under this set of agreements, it was—again, in theory—the government who chose the investor, which then conducted the actual logging under the terms set in the TP.

State control over the selection of the operator could, however, be circumvented in two ways: one was the *Forestry (Private Dealings) Act* of 1971, which granted customary owners the right to apply for their forests to be declared Local Forest Areas (LFA) and to sell their timber directly to outsiders under a Logging and Marketing Agreement (LMA) negotiated between a LOC and a logging operator (Bird et al. 2007: 8; Filer 1998: 179); another avenue whereby to circumvent state selection of the investor was to grant the TP directly to a LOC. In this move, local landowners would set up a LOC, often with the help of foreign logging companies, and apply for the TP. The LOC, which as a rule lacked the capacity to conduct any actual logging, then subcontracted foreign logging companies to do the logging (Holzknecht 1996: 4), invariably those who had helped to set up the LOCs in the first place. According to Filer and Sekhran (1998: 183) the net outcome of this type of deal was, however, very similar to the direct deals

made under the *Private Dealings Act* and in practice many conditions were ignored.

According to the World Bank, NGOs and reform-minded members of the bureaucracy, local landowners were on the losing side in direct deals with companies. Thus the repeal of the *Private Dealings Act* became central to the reform of forestry legislation. The new *Forestry Act* was devised in 1991, but only gazetted in 1992 due to efforts by the then Forests Minister, Jack Genia, and his Departmental Secretary, Michael Komtagarea, to delay it. As noted, the new Act tried to plug the loopholes that allowed foreign loggers to negotiate their own agreements with resource owners. This, along with sections which would have delayed the allocation of new resources to the companies, prompted log exporters and LOC directors to exert pressure on the Minister and his Secretary to avoid the gazettal of the new act, which they saw as an assault on the interests of loggers and logging-minded landowners. It was widely assumed that Rimbunan Hijau (RH)[16], a Malaysian logging giant that had come to dominate PNG's logging industry in the 1990s, was behind the delay. (Filer 2000: 17; Filer 2013: 307). However, the act also contained amendments which exempted existing logging permit holders from the new legal requirements—a provision which, according to Hartmut Holzknecht (1996: 18), made "a mockery out of the act".

The gazettal of the new Forestry Act in 1992 was preceded by a controversial maneuver by the Minister of Forestry, Jack Genia, and his Secretary. In the beginning of June 1992 both the Prime Minister of PNG as well as the Country Director of the World Bank sent Genia letters in which they criticized the postponing of the act (Filer 2000: 19). The Prime Minister complained that the new act, "a major achievement" for the government, should not be postponed any longer, especially since it may have "unfortunate implications with the donor agencies". The World Bank stated this quite clearly in noting that any further delay would be interpreted "by the donor community as waning commitment ... to the reform process" (quoted in Filer 2000: 19). At the same time logging companies were complaining about "bottlenecks" and lack of landowner representation in the Act. Despite the complaints of the loggers, the Minister gazetted the Act at the end of June—one day after he had allocated seventeen new TPs, most of them acquired by RH and its subsidiaries (Filer 2000: 20). The permit based

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[16]Since the 1990s PNG's forestry sector has been dominated by Malaysian companies. RH was the most powerful of these, accounting with its subsidiaries for about a half of PNG's log exports in 1994. (Filer 2013: 311; Wood 1999: 179). Since then RH's role in log exports has declined, but in the 2000s it still retained its dominant position in the selective logging industry and downstream processing of timber (Filer 2013: 316, 322). Michael Wood (1999: 182) notes that RH's position was actively facilitated by PNG's political elites, sections of the bureaucracy and local landowners, rather than its being simply a question of Malaysian "domination" as is sometimes claimed in simplistic accounts (see also Filer 2013). Between 2003 and 2011 large amounts of land were leased for ostensibly agricultural development projects (e.g. oil-palm) and logging has been conducted under the forest clearance permits given for these projects, which seem in many cases to be fronts for logging and ways to circumvent restrictions on the export of raw logs (Filer 2011: 24–25; 2012: 599, 606; Lawson 2014: 24; Nelson et al. 2014: 8–9). RH is openly involved in one oil-palm project in West Pomio (ENBP)—which is highly controversial and opposed by many locals (see Lattas 2012)—and possibly in two other projects through its subsidiaries (Filer 2011: 23). (For further information, see Colin Filer (1998: 54) on the structure of the so-called Sino-Malaysian logging cartel and the same author (2013: 311–16) on RH's role in PNG's logging industry; Andrew Lattas (2011; 2012) on the relation between state violence and logging companies in New Britain; and Michael Wood (1999) on the political role of RH in PNG.)

on the Cape Orford TRP was one of these, and it was awarded to Balokoma—a LOC established by Wide Bay Mengen with the help of Niugini Lumber, a subsidiary of RH.

4.2 Cape Orford Timber Rights Purchase

The rights to the Cape Orford TRP, covering an area of 33,700 hectares, were awarded to the Mengen LOC Balokoma. As noted above, the Timber Permit was granted on the last day on which the old forestry legislation was still in force. This made it possible for Balokoma directors to negotiate their own subcontracting deal with a logging company of their choice. The establishment of the Cape Orford TRP and Balokoma were, however, not straightforward processes; rather, they involved complex arrangements and struggles over different forms of territorialization. Logging concessions, as noted, established new abstract territories, prescribing specific activities within them, which is how Vandergeest and Peluso (1995: 388) define territorialization. Local people, such as the Mengen, were encouraged to take part in logging as landowners or territorialized corporations. Yet, contrary to their name, LOCs are not necessarily based on existing landowning groups, but are merely companies created under PNG's *Company Act* (Holzknecht 1996: 4). They were often established along the lines of logging concession areas which, according to Colin Filer (1998: 287), more closely resembled foresters' ideas of viable logging projects than local political units. They have often brought together people from different linguistic groups and have created, or failed to create, levels of political interaction not existing before (Lattas 2011: 102; Simpson 1997: 30). In Wide Bay, enterprising Mengen people on the one hand embraced logging and sought to participate actively in it but, on the other, rejected aspects of the de-territorializing logic, especially the incorporation into entities they perceived to be too large.

Commercial logging began in earnest in East New Britain in the 1960s with the acquiring of over 160,000 hectares of forest for timber concessions. In the Wide Bay and Mengen areas logging on a broader scale started later. During 1989–90 three large TRP agreements were made in the Mengen areas: the Nutuve TRP in parts of inland Mengen, the large Inland Pomio TRP (over 80,000 ha) and the Tokai-Matong TRP (22,170 ha) issued in 1989 ((PNGFA) 1998: 23)). Located some 30 km south-west from the village of Lop, the Tokai-Matong TRP was important for the expansion of logging to Cape Orford. At this time the president of East Pomio District, a Wide Bay Mengen man, was planning logging over an area starting from the Mengen village of Pulpul in the south and extending as far as the Sulka village of Setwei in the north. According to his plan, the inhabitants of the area would be represented by the Notomera LOC, named after the Noait (near Setwei), Toim, Meroi and Rak (near Pulpul) Rivers. The project never took off: according to the provincial member himself, because he wanted it researched too thoroughly. Directors of current LOCs operating in Cape Orford noted either that the plan encompassed too many people or that the terrain in the north (from Baein to Setwei) was too rugged to be attractive to logging companies at the time. A Wide Bay Mengen elder, who had been an early proponent of the Notomera plan, thought that the project never materialized because people from the southern Wide Bay area decided to go for one of their own.

In the late 1980s, Niugini Lumber, a subsidiary of RH, was logging at Tokai-Matong and it tried to extend its operations to the Wide Bay Mengen areas. Company surveyors came to villages such as Baein and Maskilklie and proposed that the villagers allow logging on their lands. During my visit to the villages that had formed Balokoma, I interviewed a middle aged man who had been a founding member of the LOC. Like most LOC directors I met, he continued to live in his home village and gained his livelihood. In the interview, he explained why they rejected the idea of being incorporated into the LOC at Tokai-Matong.

> The company [RH] had first been working at Tokai, and they wanted to extend the operation there and include some of us individually from different villages as directors, so that we would oversee this area. But we didn't agree with their idea. We wanted to do it by ourselves. ... Because we saw that they had too little forest and they are in a slightly different tribe and we are in another. Whatever small service, benefit or resource there is should go back to the people in the very same area. So we here would benefit from our resources. And they would benefit from theirs.—man, 40–50 years, 2012-01-19

> TP: *Kampani i bin wok pastaim long Tokai, so ol i laik kisim extension long hap ya na ol i kisim mipela wanwan long wanwan ples olsem director. Bai mipela i lukluk long desla area. Tasol mipela i no laikim despla tingting bilong ol. Mipela i laik bai mipela yet. ... Bikos mipela i lukim olsem ol i gat liklik bus tumas na ol i stap olsem narapela tribe liklik na mipela i narapela. So wanem liklik service o benefit o risors bilong ol man, bai i mas go bek gen long ol lain stret long hap. So mipela bilong hia bai kisim bilong mipela stret. Ol bai kisim bilong ol stret.*

The Wide Bay Mengen, and especially the men involved in the LOCs, rejected both the inclusion of their areas into the Tokai-Matong TRP and also their becoming a part of a LOC formed by people from a different Mengen dialect group. Instead, they wanted their own TRP area and LOC to control the permits. In an interview a director noted that they did not follow the correct procedures and by-passed the provincial government level altogether. The Departmental Secretary of Forestry at that time was Michael Komtagarea, himself a Mengen man from the Jacquinot Bay area. According to the director they went straight to their *wantok* (Tok Pisin, lit. one language) in the national capital of Port Moresby. One reason for by-passing the provincial level was the suspicion the directors held towards Tolai, a large linguistic group living around the capital of East New Britain. The Tolai, successful cash-croppers active in pursuing independence from Australia, have dominated the provincial government of East New Britain since the 1960s (Fajans 1998: 20; Martin 2013: 12; Rew 1999: 138, 149; Whitehouse 1995: 175). According to the director, if they had followed the correct procedures, receiving the permits would have taken a long time because, due to their "jealousy", the Tolais would have hindered any attempts by the Pomio peoples to develop themselves. Alan Rew (1999: 154) notes that many inhabitants of Pomio wanted "development", but not on terms mediated by what they saw as Tolai-dominated institutions.

This is a fairly common discourse in the rural areas of East New Britain, partly because, as a legacy of colonialism, the area around Rabaul and Kokopo is more developed in terms of infrastructure and services. Another reason is that the Tolai control the provincial administration due to their demographic strength and because they live around the administrative center of the province. In this context, even well-meaning actions by bureaucrats in the provincial administration may be interpreted very negatively by the rural population of province. Such an event occurred in June 1992 when Balokoma was issued a TP—under the fast-tracking maneuver by the Minister of Forests and his Secretary—when the struggle over the gazettal of the new *Forestry Act* was at its height. Eleven senior staff members of the Department of Forests had protested about Komtagarea's rushing through of new TPs before the gazettal of the new act, but the Secretary stated that the permits were issued according to the directives of the Cabinet (Filer 1998: 148). The parties opposing the dealings of the minister and his secretary had to concede that the permits issued in breach of the moratorium on log exports remained valid under the amendments made to the Act, but noted that it was possible to review these according to provincial legislation (Filer 1998: 148). This legal advice had been given by a counsel who had assisted in the Barnett inquiry and also helped to draft legislation with which the East New Britain Provincial Government was trying to prevent the issuing of two new TPs in Komtagarea's home district, Pomio (Filer 1998: 148).

As one of the latter permits was that which Balokoma came to hold, the director's view that the Tolais try to prevent development in Pomio becomes understandable. It also demonstrates how the well-meaning actions of the donor community, NGOs and the bureaucrats committed to reforming the old forestry legislation were negatively interpreted in the specific context of Pomio. Rather than regarding the reforms as intended to protect rural landowners from logging companies, they were seen by those Mengen men active in logging as restricting the autonomy of the rural population and preventing their attempts to achieve the development manifest in the towns. The real and perceived inequality of development between the urban areas of the Gazelle peninsula and Pomio were also key reasons why some Mengen were drawn to logging in the first place. As the director quoted above noted:

> We saw how down there [north: in the Gazelle] services were expanding, while we here lived like our ancestors before us. ... When we sat down with the bosses of RH, we asked them how they could help us landowners in the village with things like bridges and roads. ... They helped us with the schools, building schools and aid-posts. ... And then, in the past, our area had no roads. Only bush tracks from the time of the ancestors, and for many years up until today. But now we have the company, and it helped us to build the road.—man, 40-50 years, 2012-01-19

> TP: *Mipela i lukim olsem service i wok long go daun i go antap olsem na mipela long hia stap olsem ol tumbuna bipo. ... Taim mipela i bin sindaun wantaim ol bosman bilong RH, mipela bin askim ol long wanem ol samting bai ol i halpim mipela ol landowner long ples. So ol kain samting olsem ol bris, na rot. ... So ol skuls ol i wok long halpim mipela. Buildim ol skuls,*

buildim ol aid-posts. ... So bipo tru, desla hap bilong mipela, i nogat rot.
Ol rot bus stret. Stating long ol tumbuna hamas yias i kam, mipela ol lain
nau kisim desla kampani nau, i halpim mipela long mekim rot nau.

In the early 1990s, many Mengen—men and women alike—hoped that logging would grant them access to income and services. And it was not only the Mengen; these sentiments were shared by many throughout the rural areas of PNG where people hoped that natural resource extraction and increased company activity would bring development in the shape of increased income, improved services and better infrastructure (for logging, see (Bell 2015: 137; Filer 1998: 278; Kirsch 1997: 111; Leedom 1997: 44; Simpson 1997: 24)). Since the mid-1980s, infrastructure and services in many rural areas had deteriorated (May 2001: 313). After independence the foreign-owned plantations largely waned and with deteriorating infrastructure and the falling prices of agricultural commodities, many smallholders found themselves in a difficult situation with little cash income (May 2001: 313–15, 317; also Gregory 1982: 135–37). The closing in 1988, due to anti-mine conflict, of the Bougainville mine, a major source of revenue, worsened the situation (May 2001: 313–15). According to Ron May (2001: 317, 321), the government began to emphasize natural resource extraction as a source of revenue, while at the same time many rural people hoped that logging companies would provide them with income and infrastructure. Joshua Bell (2015: 137) describes how the conjuncture of the above mentioned factors with the rise in hardwood prices encouraged foreign companies to harvest the forests of PNG and the government of PNG to grant concessions in order to raise revenue. In Pomio, which in the 2000s was still regarded as one of the most disadvantaged districts in PNG (Allen 2009: 486; also Rew 1999: 155–56), logging began at the same time and for very similar reasons as in Purari. In both cases RH conducted it.
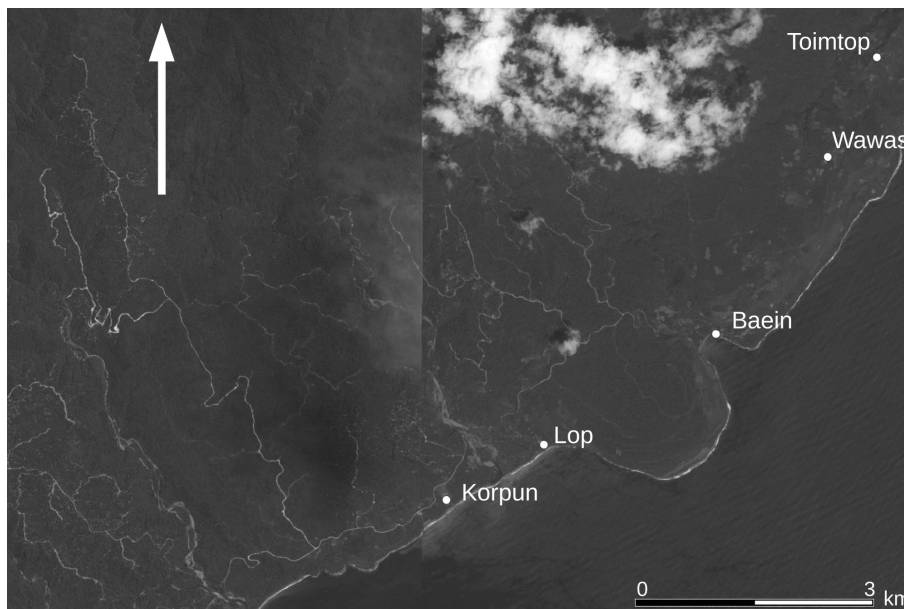
Map 3: Logging roads in Cape Orford in 2010s

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In 1994 Balokoma became the permit holder for the Cape Orford TRP. This gave the LOC considerable institutional power, since it could select which company would do the actual logging. As recounted by several Mengen men who had been among the first directors and founders of Balokoma, the choice of the "contractor", that is, the company to whom the actual logging was to be subcontracted, raised disagreements among villagers. Some people supported a company (whose name I did not learn) other than RH, while the men who had been active in setting up the LOC wanted RH as the contractor. I did not discover the reasons for wanting to subcontract to the other company. Michael Wood (1999: 85, 104) notes how in another logging project of the same era, local groups were in intense competition over which "contractor" to select, as individuals and different factions competed for influence and income. It is likely that in the Wide Bay Mengen case there were similar reasons for the dispute.

In the end, Niugini Lumber/RH, was contracted to do the logging. RH had, for its part, helped the locals to set up Balokoma, covering their traveling expenses to Port Moresby to negotiate with the Forestry Department and so on. The men who were directors had a very positive view of RH, as according to them it had acted according to the terms of their contract. However, this close relation between (future) directors and the logging companies was one of the reasons why donors and sections of the bureaucracy wanted to reform PNG's forestry legislation: while local people started LOCs to control the logging companies, the situation often resulted in the reverse (Leedom 1997: 51, 64; Simpson 1997: 22). A key concern of the critics was that LOC directors were actually—or, at least, felt morally—indebted to the logging companies for start-up costs and other expenditures (Simpson 1997: 21). John Leedom (1997: 64) and Gary Simpson (1997: 33) conclude in their respective analyses that, ultimately, LOC directors were disempowered, becoming dependent on the contractors, which also led to their losing status within their communities. Michael Wood (1997: 85, 105) notes that the national elite was opposed to reform because it would reduce its ability to enter into deals with loggers. In short, the logging companies sought to set up LOCs in order to receive the rights to log and because LOC directors would then mediate between them and the local population.

Another early LOC director summarized the argument as follows:

> We were arguing over two companies. ... We saw that RH had started to work at Matong. So we said, "That it is easy, the folks are already there and they can extend downwards [north]. To get another contractor would be hard and would take a long time." ... The argument ended when they started working and the royalties started to come in. All this [unclear] they bought during the time of Balokoma. They bought this during the time of the company. They bought roofing iron, timber and built the houses. So then there was no more arguing.—man, 40-50 years, 2011-11-17

> TP: *Mipela wok long pait long tupela kampani ya. ... Desla olsem... Mipela i lukim RH i stat wok pastaim long Matong. Olsem mipela i tok em isi long... ol lain i stap pinis na ol i ken extend i go daun. Long kisim narapela gen, em bai hat, bai tekim longpela taim. ... Kros i pinis taim ol man i wok,*

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ol royalty i kam insait. Em desla ol (unclear) ol i baim long taim bilong Balokoma. Ol i baim long taim bilong kampani. Ol i baim ol kapa, timber na wokim ol haus. Olsem, kros, i nogat mo kros nau.

Niugini Lumber/RH became the contractor for Balokoma and it made a camp in Baein. In 1995 the actual logging of the Wide Bay Mengen forests began. At first, the company conducted logging in the areas of the four villages that had created Balokoma. However, as Niugini Lumber and Balokoma sought to expand logging towards the south and north, they met with resistance from villagers that were not part of Balokoma. Like the directors of Balokoma who had refused incorporation into the LOC at Tokai-Matong, these villagers set up their own LOCs. Between 1995 and 2006 there was a proliferation of new LOCs in the Wide Bay Mengen area.

4.3 Proliferation of landowner companies in Wide Bay

Not long after Niugini Lumber began logging in the Cape Orford TRP area, people from villages adjacent to the Balokoma villages began to form their own LOCs. The first of these, Marau Ltd., was set up by men from Pulpul village, which is not far from the southern-most Balokoma village, Maskilklie. Inhabitants of Pulpul belong to a different dialect group of North Coast Mengen and their landowning clans are different from those of the Wide Bay Mengen. At first representatives from Pulpul were part of Balokoma, but they felt sidelined and feared that Balokoma would take advantage of their resources, so they formed their own company. There was, according to a Marau director, even a small conflict when loggers came to Pulpul and the director instructed young men to block the operation. The logging company brought in the police (see also Lattas 2011), but in the end the director noted that as landowners they have the final say. This led to negotiations in Kokopo between Marau directors, RH and the Department of Forestry, and Marau became a subsidiary of Balokoma with its own supplementary conditions for logging.

On the northern border of Balokoma, similar things happened. As Balokoma tried to expand north, people from the neighboring village prohibited the advance of logging in areas they considered their own. They then formed two LOCs—Kaluan Ltd. and Kulkulon Ltd.—in order to make their own contracts with Niugini Lumber, utilizing the permit held by Balokoma. One of the driving forces of Kaluan Ltd. was an elder who had sought to get logging into the area under the Notomera plan. The board members of Balokoma initially refused Kaluan as a subsidiary and the directors of Kaluan contacted the LOC at Tokai-Matong in order to become their subsidiary, but administrative territory intervened: according to forestry regulations, LOCs must become subsidiaries of the permit holder of the nearest TRP—which in this case was Balokoma. In the meantime, the board of directors of Balokoma had changed and the new board welcomed Kaluan as a subsidiary. The operations under Kaluan proceeded in the early 2000s. A clan group which held land areas north of the village in which Kaluan was operating rejected logging altogether (see Chapters 8 & 9). This formed in practice the northern border of the Cape Orford logging operation. The last two
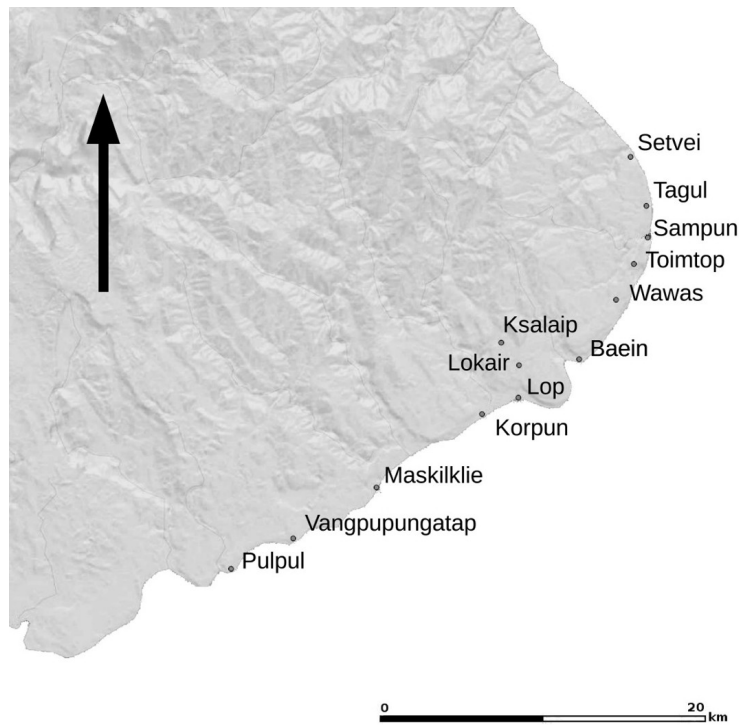
Map 4: Villages around the Cape Orford Timber Rights Purchase area

LOCs—Mavang and Talinga—were formed in 2001 and 2006 respectively by men who had been directors of Balokoma, but later broke away and established their own LOCs in the southern part of the Cape Orford area.

As these examples show, there is an almost fractal pattern in the establishment of the LOCs. By this I mean that the logic for setting up new LOCs or breaking away from the existing ones is the same as that behind the establishing of Balokoma, the first LOC. As noted, those who formed Balokoma did not want to be incorporated into a LOC, such as Notomera or the one at Tokai-Matong, that they perceived to represent a different area and group, but wanted to control "their own" resources. Similarly, when logging under Balokoma expanded, people from neighboring villages set up their own LOCs—again in order to control logging in areas they perceived as theirs. Quite simply, the Mengen who embraced logging rejected territorialization into groups they perceived to be too large—from their point of view, de-territorialized units—and created LOCs that more closely reflected their conceptions of local political groups. As noted above, in many cases in PNG, TRP areas and associated LOCs were often based on foresters' notions of viable logging concessions, rather than reflecting local political groups (Filer 1998: 283, 287). They often brought together people from different linguistic groups and created levels of political interaction that had not existed before (Lattas 2011: 102; Simpson 1997: 30). In the Cape Orford case the opposite happened, as new LOCs were formed according to a segmentary logic and the new LOCs encompassed smaller groupings than the initial ones. (For similar cases see Leedom (1997: 44, 62) and Wood (1997: 104).)

The crucial difference between Balokoma and the new LOCs is that Balokoma was the permit-holder. In order to make deals with Niugini Lumber—"the contractor"—the new LOCs had to become subsidiaries of Balokoma. (The other option would have been to allow logging and let Balokoma handle the revenue, but this was rejected.) By doing so the new LOCs could negotiate their

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Balokoma Ltd. (TP holder) 1992–
    Marau Investment Ltd. 1994–
    Kaluan Ltd. 1999–2006
    Kulkulon Ltd. 2000–2005
    Mavang Investment Ltd. 2001–2005
    Talinga Investments Ltd. 2006–
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Figure 6: Balokoma and its subsidiaries

own deals within the parameters of the TP, while Balokoma received a commission for each cubic meter of logs. Commenting on the hierarchical structure and the multitude of subsidiary LOCs, an elder Mengen woman jokingly referred to "Balokoma and its subclans". A perceptive and witty clan elder in her 60s, she made the comment as an off-hand remark during a discussion in which she and her husband recounted to me the expansion of logging at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s. With her joke she deliberately indicated important dynamics within and between the LOCs that I understood only quite some time after my fieldwork. In short, the sometimes difficult interrelations of the LOCs and the men's quest for control over logging resemble land disputes between and within clans. For example, in disagreements about authority over land, various subclans within a clan may all claim the position of mother group. In other cases, relations between subgroups and mother groups are more clearly defined and subclans can oversee their own areas, much like clans themselves (see also Eves 2011: 353). (I discuss the complex factional divisions within clans and LOCs in greater detail in the next chapter.) In the dispute over the selection of the developer, one director told me how he had trumped his opponents:

> They tried to oppose us, but they couldn't. Because we told them, I myself told them: "I am [clan name] and I'm the father of the land here. And I have all the rights, no matter that you [singular] are my subclan; you are a subclan and you must respect me, I'm the mother clan and I oversee the land."—man, 40-50 years, 2012-01-19

> Ol i traim agensim mipela, but ol i no inap. Bikos mipela tokim ol olsem, mi yet, mi tokim ol: "Mi [clan name] na mi papa graun bilong desla hap, na mi gat olgeta rait, maski yu sabklen bilong mi, yu bilong [clan name], but yu sabklen, yu mas respectim mi, mi mama klen na mi lukautim graun".

Above I noted that the Wide Bay Mengen, and especially those who were active in forming the LOCs, rejected LOCs that they regarded as too large. Even though RH and forestry officials actively helped the Mengen to set up LOCs, their scale and composition seems to be largely a Mengen creation. In short, the vast majority of the LOCs in the Cape Orford TRP area were multi-clan groups and were mostly based in adjacent villages. The largest of the LOCs, Balokoma, encompassed only four villages (Baein, Lop, Korpun & Maskilklie), and their inhabitants. Marau was based in Pulpul village and comprised three landowning clans that claimed areas there. Kaluan

was based in Wawas village and it encompassed all its inhabitants, who represented in total seven clans, of which some held land near Wawas and others further away. Kulkulon encompassed two landowning clans, which claimed areas between the villages of Baein and Wawas. Mawang operates out of smaller settlements near Lop village, encompassing four clan groups, while Talinga is based on the Talinga clan. (See Figures 6 & 7) Noteworthy is that only one of the six LOCs was based on a single clan.

All the multi-clan LOCs were named after places: Balokoma after the four villages in which it was based; Marau after the abandoned Marau plantation in Pulpul, because the directors thought the plantation had made the name famous; Kaluan and Kulkulon after abandoned villages (M: *knau*); and Mawang after two mountains. Naming the LOCs after places is no coincidence, but, rather, a way of emplacing them. This resembles cases from elsewhere in PNG where LOCs were named after spatial units in the hope of mobilizing the associated groups (Leedom 1997: 62). In the previous chapters I discussed how the Wide Bay Mengen used and made places to index personal and group histories. In light of this, naming LOCs after places was also a way of emphasizing the connections between the groups that the LOCs claimed to represent and the area in which they operated. This was especially so in the case of the LOCs named after abandoned villages.
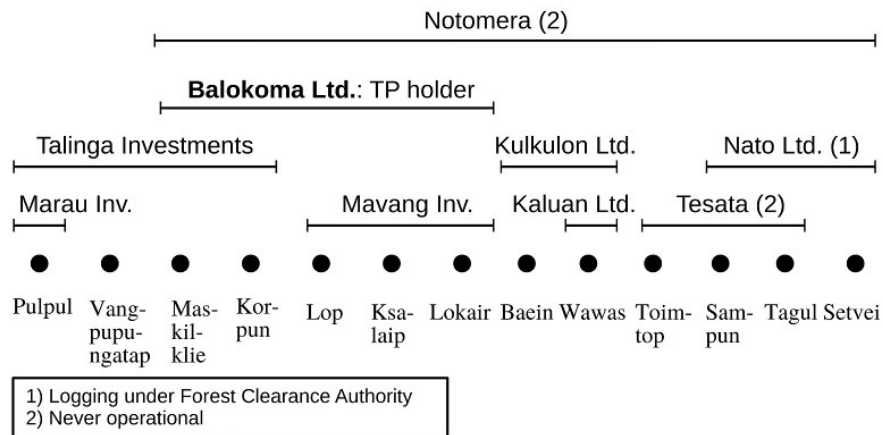
Figure 7: Wide Bay Mengen LOCs and villages

In the previous chapters I noted that the relationship between the autochthonous land-owning clan and the land-using group in Mengen land-holding practices is a *productive contradiction* in Mengen society. Clan-based ownership of the land and dwelling on it form two complementary ways of being rooted in the land, but can also be in tension with each other. The clan is attached to its land through the mythical origin place (M: *plangpun*) of the first ancestress. However, due to clan exogamy, no clan can live alone on its land and real social existence is achieved when the clans inter-marry and dwell together on the land (also Eves 2011: 353, 361; Martin 2013: 94–97; Panoff 1970; Scott 2007: 33, 218, 223). As Mengen clan histories show, when members of the different clans intermarry, live together on the land and produce offspring (i.e. produce society), they also make places, such as villages, gardens and burial sites (see also Scott 2007:

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201–2). This dwelling, or place making, therefore, not only binds the autochthonous clan to the land, but also those who actually live on it (Scott 2007: 218). Thus the origin place indexes the clan's mythical link to its land, whereas places, as signs of people's productive activities, index the multi-clan land-using group. Abandoned villages, or *knau*, are important historical markers for the Mengen. They are listed in clan histories because they narrate the movement and dwelling of the clan on its territory. However, they also index the land-using group and its *historical* or long-standing relation to the land (M. Panoff 1969c: 163).

By naming the LOCs after places, the Mengen men who set them up sought to elicit the land-using groups and highlight that the LOCs were village, or community, projects rather than clan-based endeavors. In some cases, and this is my interpretation, the LOCs were named after abandoned villages because key directors, who were active in getting logging to the area, came from clans which did not own land around the villages in which the LOCs were based. Therefore, they evoked the histories of land use—rather than clan-based landownership—in order to gain authority, or to legitimate it, within the LOCs. Initially the LOCs were community projects in the sense that royalties were evenly distributed among the inhabitants of the villages that the LOCs encompassed, and directors were drawn from each village—as in the case of Balokoma—or from each clan within the village, as in Kaluan. As Michael Scott (2007: 12) has noted for the matrilineal Arosi, who have a similar system of land-ownership and use as the Mengen, establishing "multi-lineage polities" out of the diverse lineages is a major achievement. Among the Arosi, communities are created by uniting the (cosmologically) diverse lineages—ideally under the authority of a landowning lineage. In practice, multiple lineages often claim ownership of the same area, and in a well-functioning polity these multiple claims can co-exist quietly. Conversely, if one lineage starts to explicate its claims to land, the threat of atomization arises as other lineages contest the claims or move to their own land areas. (Scott 2007: 77, 131, 228, 242, 247).

This centrifugal logic was also present in Mengen landholding practices. For example, people often contemplated the idea of moving to their clan land to avoid possible disputes over land and its use, although, in the case of men planning the move, this solution would have been temporary since their children would then, of course, inhabit land not belonging to them. Thus people often noted that, in fact, men should go to live on their wives' lands so that their children would inhabit their clan territory. Moving to one's own land was not a new solution; for example, Toimtop was said to have been founded by a man who had left a neighboring village because of disagreements, and settled on his clan land with his family (also Panoff 1970: 178). Likewise, among the Mengen LOCs clan claims to land can and do resurface. The directors of Balokoma recounted how logging royalties (paid by logged cubic meters) were initially divided equally among all the members—for example all the villagers encompassed by the LOC—while the LOC retained supplementary payments, such as agricultural and infrastructure levies. Later, around 2000, the system was changed so that individual landowning clans now receive the royalties from logging conducted on their respective clan areas. According to all the directors, this system was preferred by the people.

The two values—the autonomy of the landowning clan and its authority over land, and the socially productive inter-relations between the clans—are always to some degree in tension with each other. Placing too much emphasis on either risks undermining the other and can produce conflicts; for example, by explicating one's clan's landownership by excluding others from benefits, one risks disputes with others and indeed a possible breakdown of the community, as members of other clans can simply move away to their own clan's lands. On the other hand, highlighting the interconnections of the clans places the cosmological connection of the clan to its land at risk (or, indeed, might invite takeover by other clans claiming the area). In such a situation, community-building is about striking a balance between the two (Jorgensen 1981: 204; Robbins 2004: 196–97, 206; Scott 2007: 242). This is also evident in Mengen LOC politics: how the LOCs were established, how new ones emerged or broke away from existing ones and how clan claims to land and benefits resurface in multi-clan LOCs. The LOC directors as well as villagers referred to both values in the negotiations and disputes over logging, the distribution of benefits and who had authority over decision-making. Joel Robbins (2004: 197, 206) notes how Urapmin big men gained social prominence by exerting their "willfulness", one of the central values, in socially productive ways—but often bordering on breaking the value of "lawfulness". Similarly, Mengen LOC directors maneuvered between the values of clan autonomy and relatedness, often verging on over-emphasizing their clan's relation to the land at the cost of relatedness.

4.4 Conclusions

In this chapter I have recounted how Niugini Lumber started logging the Wide Bay Mengen forests in the mid 1990s. I started the chapter with a brief historical account of logging in New Guinea and adjacent islands, which later became the independent state of PNG. Even though the colonial governments and other actors, such as the Catholic mission in New Britain, logged the forests and laid the ground for expanded logging operations, until PNG's independence in 1975 commercial forestry was limited. Logging in PNG intensified in the 1980s and early 1990s, when PNG became a resource frontier for foreign logging companies. Frontier conditions emerged as a combination of several processes: the state of PNG needed revenue with the decline of the plantation sector and the closing of the Panguna mine in Bougainville; at the same time, infrastructure in rural areas was deteriorating and the income of many rural cash-croppers decreasing due to transport difficulties and declining prices for agricultural commodities. The state of PNG was thus eager to grant logging concessions, while many locals hoped to access infrastructure, income and services in exchange for their forests. Furthermore, Malaysian logging companies were looking for new forests to log.

Logging in Wide Bay commenced under these frontier conditions. Before the actual logging could start, however, forestry officials set up logging concessions, the Wide Bay Mengen established LOCs to act as representatives of local landowners, and foreign logging companies had to persuade the PNG officials and locals to grant them permissions to log the forests. In short, logging was preceded by complex arrangements in which the Mengen forests were revalued as resources and the Mengen had to be transformed and transform themselves into landowners. As shown in this chapter,

these processes were far from straightforward. The Mengen who wanted logging had to navigate the institutions of PNG's forestry governance, by-pass certain parts of the administration and align themselves with others, deal with logging companies and negotiate with and coerce their kin to establish the LOCs. Previous research on LOCs has found that while they were intended to increase local participation in PNG's economy, they often served to create contractual partners for logging companies and disempower locals (Filer 1998: 287; Holzknecht 1996: 4; Lattas 2011: 105; Simpson 1997: 31; Wood 1997: 98): meanwhile, logging companies benefitted from the mediating role of the LOCs and the fact that they could be presented as the "corporate voice" of locals or even as "the locals". In consequence, logging companies could play different factions and LOCs against each other. (Lattas 2011: 92–93; Wood 1997: 98).

In the Wide Bay case, the LOCs were set up by local men with support from Niugini Lumber/RH and forestry officials. Even though land was owned by the matrilineal clans, it was often men, who took the leading role logging. The vast majority of the men who were active in the LOCs and became LOC directors, were primarily engaged in swidden horticulture like their fellow villagers. They became directors for various reasons: some were regarded as adept leaders in their village communities, while others were through their education familiar with the contractual language and bureaucracy or could merely present themselves as such. In the next chapter I discuss more the various ways through which men became LOC directors. Public and official politics and leadership was previously a male sphere, and while women took part in decision-making, they did not occupy formal roles in the LOCs. In the next chapter, I discuss more the position of women in LOCs. When Balokoma, the first Wide Bay Mengen LOC, was granted a permit for the logging concession, it subcontracted logging to RH. The rights to the concession were granted during a time when international donors, NGOs and PNG's reform-minded bureaucrats sought to reform the forestry legislation and "break the alliance" between loggers and landowner representatives (Filer 2000: 11, 17, 19–20). The reformists thought that local landowners were being used by foreign loggers, whereas the forestry industry and landowner representatives saw the reform as an assault on their interests (Filer 2000: 17). In the Wide Bay case, too, local LOC directors interpreted the reform as an attempt by the Tolai-dominated provincial government to prevent their attempts to engender development—or at least they expressed it in these terms.

While forestry officials and RH representatives helped to set up the Wide Bay Mengen LOCs, local men also played an important part. When loggers came to Wide Bay, locals did not want to be incorporated into existing LOCs, and instead they formed their own LOC, Balokoma. As logging under Balokoma expanded, men from neighboring villages formed their own LOCs or broke away from Balokoma—for the same reasons Balokoma was instituted—because they wanted to control logging and the income received from it. Even though the establishment of new LOCs in some cases created disputes, the new LOCs became subsidiaries of Balokoma, which held the permits to the logging concession. The Wide Bay Mengen LOCs were fairly small and resembled the composition of local land-using groups (for a similar case see Leedom (1997: 62), and differed from other cases in PNG, where LOCs comprised a variety of local groupings and were set up in similar ways to logging concessions, which often

reflected foresters' views of logging projects rather than local political units (Filer 1998: 287; Lattas 2011: 92, 102). As I have argued in this chapter, the Wide Bay Mengen LOCs were formed along similar lines to local political units. For the most part they comprised adjacent villages and resembled local land-using groups and only one reproduced a single landowning clan. The multi-clan LOCs were named after places, and this was, I suggest, an attempt by the LOC directors to emplace the LOCs, mobilize groups associated with these places (see also Leedom 1997: 62) and a way to emphasize connections to and authority over land.

In this chapter I argued that central Mengen landholding dynamics, namely the relation between the landowning clan and the multi-clan land-using groups, were visible in the establishment, composition and relations in and between the Mengen LOCs. While the LOCs were formed for the most part as communal projects, clan claims to the land could surface: when people wanted royalties from logging to go to the clan on whose land the actual logging took place, for example. Striking a balance between a clan's claims of ownership of the land and the inter-relations between the various clans who live on it and comprise the land-using group is, as I have argued, a productive contradiction in Mengen society (e.g. Robbins 2004: 195–96, 206; Scott 2007: 242). Hence, it is no wonder that the precarious balance was also visible in Mengen LOC politics. By this I do not mean to suggest that disputes over land-ownership, the desirability of logging and the activities of LOC directors are purely a result of Mengen landholding practices. On the contrary, in this chapter I have attempted to show that logging in Wide Bay was influenced by actors and a political-economic framework that most of the Mengen could only minimally influence.

In his critical examination of LOCs in West New Britain, Andrew Lattas (2011: 90, 103–5) has noted how LOC officials combine Melanesian and Western forms of power, strategic gift giving and divide-and-rule tactics when acting with each other and as mediators between logging companies and locals. The logging companies are often the patrons of LOCs, which have become hybrid political-economic entities and corporatized forms of governance (Lattas 2011: 90, 105). Lattas' analysis resonates with earlier research on LOCs (e.g. Leedom 1997; Simpson 1997; Wood 1997), and his characterization of LOCs also applies in general to Wide Bay, even though, as noted, the Wide Bay Mengen LOCs differ in scale and composition from that analyzed by Lattas.

In this chapter I have focused on the wider political-economic framework in which Mengen actions took place, meanwhile examining the structure of Mengen LOCs. In the next chapter I will look more closely at the complex politics and power relations within Wide Bay Mengen LOCs.

5. "The company is just a name!": constructing corporate entities in logging

> So that's how I established [the landowner company]. It's not easy. It's hard and it's hard.—LOC chairman, 2011-11-03

> TP: *So how mi kirapim* [company name] *em olsem. I no isi. I hat na i hat.*

To people like me who have lived their entire lives in industrialized countries, corporations and states are familiar social formations: indeed, so familiar that we easily take them for granted and regard them simply as actors. The above quote from a Mengen man, a village elder and the chairman of a LOC, shows that this is not universally so. In places like Pomio, states and corporations are present, but they are not as routinized a part of social life as elsewhere and hence people more readily recognize the social effort that is needed to set them up and make them into actors. Following Francesca Merlan and Alan Rumsey (1991: 40–41), Keir Martin (2013: 97) notes that social groups, particularly corporate social groups, are always "hard won social constructions" that are "more or less problematically" conceived and reproduced in social action—something with which the Mengen man quoted above could certainly agree.

In the previous chapter I focused on the arrival of logging in Wide Bay and the formation of the Mengen LOCs. I especially examined them in relation to the longer history of the logging industry in PNG as well as situating them in the larger institutional and political-economic framework in which they were formed. Finally, I demonstrated that Mengen landholding dynamics, specifically the relation between landowners and land-users, was also visible in the Mengen LOCs. In the course of the chapter I took a wide view in which institutions such as the state and particularly companies, as well as Mengen clans, appear as simple actors that log forests, make contracts with each other and liaise with the rural people. Yet, as Robert Foster (2010: 97) asks, can corporations act? After all is it not people who do the acting?

Foster's rhetorical question is part of a recent discussion concerning what an anthropology of corporations should look like. Foster (2010: 99) calls on us to defamiliarize, or deconstruct, the corporation by depicting their social complexity, making them appear contingent and heterogeneous, that is, entities whose "identity as autonomous units periodically emerges with effort out of a field of relations". Note how Foster implicitly compares corporations with the "dividual person"—familiar from the work on so called "Melanesian personhood" (e.g. Strathern 1988) and Tanga Island lineages, which emerge as groups only periodically in certain contexts (Foster 1995). In this chapter, following Foster's advice, I take a step back and examine how, and exactly by whom, the Mengen LOCs were set up. What kind of social action, or effort, was required to make them into actors recognizable by others? What, as Foster (2010: 99) asks, does the field of relations out of which the companies are elicited, encompass?

I examine these questions in the context of a meeting concerning the newest logging operation, which started on Sulka and Wide Bay Mengen lands in December 2013.

Men from three villages had set up a new LOC called Nato Ltd., which had made a deal with Tzen Niugini, the logging and plantation company operating the Masrau oil palm plantation (Chapters 6 & 7). As Tzen Niugini paved the way for the new operation—quite literally by widening existing roads and clearing a new road inland to the areas to be logged—questions concerning old land disputes and details of the operation rose to the fore. Members of a clan involved in the dispute called a meeting to clarify things.

The discussion of the meeting focuses on two interrelated issues: the different participants involved in the dispute and how they sought to define its scope. As we shall see, the participants not only held contesting views of who owned the tract of land, but also of what the dispute was about—whether it was just over land ownership or the validity of the logging project in general. Depending on how people defined the scope of the dispute, they also had different notions of who precisely was part of it: did it only include the two competing clans or was the LOC also involved? Was the state an actor in the project? What I am especially interested in is how the different participants in the meeting talked about clans and LOCs. Thus, along with the process of creating LOCs, my focus is on how people elicit, renegotiate and contest the matrilineal clans.

How social groups and corporate actors are elicited, constructed and defined are central discussions in the anthropology of Melanesia. In his famous article, Roy Wagner (1974: 107–7) asks whether there are social groups at all in the New Guinea Highlands, claiming that what the anthropologists thought of as groups among the Daribi were in fact names, or distinctions, rather than "things named"; the anthropologists' presupposition that social life is organized on the basis of lasting groups was what made them find groups (Wagner 1974: 97, 103). According to Wagner, the social life of the Daribi was more fluid. The notion of lasting corporate groups or the "groupness" of lineages in Melanesia has been criticized more widely (e.g. Barnes 1962; Ernst 1999; Foster 1995; 67; Golub 2014: 188). For example Robert Foster (1995: 11, 62, 67, 194) claims that the matrilines of the Tanga Islands emerge as groups only in certain (ritual) contexts, not unlike his view of corporations cited above, while Thomas Ernst (1999) and Alex Golub (2007b: 45; 2013: 200) have noted how people in the PNG Highlands represent themselves as corporate kin groups when expected to do so by the state, especially in relation to landownership and natural resource extraction. On the other hand, Michael Scott (2007) has noted that in parts of Island Melanesia matrilines are conceived to be stable entities or groups.

Similarly Merlan and Rumsey (1991: 40–41) note that in the Highlands corporate groups can be "the things named", that is, historically specific social actors. Segmentary and corporate groups can, and do, play an important part in social life, but as Merlan and Rumsey (1991: 56) note, the actorhood of either persons or groups cannot simply be taken for granted but needs to be opened up. In this chapter I follow Merlan and Rumsey (1991: 56) and Martin (2013: 83, 89) who note that social groups are not only names, but important actors which, however, exist "in part as more or less contested representations" and are elicited, contested and reproduced through speech—very often in dispute cases in which the definition of these groups becomes an issue that people have to face (also Rumsey 2000: 112). How people speak about social groups is then

not simply a matter of representation of "pre-existing entities"; as Rupert Stasch (2011: 163) notes, ritual and oratory have important "world-making effects". I take social groups to be, following Stasch (2011: 164), at once problematical semiotic constructions with very real material consequences.

I now turn to the meeting, a single speech event, in order to look at how people spoke about, elicited and contested different groups, such as clans and companies; in other words, what are the "political and semiotic processes" that make them look like actors (Golub 2013: 2)? In order to contextualize the statements and positions of the participants, I also refer to past events and relations in order to provide a more fully rounded picture of LOC politics in Wide Bay and show the real, material consequences of these constructions.

The meeting

The meeting was held in February 2014 in Sampun village. Preparations for the logging operation by Tzen Niugini had raised a number of issues and many inhabitants of the villages near the logging area were unclear about the details of the proposed enterprise. As Tzen Niugini had established several extensions of its oil palm plantation in the Wide Bay area, people were wondering if oil palm would be planted in the new locations. Precisely what agreements had been signed? Had land been leased? Old issues also rose to the fore: a clan group not represented in Nato Ltd., which I call the *Disputing Clan*, noted that they had an unresolved land dispute with one of the clans that was represented, which I call the *Disputed Clan*. The tract of land in question was included in the proposed logging operation. As the dispute preceded the operation, members of the Disputing Clan wanted to know why activities were starting without taking this fact into account.

In order to clarify these issues, the Disputing Clan had called a meeting in Sampun, where most of its members lived and which was one of the villages surrounding the operation area. Members of the Disputing Clan had sent letters of invitation to representatives of the Disputed Clan—whose members also lived mostly in Sampun, Tagul and Setwei—as well as other representatives of Nato Ltd. In the letter, the Disputing Clan stated that it wanted to discuss two issues: the first was why people had not been given good and clear awareness regarding the project; the second was that part of the project area was the subject of an unresolved dispute between the two clans. Respected people who were not directly part of the dispute were asked to form a panel to hear the parties and facilitate discussion—a course of action typical of the informal hearings of dispute cases in the area. In land dispute cases these hearings are the first stages of dispute settlement—called pre-mediation—in which villagers appointed as "ad hoc" land mediators hear the parties and try to help find a compromise. (If a compromise is reached, it can be formalized into a binding agreement (TP: *wanbel agrimen*) by a land mediator.)

The meeting in Sampun was not a land dispute hearing as such, but a land mediator, a Sulka man from the Local Land Court based in Milim village, attended the meeting. This was so because one objective of the meeting was to establish how the

two clans should proceed to solve their dispute. The panels in dispute cases comprise respected people, often village officials and elders—almost always men. In this case the chairman of the panel was a Sulka man from Klampun, whose clan was involved in a local conservation initiative there. The other panelists were ward councilors (elected village representatives) of Sampun-Tagul and Setwei wards while the highest-ranking state official was the Vice-President of the East Pomio Local Level Government, also a Sulka man. Mengen conservationists from Toimtop village had been asked to attend the meeting and share their views, but they were not members of the panel.

The meeting was held at Sampun's meeting ground: on the beach under a large Calophyllum tree in front of a new copra shed. Men and women from the Disputing Clan sat in a group on the ground facing those of the Disputed Clan, who sat with Nato representatives on the other side. The panelists sat between the groups on plastic chairs brought to the beach, while the land mediator highlighted his role as an observer and commentator by sitting on the ground beside the panelists. People not directly involved in the dispute had come from neighboring villages to observe the meeting and sat around the meeting area in smaller groups. As I had come to Wide Bay a few weeks prior to the meeting for a follow-up period of fieldwork, I took part as well and sat with other observers from Toimtop village. The councilor of Sampun, a man originally from the Tanga Island (New Ireland) who had married a Mengen woman from Sampun, opened the meeting. In the typical fashion of Wide Bay meetings he acknowledged and thanked all the parties present and gave the floor to the chairman of the panel who also thanked everybody, summarized the main issues and started the discussion by allocating turns to speak.

Overall the meeting was calm and the speakers addressed each other politely, and in their opening statements always acknowledged the parties present. The chairman of the panel kept the meeting firmly organized by reminding speakers of the issues which they should discuss, summarizing to the audience and the speakers what had been said and asking for responses. In short, the chairman mediated the discussion by distancing issues from speakers by repeating them so that people would address the issues rather than the speakers personally. The meeting lasted for several hours and was followed by a lunch of rice served by women from Sampun. (No formal event in Wide Bay is held without serving food.) The participants discussed both the issues, first debating what constitutes "proper awareness" (see Chapter 8 for a more thorough discussion). Regarding the dispute, the two clans decided to take it to the next stage, namely, formal mediation at the Local Land Court, and they received practical advice on how to do so from the attending mediator. The representatives of Nato agreed that no logging would be conducted on the disputed tract of land until the dispute was resolved.

What was at stake, however, was not only the issue of landownership, but also the validity of the project itself and the larger framework of how natural resources were being used, by whom and under what authority. The participants sought, with varying degrees of explicitness, to define the scope of the dispute in different ways. In addition, the speakers also defined the actors involved in the dispute in different and occasionally conflicting ways.

5.1 The landowner company

The meeting started with a representative of the Disputing Clan taking up the first issue: the lack of clear awareness. The chairman of the panel asked to whom, specifically, they were directing the question—to the Disputed Clan or Nato. The spokesman of the Disputing Clan, a calm man in his early fifties, replied:

> I think I will address Nato to clarify this, because we all understand that it is a party along with us in this dispute.—spokesman of the Disputing Clan, 2014-2-18
>
> TP: *[A]ting bai mi go long Nato long kliarim desla, bikos yumi olgeta i understandim, em pati tu long wantaim mipela, mipela i stap long desla dispute(...)*

The Disputing Clan regarded Nato as a relevant party, or actor, in the dispute. Nato Resource Ltd. was the newest addition to the LOCs in the Wide Bay area. It had been registered in 2013 by men belonging to four clan groups that claimed adjacent parcels of land between the Noait and Toim Rivers—after which the LOC was named. These four clan groups were logical team partners: they claimed adjacent land areas and reaffirmed each others' boundaries. The recognition of one's ownership of a land area by others, especially those owning neighboring tracts of land, was a crucial feature of landown-
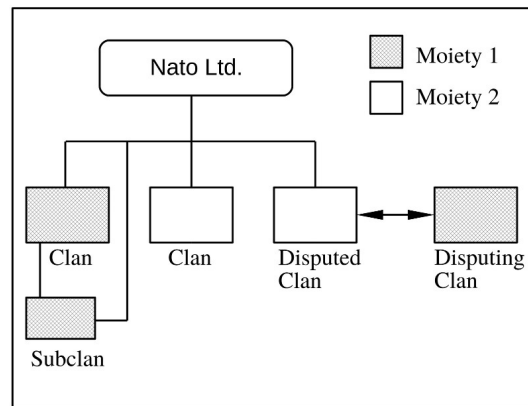
Figure 8: Nato Ltd. composition and dispute

ership among the Sulka-Mengen. The four clans also formed two pairs, which belonged to opposing moieties. Two of the clans formed a clan-subclan pair. This means that the named subclan recognized its junior status in relation to the "mother group", but both groups claimed authority over distinct, but neighboring, land areas. The other two clans of the opposing moiety formed a pair as well, although one that was less clear-cut. One was a Mengen and the other a Sulka clan with similar names. According to some they were two distinct clans that corresponded to each other, others maintained they were the same clan with Sulka and Mengen versions of the name and some claimed that one or other of the clans was a subclan of the other. These questions were related to a lingering border dispute between the two groups.

As these two clan pairs belonged to opposing moieties, they were also frequent marriage partners with each other. This created cross-cutting kinship ties between the men who set up Nato and became its officials. For example, the chairman was married into one of the other Nato clans, which his son (belonging to his mother's group) represented as a director. Similar kinship ties cut across other LOCs as well. In fact, navigating and utilizing the kinship networks to set up and maintain the

companies has been an important task of LOC officials throughout PNG (Lattas 2011: 93; Leedom 1997: 59). LOC directors are central brokers in the resource economy: for foreign contractors LOCs and their directors are important mediators through which to liaise with the local population. Andrew Lattas (2011: 90) has characterized LOCs as "ways of using local knowledge, relations and practices to control unrest, protests and compensation demands". For foreign companies LOCs have come to represent the "corporate interests" of the locals, or even "the locals" as such (Lattas 2011: 91; Wood 1997: 98).

On the other hand, LOCs have also provided an avenue for educated men to rise in status and influence, as they are more proficient than their fellow villagers in the ways of companies and states—or can present themselves as such. Many of the Wide Bay Mengen LOC directors were young and middle-aged men, who explicitly noted that they had become directors because of their education. Yet most of the directors with whom I spoke and who had been active in the LOCs lived in the villages and cultivated their gardens like other rural Mengen; only a few were part of an emerging middle class, living in towns and gaining their income from salaried jobs. Some of them had also held positions in the state bureaucracy and were sometimes classed by other villagers as "Big Shots". This is a derogatory term, used especially by the Tolai of ENB, for members of the elite who do not participate in the reciprocal networks of the "grassroots" villagers[17] (Martin 2013: 3). As Keir Martin (2013: 3, 7, 65, 141, 177) notes, the figure of the Big Shot is explicitly contrasted with that of the "Big Man", the "traditional" leader, and is used to talk about emerging class divisions and disputes over the extents of reciprocity.

While the majority of the LOC directors were not classed as Big Shots by their rural kin or fellow villagers, they were often men who both knew how to deal with foreign companies and state officials and were also regarded as figures of authority within their own clans. One particularly important source of authority was the access to, and knowledge of, clan histories that recounted the emergence of the clan and its links to the land (see Chapter 3); often restricted, this information was only revealed to convince others in appropriate situations, such as land disputes. Access to these histories was also constitutive of leadership and in some Mengen clans such knowledge was held by only a few clan members and passed on strategically (see Chapter 8). One woman told me that children of the clan learn the stories in meetings, prior to dispute situations, in which clan members come together to select a spokesperson and check their stories, as the full genealogies and histories might not be remembered by a single person. In other clans these stories were written down and the records held by clan leaders. A female clan leader recounted how her clan compiled the clan histories:

> We compile the family tree individually. The apical ancestress is at first alone, but then she gives birth to children. They start the big branches, which then give birth to the small, small ones [lineages]. We track them down individually so that you for example write down our lineage until the ancestress, which gave birth to our lineage. And another ancestress,

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[17]The term is a Tok Pisin slang expression and is in use throughout PNG (Peter Bosip, personal communication 2016).

she gave birth to his [named man] lineage in [village name], so he writes down his lineage's family tree. And then we come together and combine the genealogies and that's how you come up with the family tree of your clan..—woman in her 50s, 2011-08-14

TP: *Mipela makim wanwan. First tumbuna em wan, tasol taim em i karim. Em i gat ol desla certain bik branch nau kamapim ol liklik liklik na mipela makim ol olsem yu ya, yu kisim femili tri bilong mipela i go long pupu i karim mipela. Ok, narapela pupu karim* [man] *ol long* [village name], *em i kisim ol. Na bihain i kam bungim wantaim mi na* (...), *mipela rait rait bilong olgeta i bung nau.* (...) *Bai yu kam long desla femili tri bilong yu.*

One man, who had been a LOC director in previous operations, told me in an interview that he would pass his clan records to a young man whom he sees as fit to lead the clan. I asked him if a woman could become a leader, and he replied that women were less assertive in public settings and hence not strong enough leaders. Contrary to the comment of the director, especially elder women voiced their opinions strongly and the woman quoted above had assumed the role of a clan leader. However, the LOC setting was highly gendered. During my fieldwork I did not encounter women who had been directors and in the LOC documents I reviewed, I found only one woman marked as a director. While some women assumed the role of clan leaders, most people—men and women alike—noted that it was less common, because in the past women were regarded as less assertive leaders, were not taught to take part public settings, had less experience in oratory and so forth. In his account of LOCs in West New Britain, Andrew Lattas (2011) notes that they are foremostly male settings. In the Mengen case, women attended land dispute meetings, took part in the compiling of genealogies and in less visible discussions over the use of land, even though they did not hold formal positions in the LOCs.

While many of the LOC directors had access to clan histories, as noted, their ability to claim the knowledge necessary in dealing with states and companies was another reason why they had been appointed to their position. Many LOC directors I interviewed noted that they had become directors either because they had an education and knew how to deal with companies, or because their fellow villagers lacked the "mindset for business". In short, they had managed to present themselves as necessary mediators. One LOC official told me that he had sidelined his kin from LOC decision-making due to their ostensible lack of knowledge. Unlike most directors, he had been worked in the state bureaucracy and was decidedly part of the urban middle-class. Many of his rural clan-members resented being sidelined and, justly, felt dispossessed. They also noted that they felt unable to challenge his control over forest resources vested in the LOC, but hoped that a younger, highly educated clan member, could do so. The institutional framework of the LOC thus provided the possibility for dispossession, but this threat had actualized itself in only one of the LOCs. Due to their multi-clan composition and the possibility of fission, asserting long-time and institutional control over the forest resources through the LOCs was difficult in the Wide Bay Mengen case.

The men who became LOC directors needed to have authority within their kin groups, while at the same time logging operations provided a way to gain such authority.

Indeed, LOC directors were often men who had managed to present themselves as necessary mediators in dealing with the logging companies. James Slotta (2014: 628, 631) has noted that, in the Highlands of PNG, access to esoteric knowledge and its revelation to others is constitutive of power. Knowledge of transnational institutions— such as churches, NGOs or companies—can be presented in a "revelatory framework" as esoteric knowledge and those who hold this, often young and educated people, especially men, can present themselves as necessary mediators (Slotta 2014: 627, 638). "Gradual revelation" of the hidden is constitutive of power more broadly in Melanesia (Foster 1995: 194, 207, 209)—including among the Mengen.

In previous logging operations, in which Balokoma held the Timber Permit (TP) and subcontracted logging to Niugini Lumber (see Chapter 4), the directors also wielded considerable power by selecting the contractor. Sometimes these instances became sites of contestation, as different local factions sought to align themselves with different contractors (Wood 1997: 85). One LOC director told me how he had trumped his clan-members, who supported a different contractor, by noting that the others belonged to a subclan holding land elsewhere, while he was of the super-ordinate group, thus delegitimizing the others' claim to authority. Yet while the locals, especially directors, have sought to control foreign companies, the opposite has also been the case, as LOCs have become indebted to foreign companies for start-up costs while directors have felt moral indebtedness for their help in setting up the LOCs (Leedom 1997: 64; Simpson 1997: 21–22, 33). In previous logging operations, the contractor ultimately selected to conduct the logging had helped locals establish their LOCs (see Chapter 4.2).

Those who set up Nato had wanted to engage in logging as early as the mid-1990s when it was conducted under the license held by Balokoma. However, the operation based to the south of their areas never expanded so far north and the villages between the Noait and Toim Rivers saw no logging. They did not give up, however, and when Tzen Niugini started operating in Masrau, north of their villages, they set up their LOC in order to be able to make a deal with it. The Tzen operation was also based on a new legal scheme. Rather than holding a TP for a logging concession—that is, a Timber Rights Purchase (as in the previous operations, see Chapter 4)—Tzen Niugini conducted its logging under a Forest Clearance Authority (FCA), needed for clearances of over 50 ha for agricultural purposes (Filer 2011: 5). Under the new regulations, TPs would be granted only for selective logging and on-shore processing, while timber logged under an FCA can be exported as raw logs—a reason why many of the new "agro-forestry" projects are merely logging projects in disguise (Filer 2011: 20; Nelson et al. 2014: 189, 192). As a result of the Special Agriculture and Business Leases (SABL) combined with old concessions, PNG became the world's largest exporter of tropical wood in 2014 (Mousseau and Lau 2016: 4).

The plantation in Masrau was not just a front for logging (see Chapters 6 & 7); the harvest of timber was central for financing the Ili-Wawas project. Likewise, for those who set up Nato, it was a chance to attract logging and enter into deals with foreign companies in order to "improve the cash-flow of the area", as one of the founders put it, meanwhile emphasizing how they had "struggled" to get the project. Some of them had been involved in unsuccessful attempts to get logging to the area ten or twenty years

earlier. I interpret the expressions "hard work" and "struggle" to refer also to the social efforts—briefly discussed above—needed to set up the LOC, which involved establishing links with outsiders, dealing with state officials and negotiating with, and occasionally outmaneuvering, fellow villagers.

> He noted that in order to get such a project into [the area] is hard—it's hard and more than hard.—panelist referring to the Chairman of Nato 2014-2-18
>
> TP: *Em i wok long tok olsem, long kisim kain projek i kam insait i hard, na i hard na i hard tumas.*)

As Tzen Niugini machinery began rolling into the area and with surveyors visiting the forests daily, it seemed that the men of the four clans had been successful in their attempts, and Nato had performed its role. The logging operation had arrived, and it was in part due to their efforts. The opening statement of the spokesman of the Disputing Clan referred to this as well: he recognized the crucial role of Nato in facilitating and making the logging operation possible, and therefore regarded it as an important actor in the dispute.

5.2 Disputing clans

Responding to the question of the alleged lack of awareness, the Chairman of Nato claimed that awareness meetings open to all had been conducted in Setwei and Tagul, but people had failed to attend. Moreover, he noted that Nato and the logging project were based on "four recognized clans" and that is why awareness was directed more to them; in other words, meetings were held in villages where many of the members of these clans lived. The different parties and panelists then discussed for some time precisely what was meant by "awareness" (see Chapter 8 for a more thorough analysis of this). One of the Nato directors noted they had earlier received letters from the Disputing Clan which had noted that the Disputed Clan should not incorporate itself as a landowning group and that logging on the disputed area could not proceed until the ownership issue were clear. Upon this the chairman of the panel noted that the question of awareness had been clarified and that the discussion should focus on the land issue between the two disputing clans. If Nato was regarded as an actor in the dispute, at least by the members of the Disputing Clan, the status of clans as relevant parties to the dispute was acknowledged by all. Indeed, in the meeting in Sampun, clans were successfully "performed" by all representatives. By this I mean that the representatives were regarded as the voices of their clans and none of the speakers questioned the notion of a landowning clan as an entity or actor.

On the contrary, the spokesmen of the clans involved in the dispute raised the issues "on behalf of the clan" and their statements were addressed to the opposing clan, rather than individual representatives of it. Similarly, Nato representatives noted that the company was based on "four recognized clans". The speakers also agreed that the main "issue was between two clans" (TP: *Desla issue em i bilong tupela klen*), as a spokesman of the Disputing Clan noted. Similarly, the Chairman of Nato, switching

quickly to his role as a clan representative, remarked that his clan was "chasing" (TP: *ronim*) another clan, while others "chased" his, referring to the ubiquitous land disputes and thus portraying the clans as the main actors. Indeed the issue was between clans: members from both clans claimed the land area and delegitimized the claims of the other party in identical terms. In interviews with representatives of the two clans, I was told in both cases that the other group had confused land-user rights with ownership and that "our" clan was the "original clan" of the area and had brought in the other through intermarriage. For example, a member of the Disputing Clan characterized the core of the dispute as follows:

> The [people from our clan], they can trace their ancestors, which lived in these villages up there in the bush. So, [the people from the other clan], their story is not clear. Because they don't know which of their ancestors lived up there, in the old villages that are called *knau*. Who lived in this *knau* and who lived in that *knau*. Like that. So [the other clan], they are not quite clear about which of their ancestors lived where. But [our clan], they know their stories well; they know which of their ancestors lived in the area.—woman, in her mid 20s, 2014-02-06

> TP: *Em ol* [Disputing Clan], *ol i tok bihainim ol tumbuna bilong* [Disputing Clan] *yet … em i sindaun long desla ol ples antap nau long desla bus ya. So tasol ol* [Disputed Clan], *… stori bilong ol i no klia. Bikos ol i no save husat ol tumbuna bilong ol i bin sindaun long desla ol hap. Ol oldpela ples ol i kolim* knau. *Husat i bin sindaun long desla* knau, *husat i bin sindaun long desla* knau *… Em. Ol* [Disputed Clan] *i no klia tumas wanem tumbuna bilong ol i bin sindaun. Tasol ol* [Disputing Clan], *em … ol i save gut long stori bilong ol, ol i save long husat tumbuna i sindaun long desla hap.*

Like the clans represented in Nato, the disputing parties were of opposing moieties and thus also related to each through frequent intermarriage. Due to this, the disputants occasionally referred to each other as cross-cousins (M: *ruvung*, S: *ros*). People commonly described each other in kinship terms, and those of the same age and gender who belonged to inter-marrying clans were each others' *ruvung*. There was also a strong moral implication, because people related to each other as *ruvung* should be allies and supporters. This was argued by Michel Panoff (1976: 177, 181) for the 1960s, and it was still the case during my fieldwork. In day-to-day village affairs *ruvung* often helped each other and people explicated the importance of this relationship, selecting their *ruvung* as recipients in formal gift prestations, for example. This is because, along with intermarriages, the cross-cousin relationship signified and emphasized socially productive relations between the respective clans.

The panelists also referred to the disputants as each other's *ruvung*, with the explicit intention of reminding the disputants of the mutual recognition (M: *glang lomtan*, TP: *luksave*) that should exist between them. Urging the disputants to settle their dispute through a compromise, the Vice-President stated:

> If this recognition and *ruvung* [cross-cousin relationship] you are both talking about is a tight *ruvung*, then you two should bring it out clearly.—man, in his 50s 2014-2-18
>
> TP: *Sapos desla luksave na* ruvung *yupela tokim em i* ruvung *tait, tupela kamapim* ruvung *long ples kilia.*

This was not just a neutral statement but one that reminded the disputants that disputes often arise when people consider that they have been sidelined, and that cross-cousins should take each other into account. Moreover, he urged them not to draw Nato into the dispute and endanger the whole project. Conversely, the prescription of cross-cousin solidarity also highlights the fact that, especially in land matters, *ruvung* can be in fierce contestation with each other. One reason for this is that two clans that have inhabited the same area and are long-standing marriage partners often both regard themselves as the original owners due to the long history of dwelling on the land (see Chapters 2 & 3). Even when both clans agree on who is the landowner, members of other clans with strong ties to the land often feel that they are entitled to benefits and decision-making rights—that is, recognition—on the basis of their status as *ruvung* or land-users in general.

As noted in the previous section, managing relations between the landowning clans has been an important aspect of the construction of LOCs in Wide Bay. LOCs and resource extraction in general provided instances in which clans—or clan representatives— entered into new kinds of alliances with each other. Frequent inter-marriages between two clans, prestations in initiations and other interaction created bonds between the clans, and it was common for people then to regard the two clans as allied or paired (M: *vimbis kam*, "to hold hands"). Today, the notion of being "attached" (TP: *pas wantaim*) to another clan extends to issues of land ownership and disputes. A young man noted in reference to a land dispute in which his clan was involved that they had no trouble with a neighboring group, with whom they had been "one" from the time of the ancestors. Being "one" meant working together, remembering the other group in prestations and the confirmation of land boundaries, or "supporting the other one with talk" (Tok Pisin: *sapotim long toktok*) in the case of disputes.

This kind of support could be reciprocated with benefits. When a proposed repeat operation caused a land dispute between two clans in one of the Wide Bay Mengen villages in 2011, the clan marked as the principal landowner was supported by the rest of the clan groups, while the disputing clan was left on its own. In the land dealings of the Mengen this is a precarious position, as one of the key pieces of evidence for the ownership of a particular tract of land is confirmation of the borders by a neighboring group: ownership of land is substantially based on mutual recognition. The clan marked as the landowner, or its representatives, had agreed to the repeat operation on the condition that, as the landowners, they would receive the premium (supplementary payments paid by the contractor to run the LOC), while the royalties would be divided evenly among the seven clans of that village and then distributed by the respective leaders to individual members. The leader of the landowning clan had decided to give 20% of the premium to the three clans that had testified for his clan in the dispute, in

order to recognize their "hard work". The clan leader, an articulate middle-aged man, explained the rationale for keeping 80% of the premium for his own clan:

> We told them that if you [plural] want to take part in this, all the service payments the company gives will be distributed among all of us. Only one, called the "premium", we'd like that this payment should go to [our clan]. I'm not in the habit of getting everything—I do not like that, but I would like to get this premium in order to show that I am the father of the land. Because if we all get the same service, it looks like we are all landowners. So that's why I must get a bit more than you [plural] to show that I am the father of the land and that I go first in approving something [the operation] connected with the land. And they agreed with my getting the premium, because as a landowner I should have it.—man, 40 years 2011-11-16
>
> TP: *Mipela i tokim ol tasol, sapos yupela i laik go insait, olgeta service payment we kampani bai givim, yumi olgeta bai kisim service long en. Wanpela tasol ol i kolim long premium, mipela i laikim bai desla payment mas go long* [clan name]. *Despla mi no laik, mi no putim long pasin bilong kisim olgeta samting. Mi laik kisim desla premium tasol long sovim, olsem mi papa graun. Bikos sapos yumi i kisim same service, i luk olsem yumi olgeta i papa graun. So mi mas kisim wanpela liklik different long yupela blong sovim mi papa graun na mi go pas long tok oraitim ol samting i go insait. Na ol i tok oraitim mi long bilong kisim desla premium, olsem mi papa graun na mi mas kisim.*

The proposal of the clan leader to give a part of the premium to those who had supported him in the dispute case resembles instances of customary support and prestations such as a landowning clan giving small areas of its territory to allied groups, although the same event could of course be interpreted quite cynically as an instance of buying support. On the other hand, this was connected to central Mengen notions of relatedness, as actions that contributed to the maintenance of valued social relations were classed as "work" (see Chapter 2). Recognizing the "hard work" of others in the form of gifts—given for example during initiation ceremonies—were pervasive acts of reciprocity and relatedness. To follow Jane Fajans (1997: 51, 70, 79), the "underlying schema", namely work as relation-making, was operating here, even though its outward expression and context had changed.

Keeping the premium payment for the landowning clan was also interesting in another sense: rather than a question of maximizing benefits, the clan leader wanted the premium to go to his own clan as a sign of landownership and authority over the land. This was intended to reproduce the moral order of Mengen communal life, namely, that the different clans live productively together (in this case sharing the benefits) forming a multi-clan polity on the land, which was held by the autochthonous clan (see Scott (2007: 218–20, 223) for the construction of "multi-lineage" polities among the matrilineal Arosi). Moreover, the cynical interpretation and the notion that the sharing of benefits resembles and reproduces clan alliances are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, possible self-interest and strategizing are enacted in culturally specific forms.

In the quote above, the clan leader sought to personify his clan by using the 1st person singular ("I") (Rumsey 1999) to refer to his clan. People often used these referents to talk about their kin-groups. Alan Rumsey (1999) has analyzed similar uses of the singular forms in reference to social collectives among the Ku Waru of Highland PNG. The Ku Waru did not use the "collective I" in oral history accounts to describe the actions of ancestors, as in Polynesia (see Sahlins 1985: 47), but these forms were used in inter-group events where they played a key role in constructing segmentary-level social identities as the relevant actors in play (Rumsey 1999: 57, 58). Furthermore, among the Ku Waru the use of the "collective I" was not restricted to chiefs, as in Polynesia; several aspiring men could use it when seeking to represent a given collective (Rumsey 1999: 56). Rumsey (1999: 56) notes that it was not always clear whether a Ku Waru big man was referring to himself, or his group, and that in fact this was a moot point, because the big men were simultaneously aspiring to represent their groups *and* trying to amplify their persons. Acting as the "collective I" required social effort (Rumsey 1999: 56). This applies to the quote above as well: the clan leader shifted between plural and singular forms and it is not always clear whether the decision to distribute the money in a given way was made by him or by several members of his clan. What the clan leader sought to do was to present clans as the relevant actors in the discussion of logging operations and simultaneously himself as the embodiment of the "corporate will" of his clan. In the end, the particular operation never materialized and slowly the dispute faded into background.

Returning to the dispute regarding the operation of Nato Resources Ltd., what was not addressed in the meeting was the fact that neither of the disputing clans was as unified in its position as one would assume on the basis of discourse. The Disputing Clan was in fact deeply divided over the issue: the land dispute was raised by one lineage within the clan and was supported by another, with members of both noting that the clan was unified over the issue. However, a man speaking for a third lineage of the same clan totally refuted the claims of the representatives of the other two lineages and claimed that the land belonged to the opposing clan, that is, to his *ruvung*s. I use here the term "named lineage" rather than subclan, because all the lineages claimed to represent the "mother clan", awarding the junior status of subclans to the others. This often involves rejecting a subclan name attributed by others and claiming the name of the main clan (Tok Pisin: *klen stret*, "the actual clan"). The opposing clan in Nato was not as explicitly divided into contesting subclans, but it too was far from unified over the issue. A female clan leader, who was highly critical of the project and very aware of the land dispute, had at one point, along with her male supporters, tried to withdraw her clan from the project altogether. She was not successful, being trumped in a meeting by other Nato representatives and state officials, according to her own account. Other clans in Nato were similarly divided: opposition to the project was not always explicated, but as one member of a clan in Nato told me, he was glad of the contestation between the two disputing clans, since it stalled a project he was not at all happy with, although he felt that it was socially difficult to oppose those advocating logging.

Matrilineal clans were routinized and taken-for-granted groups for the Mengen. This does not mean that they were unchanging or perceived by different people in the

same way. On the contrary, the clan and subclan groups were reproduced in different instances, such as customary exchanges and land-dispute cases, and at these points the composition of the groups could be renegotiated. As noted by Keir Martin (2013: 97), in cases of a land dispute among the Tolai of New Britain, the existence of matrilineal clan groups is not questioned, but their composition and nature is subject to negotiation: in rituals a clan group may act as "one", but be divided into lineages in questions of landownership. This was the case with Mengen clan groups as well: there was a general agreement that land was held by the "original" clan, but there could be significant disagreements over which clan was the original, who was included in it, who had the authority to speak for the group and so on. The subclans were a case in point: in some cases they were autonomous in terms of land and resembled "actual clans" (see also Eves 2011; 353; Chapter 9). This depended partly on contingent factors such as whether the spokespersons of the group managed to present their case and convince others. In other cases, appealing to the superior status of the "mother group" may trump dissenting voices, while some clan groups had decided to disregard subclan divisions and "act as one". As John Wagner (2007: 31) has shown for other parts of PNG, authority over land may fragment and move simultaneously to groups of smaller and larger orders.

5.3 "The company is nothing but a name"

While the clans as actors appeared as rather unproblematic entities in the statements of the participants, the role of the LOC was interesting. Relating to both points—of awareness and the dispute—the chairman of the panel noted that Nato Ltd. was also a part of the dispute, because the clans that were part of it took their orders from it: "The clan gets the ideas [orders] from the LOC." (TP: *Klen i save kisim tingting long landowner kampani.*) This was also the stance of the Disputing Clan, whose representatives explicitly stated that Nato was a party in the dispute, and should have consulted the Disputing Clan before including the contested territory into its logging plans. Nobody, not the panelists, clan or Nato representatives, questioned the principle that the clans had a right to advance their claims over land areas and raise disputes.

The proponents of the project suggested that the clans deal with the dispute over the ownership of land as they saw fit, while allowing the logging operation to continue; whoever won would become part of the LOC. This was suggested by the Nato Chairman as well as by one of the panelists. The Vice-President of the LLG took a strong stance in support of the project by thanking Nato for offering "its resources"—that is, the resources of the clans—"to get development" (the road) that the government could not fund. Moreover, he warned the litigants that they might miss the "good chance" for development and told them not to "touch Nato", to leave the company out of the dispute, in other words. As noted in the previous section, he emphasized this by appealing to the litigants to settle the dispute quickly, as cross-cousins. (Büscher & Dressler (2012: 371) note similar cases where locals are encouraged to participate as laborers in "development" projects by noting that if they do not, they will lose the opportunity.)

This is an important statement as, with it, one of the speakers sought to define the stakes and nature of the dispute. In an email concerning the dispute and the call

for the meeting by the Disputing Clan, a local (Mengen) consultant of Tzen Niugini noted that the land dispute indeed pre-existed the operation and that the LOC officials had known about it beforehand. He concluded that as no resolution had been passed in previous mediations, the dispute should now be settled properly and quickly. According to him "stopping the operation will have severe consequences since it is a government project."[18] The consultant did not specify what these "serious consequences" might be, but he explicitly appealed to the government as a legitimating framework (see also Li 2014: 37, 86). The Ili-Wawas Project was indeed initiated by the then sitting MP, Paul Tiensten, and was also endorsed by the President of the East Pomio LLG—and then again in this meeting by the Vice-President. In this sense the logging operation had the support of at least the administration of Pomio district. However, critical voices noted that Tzen Niugini was a private company and its operations were therefore not above the law and that if the landowners wished to stop the project, they had the right to do so.

The proponents of the project sought to present the issue as a disagreement over the ownership of a particular land area between two clan groups. The Chairman of Nato told the audience that getting such a project was extremely hard and asked them not to "kill the child" that had come among them. He too noted that the issue was up to the two clans to resolve and that no logging would take place on the disputed area, where ultimately one clan must be proved owner while the other submit. He also distanced the company from the dispute even more starkly. Before the meeting, the female clan leader had suggested that Nato take representatives from the Disputing Clan—that is, from the clan with whom her own clan was in a dispute—onto its board of directors. With this measure she proposed that recognition and participation be granted to her *ruvung*, even though she never questioned that her clan was the rightful owner. However, as the Chairman noted, he had been opposed to this. The LOC Chairman thus advanced a more exclusive view of land ownership by emphasizing that the LOC should only include landowning clans in the project area, while the female clan leader wanted to emphasize the inter-relations of the clans. This is a concrete example of how different actors sought to settle the productive contradiction between the autonomy of the landowning clan and the interrelations between it and others in different ways.

According to the Nato Chairman, the real level of the dispute was between "Incorporated Land Groups" (ILG)—that is, clans which automatically were not incorporated as ILGs. This notion alone is highly interesting, since the Chairman conflated the "traditional clans" with ILGs, which are kin groups incorporated under PNG law (Fingleton 2007).[19] This shows how the legislation of PNG—particularly that concerning customary land title—and the "ideology of landownership" (Filer 2006) have influenced "traditional" conceptions of relatedness, often resulting in existing kin categories ("distinctions" in

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[18]The quote is from a printout of the email, which was circulated before the meeting.

[19]While there has been a proliferation of ILGs in PNG (Filer 2012: 601–2), very few of the Wide Bay Mengen clans had actually incorporated themselves. This is because ILG legislation requires a thorough listing of members, their birth certificates etc. in a laudable attempt to avoid wrongdoing and ensure that ILGs reflect existing groups (c.f. Fingleton 2007). In practice, this makes applying for the ILG status difficult for many rural people.

Wagner's (1974: 106) terminology) being reshaped as clearly defined stable groups (e.g. Ernst 1999; Golub 2007a; 2014). The Chairman added that above the ILGs (namely, the clans) was the LOC, but according to him, that was just a coordinating level and this level should not be included in the dispute. He stated:

> At the higher [LOC] level, you should not fight; it is an empty body, a controlling body to make things happen. When everything is in place and you get the power over the land, it is you who will run all the work, not the LOC. Not Nato! Nato is nothing but a name!
>
> TP: *Antap yu noken pait long en, em i bodi nating, i controllim bodi tasol bilong muvim ol samting. Taim olgeta samting in place na yu kisim paua antap long graun, yupela yet bai ronim ol wok, i no LOC. I no Nato! Nato em nem nating!*)

Like the Vice-President before him, the Chairman of Nato also sought to define the scope of the dispute so that Nato and the project would be left out of it. He did this in even starker terms by "deconstructing" the company from an actor in itself to just the sum of its parts—the clans—by noting that any potential issues were between them. In my opinion, this correlates with the fact that clans were talked about in the meeting as unproblematic entities by all parties—albeit for different reasons. For the proponents of the project it was a convenient way to "contain" the dispute as an issue between clans. For the parties disputing the area, it made sense to downplay any divisions within their clans as these could undermine their claims to ownership of the land.

In the meeting, therefore, clans appeared as the relevant actors, successfully performed by their representatives because people acknowledged that they indeed represented entities that can be termed landowning clans. This was also the case with the LOC: members of the Disputing Clan as well as the chairman of the panel regarded it as an actor in the dispute. This was a problem for the LOC members, because then the dispute was not only about landownership between two clans, but threatened to halt logging in the disputed area. In a desperate attempt to keep the LOC out of the dispute, the LOC Chairman spoke like a true "Wagnerian" by claiming that the LOC, literally, was only a name, rather than the thing named, in an attempt to avoid speaking about the very real consequences of the LOC, namely the ongoing logging operation.

This resembles a land dispute case analyzed by Keir Martin (2013: 83–87, 97), where Tolai men belonging to the same clan, but to different subclans, dispute the validity of a land purchase. Both parties acknowledged that a payment for a piece of land had been made, but one of the parties claimed that it had been paid to a subclan, which did not have authority over the land, and hence the purchase was invalid. The representative of the subclan which received the payment tried to argue that the payment had gone to the landowning clan, while members of the other subclan stressed that in terms of land, the clan was divided between two *tubuan*, taboo figures that represent groups among the Tolai. Both parties knew that the clan was indeed divided into two separate subclans represented by the two *tubuan* but, as acknowledging this would have meant that payment had gone to the wrong group and was hence invalid,

those who had received the payment tried to avoid speaking about the *tubuan* altogether, claiming that they are male secrets and should not be talked about in public. (Certain aspects of the *tubuan* indeed are male secrets, but not those relating to land which, on the contrary, are made as widely known as possible, as Martin notes.) (Martin 2013: 83–87)

Much in the same way the Chairman of Nato was aware that the LOC was not just a "coordinating body" but, rather, was an important actor in the logging operation that had caused the disagreement over land to resurface as an open dispute. Due to this he sought to obfuscate Nato's role in the issue and keep it out of the dispute. If social groups are "hard won constructions" (Martin 2013: 97), sometimes the effectiveness of an actor seems to be best achieved when it is seemingly dissolved and left out of the framework. Or, as David Graeber (2001: 259) puts it, social action is considered to be competent or successful when it can make the structures and templates of action behind it disappear. With a sort of crude rhetorical sleight of hand, the Chairman of Nato sought to do just that: make the LOC disappear from the picture.

5.4 Conclusions

In this chapter I have focused on a meeting held in a Wide Bay Mengen village concerning a logging operation conducted by a plantation company with the blessing of Nato, a Sulka-Mengen LOC. The meeting was called by members of a Mengen clan group who claimed land areas that were part of the logging operation. Members of another clan group claiming the same area had been active in forming the LOC and allowing the plantation company to log the area they perceived as theirs. The disagreement over the land area was older than the logging operation and the clan groups had in the past sought to establish who the owner was, but without clear results. Even though in Wide Bay Mengen (and Sulka) land-holding practices land was owned by single matrilineal group, people from several clan groups have long-established rights to use the land. Thus in everyday life disagreements over land may be dormant as people cultivate their gardens, while each of the disagreeing parties quietly regard themselves as the owners (c.f. Scott 2007). However, when one party openly claims authority over the land, for example by allowing a logging operation, the disagreement can become an open dispute again. When Tzen Niugini, the Malaysian plantation company, began logging the area, the clan which was not part of the project called the LOC representatives and members of the other clan together to discuss why the unresolved dispute had been ignored and how to proceed.

On the surface, the clan group which had been left out of the LOC had called the meeting to clarify two questions: Why had there not been proper awareness regarding the project? And why had the LOC ignored the land dispute over a part of the project area? These issues were addressed in the meeting, in which the two disputing clan groups decided that as no compromise resolution was in sight as both groups claimed to be the owners, they would settle the dispute formally. The LOC noted that logging on the disputed area would be halted until it was resolved. As I have shown in this chapter, however, much more was at stake in the meeting. People involved in the

dispute had not only diverging opinions on the matter at hand, namely, who owned the land, but on what the dispute was in fact about and who was part of it. Members of the disputing clan group were against the logging project as such, and many noted they would not allow it should their claims to ownership be recognized. The LOC officials and supporters of the project, on the other hand, said that whichever clan group won would become a member of the LOC, but sought to persuade the disputants to let the logging continue. Depending on how the participants viewed what the dispute was about, they also had different views on who was part of it. The proponents of the project claimed that it was a dispute between the two clan groups, while the opponents maintained that the LOC was also part of the dispute, because it had brought logging to the area. Interestingly, nobody in the meeting claimed that Tzen Niugini was involved in the dispute.

Furthermore, the participants in the meeting sought not only to enforce their own views of what the dispute was about and who was part of it, but also elicited and reconstructed the actors. In the beginning of this chapter I quoted a Mengen man who noted that setting up a company is hard work, referring to the social effort needed to build up a company, which in his case meant dealing with foreign logging company representatives, members of the bureaucracy and community members in different ways. This is in line with Robert Foster's (2010: 99) call for a new anthropology of corporations, in which corporations should be examined as contingent and heterogeneous constructions, rather than "unproblematically as actors" (Golub 2014). This call has been informed by work in the anthropology of the state (e.g. Mitchell 2006; Trouillot 2001)—which has sought to move away from a view of the state as a monolithic actor—as well as the discussion of corporate groups, or the lack thereof, in Melanesia (e.g. Foster 1995; Golub 2014; Wagner 1974). I took as my point of departure the notion that social groups, whether states, clans or companies, are simultaneously social constructions as well as important actors (Golub 2014; Martin 2013; Merlan and Rumsey 1991). These actors are commonly constructed in speech events, and in PNG in land dispute meetings in particular, where people talk about the groups, renegotiate their boundaries, contest them and, most crucially, seek to personify them (Golub 2014). As Golub (2014: 20) notes, persons seek to amplify their own actions by seeking to personify corporate groups.

By focusing on the dispute meeting and how different participants talked about the actors involved, I looked more closely at a variety of concrete practices, like dealing with bureaucracy, the use of logging money as gifts to re-create kinship ties and clan alliances and the use of clan histories that are crucial to the formation and the politics of the Mengen LOCs. With this I have sought to show that while speech and speech events are important in eliciting and re-negotiating social groups, the complex "semiotic and political processes" (Golub 2014; Stasch (2011)) that make up these events are not restricted to speech alone. By focusing on the dispute meeting and the actors involved I have attempted to show not only how these actors are constructed, but also the sometimes intimate and local politics of logging in the Sulka and Mengen villages. Here young and middle-aged men with good education have played a central role because they have knowledge both of the ways of the state and companies and could also lay claim to authority over land matters. In short, they were important mediators between

the state bureaucracy, foreign companies and the rural people. More often than not, the Mengen LOC directors were part of the rural peasantry, and only a minority belonged to the middle-class or elite. By focusing on "internal" or "local" politics of logging, I do not claim that the LOCs are a purely local phenomenon or that the most effective decisions and actions are made in the villages. In the previous chapter I focused on the wider political economy of logging in which the LOCs were formed, whereas in this chapter I looked at how the Mengen, and Mengen men in particular, acted in the context of LOCs and clans by seeking to personify them.

Two interesting things happened in the meeting in terms of the construction of corporate actors: all the parties present—regardless of their stance—regarded matrilineal clans as important actors in the dispute. The people present also successfully performed them, that is, the audience regarded the speakers as representatives of their clans and indeed as the personifications of their clan's opinions. This was so despite the fact that the clans were in reality much less unified over the issue of logging than seemed to be the case on the basis of discourse. In fact, both the disputing clans were divided into disagreeing factions. On the other hand, the men who had formed the LOC had initially been successful. They had managed to get logging to the area and they had constructed the LOC as a relevant actor. But in doing so they had been almost too successful: their opponents also recognized the important role the LOC had played in the logging operation, which risked the LOC being drawn into the dispute.

Photo 11: A local chainsaw operator

Photo 12: A logging road in Wide Bay

Photo 13: Log collection point in Pulpul

Photo 14: Logs waiting to be shipped from Pulpul

Photo 15: Newly widened logging road in Wide Bay

Photo 16: Log ships being loaded in Pulpul
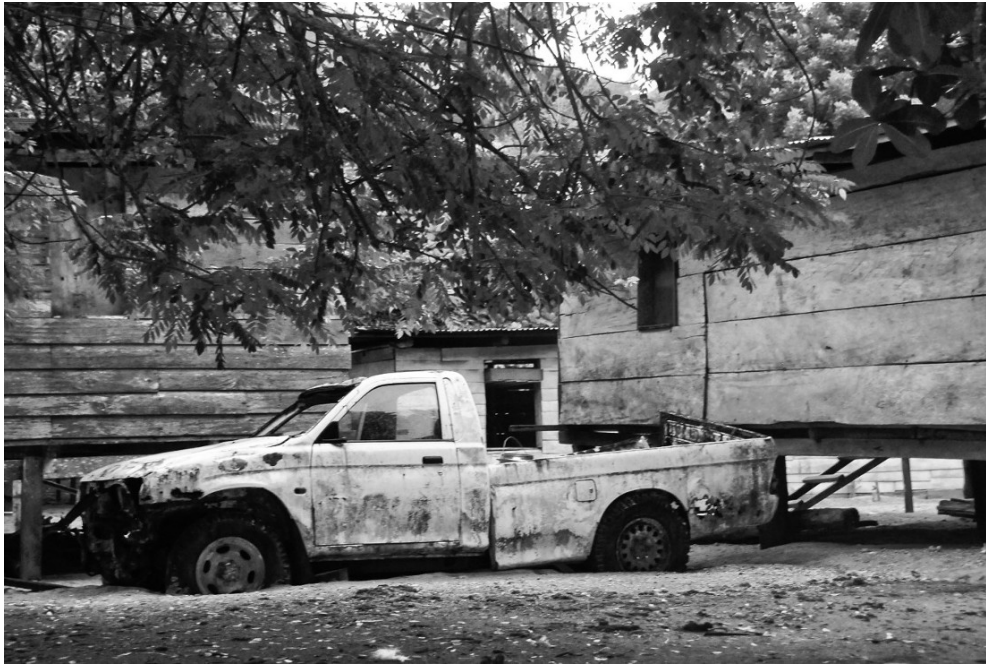
Photo 17: Remnants of a LOC car in Wide Bay

Photo 18: Saw mill at the new oil palm plantation

Part III: Oil-palm and Wage Labor

6. Enacting the absent state: state formation on the oil palm frontier

In 2008 a Malaysian company established a new oil palm plantation in the Mevlo River valley on the northern shore of Wide Bay. Soon after, many inhabitants of Pomio, including numerous Wide Bay Mengen, moved to the plantation as laborers. In this chapter I investigate the spaces of governance produced by the plantation and how it contributed to state formation in Pomio, where state presence and service provision were partial at best. As noted in Chapter 4, logging began in Wide Bay in the late 1980s in frontier conditions. For Malaysian logging companies PNG was a frontier to which they could move after having depleted the forests of Sabah and Sarawak (Filer 1998: 57, 60). Meanwhile, the state of PNG granted logging concessions in order to gain much needed revenue, and many rural people hoped that logging would provide them income, services and infrastructure (e.g. Bell 2015: 137; May 2001: 317, 321; Leedom 1997: 44; Simpson 1997: 24). In Pomio, frontier conditions persisted and, due its large forested areas and the comparatively small amount of industrial agriculture, the district was seen in the early 2000s as having potential for the expansion of logging and oil palm plantations.

The plantation was established as a part of the Ili-Wawas project, a combined logging and oil palm enterprise initiated in 2004 by Paul Tiensten, the MP of Pomio. The goal of the project was that companies would connect the existing logging roads of Pomio with the road network around Kokopo, the provincial capital, in exchange for logging concessions and leases on land for plantations. The road would improve people's access to markets and services and logging revenue would fund the road and bring immediate income. In its turn, the plantation would provide employment and, through long-term company presence, ensure the maintenance of infrastructure (Tzen Niugini Ltd. 2005: 8–9, 12). In short, local politicians hoped that the Ili-Wawas project would provide funding for infrastructure that the state was unable or unwilling to provide, and tie Pomio more closely to the state and markets. As the modern state's power is enacted and advanced through infrastructure in important ways (Chalfin 2010: 238; Ferguson 1994; Scott 1998), and as people in PNG and elsewhere evaluate the legitimacy of the state through the provision of services and infrastructure (Anand 2011: 545; Ballard and Banks 2003: 296; Jansen 2014: 253–54), state formation is a central question in relation to the Ili-Wawas project.[20] Likewise, corporate land grabs have been linked to the new expansion of the state as they include alliances between state officials, local political elites and investors—foreign and domestic alike (White et al. 2012: 627).

The relation between state formation and the new plantation became explicit during my fieldwork. As significant numbers of people from the Wide Bay Mengen villages had moved to work on the plantation, I started to focus on questions of labor and plantation agriculture. I conducted interviews and spoke with Mengen workers who were or had been working on the plantation, and visited the new plantation in 2012. In one of the interviews, a man mentioned the councilor of the plantation. In PNG's administrative structure, a councilor is an elected village or ward representative

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[20]For the unintended political effects of the project, see Tammisto (2010).

operating in Local Level Government (LLG): the lowest, village-level members of the state hierarchy. I was surprised and asked if the plantation had been designated a government ward. The worker replied that it was not; the councilor and deputies were elected by the workers, but their allowances were paid by the plantation company. In addition, the company had hired a catechist of the Catholic Church and, perhaps less surprisingly, an ex-police officer who acted as the security guard or "policeman" of the plantation. Thus the new plantation was organized on the model of a government ward without actually being one. The state-like order was fully private. Not only was the building of infrastructure, such as roads, and the funding of services outsourced to companies, but in this case the company had also assumed a state-like form.

Historically, plantations in Melanesia have been a means of occupying, pacifying and bringing new land into development, thus supplementing the work of the colonial administration, as Maxine Dennis (198-: 219) notes. More generally plantations are both sites of agricultural production and exploitation and political projects that create and represent governance through the reordering of the landscape, the mobilization of labor and capital and the surveillance of people, as Michael Dove (2012: 30) observes: places where people are controlled and their activities are prescribed according to the demands of the company and agricultural production (Benson 2008; Bernstein and Pitt 1974; Dennis 198-). This resonates with Michel Trouillot's (2001: 126) notion that there are currently two contradictory images of national states: at the same time as they seem to be becoming more visible and encroaching, their relevance seems to be declining. A conclusion regarding this (seeming) tension is that state power has no institutional fixity and that so called *state effects* are never solely obtained through national institutions or in governmental sites. Thus the study of state formation has to focus on the multiple sites in which state practices and processes are recognizable through their *effects*.

Following recent work in the anthropology of the state, which seeks to understand state power as "contingent relations and practices rather than isomorphic with any singular state" (Fisher and Timmer 2013: 153), I examine the new plantation as one of these "multiple sites" (Trouillot 2001: 126) in which state effects are produced. In this chapter I query how the new oil palm plantation became a state-like space in a situation where national and provincial government institutions were relatively absent. By whom were state effects produced and how did the Mengen workers contribute to, cope with and evade controlled life on the plantation? I suggest that several processes of state-making converged on the agribusiness. Even though the plantation became a state-like space, it did not produce a uniformly governable territory and easily governable subjects. Rather, the state-like order was confined to certain places, and Mengen workers moved between these to live out or shun certain aspects of the state.

6.1 Plantations and state effects

The oil palm plantation was established in the north-western corner of Wide Bay. The nursery and parts of the plantation were located on a 10,000 ha parcel of state land, alienated during the colonial era (Tzen Niugini Ltd. 2005: 61). The Tzen plantation,

operated by the Malaysian company Tzen Niugini, became colloquially known as Masrau where the nursery was located. In addition to the state land, the whole oil palm project area of approximately 171,000 ha was divided into twelve Timber Authorities for Agricultural Clearance (Tzen Niugini Ltd. 2005: 17, 43)—land held by local inhabitants under the customary land title. Of these, at least the Simbali Baining, who held land adjacent to the state land near the nursery, had entered into a lease agreement. In 2007 five Simbali men had established the Simbali Incorporated Land Group (ILG). The ILG is a legal mechanism which is intended to give legal recognition to groups which "already have a corporate identity under custom", thereby securing the land rights of customary land groups (Fingleton 2007: 16). They are intended to organize and mobilize the customary landowners without threatening customary ownership through individual titles, but extractive industries have also used them to create partners for their initiatives (Filer 2012: 601; Fingleton 2007: 16).

After its incorporation in 2008, the Simbali ILG signed a Special Agricultural and Business Lease (SABL) with the state of PNG for over 25,000 hectares of land. The SABLs are agreements made under the peculiar lease / lease back scheme devised in 1979 to compensate for the absence of any method of registering customary land titles. The scheme was later added to PNG's *Land Act*, allowing the state to lease land from its customary owners and then lease it back to them or to other persons or organizations approved by it for a period of up to 99 years. (Filer 2012: 599)). Any customary rights in the land—except those reserved in the lease—are suspended for the lease period. After leasing the land from the Simbali ILG, the state of PNG leased it back to the ILG which, in July 2009, signed a sub-lease agreement (Journal number 1.14090—Volume 17, Folio 130) with Tzen Plantations Ltd.—a Malaysian oil palm company—operative until 26th November 2107, that is, for the whole 99-year lease period.[21] Extensions of the plantation were cleared over the years on other customary titled lands as well.

After the establishment of the plantation, workers from Pomio and later from other parts of PNG began to move to the plantation, including people from the Wide Bay Mengen villages. Significant numbers of people from the villages of Wawas, Toimtop, Sampun and Tagul left for Masrau. More than ten young people from Toimtop had gone to Masrau—a considerable number in a village with fewer than 100 inhabitants. Others had just returned. The situation in the neighboring village of Wawas was similar: about 10% of the population was in Masrau. (The impact on Toimtop with a smaller and relatively older population was probably greater.) Most striking however was the case of Tagul. When visiting Tagul with my friends from Toimtop, they noted that Tagul resembles a *knau* (Mengen: abandoned village). It used to be bigger than Toimtop, but at the time of my visit its population had shrunk to the same level. Indeed, about a quarter of Tagul's inhabitants were in Masrau, a depletion which was clearly visible. Houses in Mengen villages are ideally laid out in two rows facing each other, with the distinctive round men's houses (M: *ging*) in the middle. In Tagul one of the two men's houses had deteriorated and there were considerable gaps in the rows of houses as entire families had left for Masrau. They had dismantled their houses and built them again at the plantation. "Tagul is now in Masrau," I was told.

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[21]The details on the land lease are from the lease agreement of which I obtained a copy.

The Masrau plantation was located a few kilometers from the coast, on flat terrain that becomes increasingly hilly inland. In 2012, extensive areas of forest had been cleared and planted with oil palm. Roads ran between the large blocks of neat rows to further areas that were being logged and where more palms were to be planted. The radical transformation of the landscape was not only confined to clearing the forests; hills had been turned into terraces and were also planted with palms. Seen from a hill near the nursery, the plantation was a hypnotic landscape with straight lines of palms extending seemingly endlessly in all directions, the light green of the foliage alternating rhythmically with the distinctively red soil of the terraces. The company was building a guesthouse on the top of the hill and next to it was a mobile phone tower built by the state-owned PNG Telikom, part of a government-funded project initiated in 2011 to extend the mobile phone network to cover Pomio—where communication infrastructure was confined to scattered satellite phones and short-wave radios. The plantation manager's house was on the slope of the hill, which descended to workshops where workers maintained cars and other plantation equipment. Further away across oil palm plantings on the shore of the swampy Mevlu River was a new saw-mill where logged trees were turned into timber and small furniture items. The nursery, where seedlings were planted in plastic bags and grown until they were mature enough to be planted out, lay amidst the oil palm blocks, next to a compound of workers' shacks and the new, barrack-style houses of supervisors.

Masrau was, like all plantations, a "legible" environment (Scott 1998: 30), made to conform to and support the requirements of administration and control (Scott 1998: 18, 21, 30). Legibility, as famously defined by James Scott (1998: 22, 30), is a tool of governance that allows outsiders to comprehend, administer and control complex situations '"from the center". This is achieved by reducing the infinite complexity of reality to those features that interest the administrators or readers of reports. Plantations and commercially managed forests are environments where abstraction and standardization are taken further: the complexity of reality is not only reduced in representations, but actual social life and environments are standardized and abstracted (Scott 1998: 13–15). The everyday practices on the plantation illustrated this. In the nursery, seedlings were marked with their day of planting so that they could be transferred to the field at the right age; supervisors marked down how many palms their groups had planted on a given day: managers knew the exact number of palms in a given block, and so forth. This kind of legibility is obviously crucial for managing a plantation, an environment geared to the commercial production of a single crop. Likewise, and for the same reasons, attempts were made to make social life on the plantation equally legible, standardized and controlled. In other words it was turned into labor. Each morning started with a roll call; supervisors listed who attended work on each day; workers were divided into sections and groups; each worker performed a specific task; supervisors listed how many times an individual worker performed that task, and so on. Moreover, on the plantation workers were not only listed, but also organized into different sections, such as "planters", "nursery workers", "sprayers" and "mechanics". Just as plantations create legible environments, people's actions also need to be made legible and to conform to the requirements of production (Benson 2008: 601; Bernstein and Pitt 1974: 514; Dennis 198-: 219).

Dove (2012: 30), in consequence, has likened plantations to Foucauldian panopticons which are concerned with the "conduct of conduct". For the workers, the plantation was not only a site for earning a meager but necessary salary, but also one of controlled labor and regimented life. This was evident in the common notion among Mengen workers that: "Life in the village is free". With this phrase they not only contrasted the plantation with the village as a site of earning and using money—that is, dominated by commodity relations—but also as a locus of controlled or alienated labor. The Mengen workers noted that, whereas in the village people worked as they pleased, on the plantation they had to follow the commands and schedules of others (see Chapter 7 for a more thorough discussion of this). In his account Scott (1998: 14, 262) uses the legibility-making practices of scientific forestry and industrial agriculture as allegories of statecraft in general. State power relies on the creation of legibility as it enables control from the centre, and standardization, because local social practices and environments are often too heterogeneous and complex for outsiders to administer (Scott 1998: 22, 24, 30). The creation of legibility is crucial for states, but it is not created exclusively by states. Michel Trouillot (Trouillot 2001: 126) has argued that researchers studying the state should look beyond national and governmental institutions and focus on the multiple sites in which state processes and practices are recognizable through their effects (see also Lund 2011). The Masrau plantation was such a site: it was not a government institution, but it produced so-called state effects in the context of state-like processes.

Along with legibility—one "state effect" identified by Trouillot—Masrau produced others, including the "isolation effect", namely, the production of atomized individual subjects, achieved by the roll calls and by listing workers and their individual activities. The division of workers into task-based sections resembles the "identification effect", or the alignment of these newly created individuals along new collective lines which are recognizable to both the governing and governed alike (Trouillot 2001: 126). This reflects earlier studies of plantations, which—as already noted—point out that plantation production hinges not only on cheap land and labor (Dennis 198-: 219), but also on rigid class division and strict control over the specific tasks of workers (Benson 2008: 601; Dove 2012: 30).

What is interesting about the Masrau case is that state effects were taken even further. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, one Mengen worker mentioned the councilor and deputies (TP: *komiti*) of the plantation. They are paid an allowance, rather than being fully employed by the state. However, in Masrau they were not officially recognized by the state. The workers elected the plantation councilor and committees, as in a regular ward, but their allowances were paid by the company. In addition to them, the company had hired a catechist of the Catholic Church. Like the councilors, the catechists are not full employees of the Mission, but local people trained to lead the day-to-day religious life of the villages, holding abbreviated masses in the absence of a priest, conducting prayer meetings and so on. They too receive an allowance from the Mission. In Masrau, they were paid by the company. The Masrau plantation was thus organized along the lines of a government ward without actually being one.

This comes close to Trouillot's (2001: 126) fourth state effect, "spatialisation", or the creation of jurisdiction and boundaries. Even though the plantation has not created a parallel jurisdiction, the government-like order is still noteworthy. It brings to mind Bruce Kapferer's (2005: 289) observation that, much as states are being run more and more like—imagined—companies, actual corporations are assuming state-like powers. The "corporate states", hybrid forms of governance along the lines of nation states but with new managerial techniques, have minimal interest in regulating populations or territory except for market needs. At the same time as corporations assume more state-like powers, public order becomes a security issue which also is privatized, corporatized and turned to an increasing extent against the public and citizens. Whereas nation-states sought to create order, even if by oppressive means, corporations are not interested in ordering the masses, but are retreating into enclave forms that are relatively isolated, both socially and spatially, from their surroundings (Kapferer 2005: 290, 293–94; also: Ferguson 2005; Lattas 2011).

Certainly, the plantation at Masrau seems to be an enclave of sorts. That plantations, private companies and other non-state actors produce state-like governance, order and process, is nothing new in PNG. On the contrary, the current situation is like an echo from colonial times when European plantation entrepreneurs sought Melanesian workers from the shifting labor frontier, when private trading companies controlled entire colonial possessions and when the administration sought to facilitate the growth of plantations. It is thus worth looking more closely at the history of plantation agriculture in PNG and New Britain.

6.2 History of plantations and wage labor

Historical accounts of the imposition of commodity relations on PNG often divide the process into overlapping phases distinguished by the most prevalent form at a given time. Chris Gregory (1982: 118) divides the history of labor as a commodity in PNG into four phases: forced overseas indentured labor (1863–1904); semi-forced domestic indentured labor (1863–1950); semi-free labor (1951–1974); and free wage labor (1927–). Robert Foster (1995: 37, 42, 50, 57) uses a similar periodization to describe commodity relations in New Ireland: the labor trade in the late 1800s; systematic labor mobilization under German rule; the shift to local cash cropping under co-operatives controlled by local big men in the 1950s; and the household control of cash crop production. Foster's account applies broadly to the Sulka and Mengen areas, which have a long history of labor and commodity relations.

The first recorded contact of the Sulka and Mengen with Europeans was in 1878 when Methodist missionaries visited the area on a brief voyage (Laufer 1955: 32). Around this time the inhabitants of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago also began to be involved with the colonial labor trade. There are indications that so-called "blackbirders", who recruited Melanesian labor to plantations, may have raided the area, as Michel Panoff puts it, in the 1870s and 1880s (M. Panoff 1969a: 111). A Catholic missionary, Carl Laufer (1955: 33), notes that Sulka men were acquainted "relatively early" with the blackbirders who recruited them to Queensland and Samoa. The "Pacific

labor trade", which brought Melanesians as cheap labor to Queensland plantations, was suspended due to the appalling death rates of laborers and other transgressions between 1884–1892 and completely halted in 1904 (Corris 1968: 94, 97, 102, 105).

For Wide Bay's inhabitants labor mobilization under the German colonial rule was more significant. While the Germans were minor actors in the labor trade, they employed a significant number of people from their own colonies on plantations (Firth 1976: 51) and labor relations reflect changes in the way the colonies were administered. Germany and Britain partitioned New Guinea in 1884. Between 1885 and 1899 the German properties, consisting of New Guinea's north coast, the Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomons and other adjacent islands, were administered by the German New Guinea Company (*Deutsche Neuguinea-Kompagnie*, NGC), a chartered company which initially sought to speculate with land. From 1885 it had exclusive rights to take possession of "unowned" land in the colonies or buy it from locals. As the NGC administered the German possessions, it could exercise the authority vested in the Kaiser except with regards foreign relations and the administration of justice. The German Navy was, for instance, obliged to protect "the Company"; likewise, when the new Imperial Commissioner attempted to address NGC's wrongdoings in 1891, he was instructed that the administration was supposed to further the Company's interests (Firth 1972: 362, 363, 368).

The Company was soon forced into the plantation economy as the thousands of settlers to whom it had planned to sell land never arrived (Firth 1976: 52), and it established plantations on mainland New Guinea where the locals were, however, unwilling to work on them. Thus a workforce was recruited from the Islands, where people were much more familiar with contract labor. Conditions in the mainland plantations were bad and the annual death rate was a staggering 40% of the 2,800 laborers who passed through Kokopo between 1887–1903 (Firth 1976: 52–53). This obviously decreased the appeal of plantation employment and attacks on recruiters increased while the number of laborers on the mainland decreased. At the same time, the Gazelle Peninsula in New Britain became a much more popular destination among laborers from the Islands, as conditions were healthier and it was closer to home (Firth 1976: 53). The NGC, however, had concentrated its plantation investments on the mainland where people were less willing to work for them and opportunities for copra trading were fewer than in the Bismarck Archipelago, which produced substantially larger volumes of the commodity (Dennis 198-: 228). This, and the Company's attempt to engage in what Stewart Firth calls "imperialism without rule" eventually forced it to relinquish control of the colonies (Firth 1972: 374, 377).

In 1899 the *Reich* took over the administration (Firth 1972: 374). As most New Guineans were quite independent and took on labor when it suited them, the administration was faced with a labor shortage (Dennis 198-: 228; Firth 1976: 54). Under the NGC labor recruitment had resembled the Pacific labor trade as it was based, at least in theory, on mutual consent. The imperial administration wanted to change this and labor mobilization became its special task (Firth 1976: 52, 54–56; Gründner 1985: 171). Administrators figured that occasional administrative (and punitive!) patrols were not enough and the Germans began establishing new government stations

in 1900 to make the surrounding areas safe for planters, develop infrastructure and mobilize villagers for labor. By 1913 Germany claimed to control the coastal areas of the mainland and large parts of the Islands (Firth 1976: 55). Even though German control of its New Guinea colonies was uneven, its impact on the coastal areas was significant, as it made the coast safe for plantations and provided them with labor (Firth 1976: 55).

New Guineans were mobilized as laborers through statutory forced labor introduced in 1903, which required up to four weeks of work on government plantations or roads, and the head tax, introduced in 1907, which was an alternative to forced labor. As the tax was payable solely in marks, the only option for most locals was to earn it on plantations. Tax defaulters could be assigned to forced labor, which should have been performed on government projects, but in practice district officers could conscript men for local plantations (Dennis 198-: 229; Firth 1976: 58, 59; Gründner 1985: 171). These measures, common features of the colonial mode of production, rapidly increased the labor pool, and the administration met resistance with force (Firth 1976: 59, 60). The intention was to break the economic and political independence of local economies (Bernstein 1979: 424) or create "the social basis for commodity relations" (Foster 1995: 43). By the first decade of the 1900s contract work had become an accepted part of life in New Ireland from where half of laborers employed by the Germans came (Firth 1976: 61). Fearing depopulation and a future labor shortfall, however, Governor Albert Hahl closed certain areas of New Britain to recruitment and banned the recruitment of New Ireland women, as the population there was already declining (Firth 1976: 64).

During the early colonial period the Catholic Mission also turned New Guineans into laborers. Virtually from its inception the Mission was instructed by Rome to ensure its economic sustainability locally in case support from Europe diminished as the Missions expanded or was cut off completely in case of a war (Baumann 1932: 115). For this purpose, the leader of the Mission, Bishop Louis Couppé, ordered the establishment of small copra plantations adjacent to the Mission stations, as copra was regarded the most "secure crop" (Baumann 1932: 115). These were not enough, however, and the Mission was "forced" to set up bigger plantations administered by the Mission brothers (Baumann 1932: 116). The Mission also established saw mills in New Britain to provide both building materials and monetary income (see Chapter 4). After timber resources had been depleted in an area, plantations were set up (Baumann 1932: 117–18)—a practice which is continued by contemporary integrated projects. Obviously, local labor was needed.

In Wide Bay the recruitment of labor by the Mission began in 1901 when a missionary, Hermann Müller, proposed making a recruiting voyage to New Britain's southern coast. According to Müller's own account, the Sulka were initially eager to sign up and he recruited 123 workers during the first two trips. (Müller 1932: 130, 132). Later, however, people often deserted their villages upon sight of Europeans—precisely because they were familiar with labor recruitment and its wrongdoings, as Müller (1932: 134) himself notes. During this early period some Sulka men also worked at the Toriu sawmill in 1910. In 1913 the Mission established the Karlei plantation in the northern part of Wide Bay—close to the private plantations of Tol and Kiep (Schneider 1932:

51, 53). In Jacquinot Bay the Palmalmal plantation also worked as a recruiting station for plantations in the Gazelle Peninsula (M. Panoff 1969b: 3). The Mengen there were not keen to work on foreign plantations, but many worked in the Gazelle. For example, patrol officers R.S. Bell mentions in 1950 how there was "gross over-recruiting" of labor in Wide Bay Mengen villages; of able bodied men 40 % were absent in Korpun, 44 % in Maskilklie and 47 % in Baein (Patrol report: Bell 1950). Likewise, according to M. Panoff in 1967, 90% of Mengen men in Jacquinot Bay aged 50–70 had experience of contract labor (Michel Panoff 1969a: 112).

Under Australian rule, which began after the First World War, the indenture system continued in the same way as under the Germans (Fitzpatrick 1980: 78). According to Peter Fitzpatrick (1980: 77), despite Australia's reputation as a "good" colonist, it acted very much like any other, and emphasized the maintenance of cheap labor through labor laws and regulations. While Australia sought to preserve "traditional societies" and even banned labor recruitment in some areas, labor laws initially sought to ensure that the "natives" remain workers rather than cash-croppers (Dennis 198-: 232; Fitzpatrick 1980: 78–79, 83). This was enforced by criminal penalties for laborers "deserting" their work or anyone harboring a deserter. While labor laws also applied to employers, their prosecutions were few until the early 1950s even though breaches were frequent (Fitzpatrick 1980: 78–80).

Fitzpatrick's (1980) account accurately reflects the experience of many Sulka and Mengen as they describe it themselves. A Sulka man in his 70s told me how in the past many workers perished on the plantations and were buried "here and there" (TP: nabaut), that is, not on their home land. Men did not just willingly sign up as laborers, but were forced to do so under contract for years to come. Those fleeing such contracts, as well as those harboring them, were imprisoned. The Sulka man said that cash-cropping or bisnis (TP) by the locals was discouraged to ensure that there would be enough workers. As noted, unlike under German rule, the Australians initially actively discouraged local cash-cropping (Fitzpatrick 1980: 79). According to the Sulka man, laws forbidding de facto slavery were introduced when Queen Elizabeth succeeded King George in the 1950s. This is an accurate dating, as most of the penal sanctions against workers were abolished by the end of 1950s—after which convictions against employers also decreased sharply (Fitzpatrick 1980: 80). The Sulka man, who had set up a local copra co-operative, observed that cash-cropping increased in the 1960s, often aided by the Mission and the government, which is echoed in scholarly accounts of the colonial economy (see Foster 1995; Gregory 1982: 146, 157); the history of wage labor in PNG and New Britain describes a shifting labor frontier. According to Gregory (1982: 146, 155), former indentured and agreement laborers became smallholders and primary producers and no longer signed up as workers, contributing to the closure of the labor frontier. In a patrol report from 1956, the patrol officer meantions how the Baining and Sulka "loath" to work for long periods on plantations and returned quickly, leading plantation owners to rely on labor from other areas (Patrol report: Hearne 1956). Ultimately, New Britain, which was the first labor frontier, also became the leader in smallholder commodity production, whereas the Highlands region was the last labor frontier to open and close (Gregory 1982: 131, 157).

Household cash-cropping, however, did not end wage labor. In Wide Bay the household production of cash crops diminished with the decline of the buying infrastructure (Allen 2009: 296). Since the mid-1990s, copra ships have stopped visiting the area and the buying points are now far away. While most households had at least access to the copra blocks of their relatives, cash-cropping, especially in the villages located further inland, became sporadic at best. Among the Wide Bay Mengen many young men worked for varying lengths of time as wage laborers. During my first period of fieldwork in 2007 some young women had also gone to "the West", mostly to accompany their relatives, and a few worked on the plantations in West New Britain. However, by 2011 many had gone to the plantation in Masrau although Wide Bay Mengen villages further south had not witnessed such a rush at the time and nor, I was told, had the Sulka of Wide Bay.

According to many, the Sulka were keener to cultivate their copra blocks and selling the produce is easier as there are more buying points in their area. Near the southern Wide Bay Mengen villages, logging was still being carried out in 2012 and a successful LOC also operated in the area and planned to set up a buying point for cash crops there; it seems that in the southern Wide Bay villages there were other possibilities for monetary income than migrant labor. Comparably, Wawas, Toimtop, Sampun and Tagul formed a very local "periphery" or frontier: they were relatively far away both from the copra buying points in the north and the logging centers further south. This effectively illustrates Bernstein's notion that areas with a lower rate of commodity production often geographically correlate with labor reserves in situations where commodity production has become a necessity (Bernstein 1979: 423, 426; for PNG see Allen 2009: 411). Indeed, the demise of cash-cropping had re-opened the labor frontier in Pomio, while the Ili-Wawas project and the possibility of leasing land had opened the land frontier.

6.3 Self-made order

In light of the long shared history of plantations, colonization and state formation in Melanesia, the organization of Masrau along government lines is perhaps less surprising than it initially seemed to me. What surprised me even more was that the workers claimed to have proposed this form of organization themselves. According to workers I interviewed, the security guard was hired from the start, but having a catechist and elected officials was suggested by the workers, proposals to which the management had agreed. As one worker, who had risen in the company, put it:

> We [pay them]. The policeman. It's not the state who pays their salaries. The catechist as well. They became sort of employees of the company. The management pays their salaries, but they work as government officials work. And now the government is aware of this. The President [of East Pomio LLG] and the MP [of Pomio] came to see the plantation and they were surprised! Because other companies do not have catechists, councilors and committees. They've got police and security, but not the others. ... Their minds clicked, when they saw this.—man, 39 years 2011-11-12

Mipela yet. Police. Govaman i no baim. Katiket tu. Ol i kamap olsem ol wokman bilong kampani. Management i baim. Tasol ol i wokim ol wok olsem how ol lain bilong govaman i wok. Nau govaman tu i luksave. President na memba i go insait tu na lukluk. Ol i kirap nogut ya. Bikos long ol kampani i nogat katiket na inogat ol councillar na komiti. I gat police na security. Tasol ol narapela nogat. . . . Tingting bilong ol i click, taim ol i lukim.

My knowledge of the origins of the state-like organization relies on the accounts of the workers, but it seems likely that the workers could have influenced the situation in this way. The company running the plantation in Masrau seems to be a newcomer and relatively inexperienced in the plantation business. Workers discreetly hinted and at other times explicitly told me that the company was not always up-to-date, as exemplified by workers' housing and working conditions: "A proper company," noted one worker, "would have built good housing before starting the operation" (see Chapter 7). At the time of my visit in 2012, the plantation had as yet no mill to process the fruit, yet without a mill an oil palm plantation is not economically viable. The workers' evaluation of the company echoes recent studies. The established oil palm producers in PNG have found that they can compete with large international producers by having their produce certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. PNG accounts only for one percent of global palm oil production globally but more than a third of the certified product, so it is in the interests of the established industry to maintain its reputation for environmental sustainability (Filer 2012: 604).

There are new actors on the scene, however. In 2012, PNG's oil palm was produced by two companies and some 20,000 smallholders. After that 36 new "agro-forestry" projects intended to establish oil-palm plantations for which they leased land under the SABL scheme were established (Nelson et al. 2014: 188, 190). These projects were fraught with problems. According to the study by Nelson et al. (2014: 192), only five of the projects were viable, while 24 had insufficient land, 19 faced major socio-legal constraints and 21 had no prior experience in oil-palm. This seems to indicate fairly conclusively that most of the projects were merely fronts for logging, as agricultural-clearing licenses can be used to circumvent logging restrictions (Filer 2012; Nelson et al. 2014: 192). The project in Masrau was not a front for logging—it would have been an unreasonably elaborate one—nonetheless, the company was judged by Nelson et al. (2014, Table S1) not to have sufficient capacity in terms of mill development. (To my knowledge, the mill was built in 2014, six years after the establishment of the plantation.) If the company running the plantation was relatively inexperienced, however, the workers were not. Many Mengen workers had long experience of work on oil palm plantations in Bialla and Ulamona in West New Britain—PNG's "oil palm province"—and quickly rose to positions as supervisors and assistant managers. And, as noted above, it was they who proposed the organization of the plantation along government lines.

These workers can be characterized in Gramscian (1971) terms as "organic intellectuals" of plantation capital. By intellectuals Gramsci (1971: 12, 16) means people engaged in "directive and organizational" tasks (also Crehan 2002: 131) and they are "organic" in that they have structural and fundamental links to a particular class

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(Crehan 2002: 134, 137; Gramsci 1971: 5–8). As Kate Crehan notes, according to Gramsci the emergence of new classes and economic realities is associated with the emergence of new kinds of intellectuals, such as the technical organizers and specialists in applied science produced by the rise of industrialization (Crehan 2002: 137). (See Chapter 8 for a more thorough discussion of intellectuals.) Similarly, the workers who became supervisors and assistant managers due to their experience were, in their organizational function, a product of plantation agriculture. As they rose in the ranks of the company and proposed ways of managing the plantation more efficiently, their "organizational function" accorded with the interests of the company. Due to this, they can be characterized as intellectuals of plantation capital rather than, say, representing plantation workers. Noteworthy in the quote above is the pride with which the young worker describes the reactions of the state officials, the local MP and the president of the LLG. According to the worker, the officials' "minds clicked", meaning that they were positively dazzled by the organization and initiative of the company and the workers. This is, then, not simply a case of a company assuming state-like powers on a frontier, or "top-down" production of state effects. On the contrary, this seems to be state formation from below.

The case of workers proposing that the plantation on which they work should be organized along the lines of a government ward resembles that of Bugis settlers in rural Kalimantan—a place where the state is equally peripheral in terms of services (Timmer 2010: 706, 711). Jaap Timmer (2010: 705, 711) shows how people in remote areas of Kalimantan have adopted state-like instruments in order to "be seen like state", that is, have their sovereignty recognized by the state. Local elites in particular have emulated the state's legal culture so that local land tenure arrangements may potentially be recognized by the state and also in order to present (and legitimate) patron-client relations (Timmer 2010: 704–5). According to Timmer (2010: 705), the adoption of state-like forms does not so much show people's willingness to become subjects of the state, as their wish to be seen like one because of the "suggestion of sovereignty" that state-like formations contain.

Similar interpretations have been made of people in rural Melanesia who adopt and subvert institutions such as churches or schools for their own moral economy (Barker 1996: 211), use institutions synoptically (Carrier and Carrier 1989: 17), or create localized and alternative forms of government through which they engage with the state and politics (Lattas 2006). These interpretations are all valuable and accurate analyses that have shed light on politics and economies in Melanesia. Yet, as Thiago Oppermann (Oppermann 2015: 201) has noted, interpretations that frame Melanesian adoptions of bureaucracy and state forms as "mimicry" or "mimesis"—while often warranted—place the state as always external to Melanesian societies. If taken too much for granted, notions of mimesis may obscure our view of cases where the state is "thoroughly enmeshed with local political organization" and where locals are not mimicking the state, but building it locally—as in Opperman's (2015: 210, 215) analysis of local enforcement of paying school fees in Bougainville.

Stef Jansen (2014) comes close to Opperman in his constructive critique of anthropology's so-called "libertarian paradigm" which has presented the state as an imposition

in a two-fold way: firstly, by unmasking modern statecraft's top-down claims to enlightened progress and, secondly, by documenting people's resilience and opposition to the state (Jansen 2014: 239). Jansen analyzes bottom-up organization and the making of state infrastructure in Bosnia during the civil war, offering the example of the so-called "staircase schools" which people organized after conventional schools were closed because of the conflict. An important goal of the staircase schools was to recreate "normal life" and its rhythms in a situation that was anything but normal, demonstrating people's pragmatic orientation towards a future time of peace. (Jansen 2014: 244–49). This was clearly a bottom-up initiative and something in which people took pride. It could be easily explained under the rubric of a libertarian narrative as an opposition to top-down policies, and as *mêtis*—described by Scott (1998: 7, 313) as bricoleur-like practical knowledge and skill—or what savvy people on the ground use to navigate their lives. In Scott's (1998) accounts, the use of *mêtis* is often at odds with the ways the state sees and operates. However, people in Bosnia initiated the staircase schools out of necessity and explicitly sought to call the state into being, or at least restore aspects of it (Jansen 2014: 252–54).

These notions are central for understanding the case of Wide Bay. The experienced workers who organized the plantation along government lines certainly empowered themselves by showing that they can influence the development of the plantation and that their suggestions are taken seriously by the management. It is no surprise that workers with prior experience of oil palm labor rose in the company hierarchy as this also happens in other institutions. For example, Adam Reed (2003: 39) notes how in the early colonial era former prisoners often became prison warders themselves, or members of the village constabulary. Laborers and convicts, people who had experienced the potentially harsh manifestations of state institutions, often became the first representatives of the state in rural or frontier areas. The ward type of organization had also emerged in the shadow of the state (Timmer 2010: 710); as the informant quoted above noted, the newly established officials worked like their government counterparts but without actually being part of the state hierarchy, while the workers who had proposed the innovation were proud of impressing the actual state officials with their initiative. The latter were probably also genuinely impressed; after all, the combined logging and plantation project was part of an attempt to increase state coverage in Pomio: a plantation organized along the lines of a ward council probably exceeded their wildest expectations.

Here, therefore, two state-making processes converged. By enacting an idealized state order—the government ward with its catechists and elected representatives—the workers were making claims of what the state *should* be like (see Timmer 2010: 707, 711). In the Wide Bay case, the term "enact" is more appropriate than "emulation" or "mimicry", which refer to the same form without the same content (Oppermann 2015: 200). On the contrary, the workers in Wide Bay knew how the state worked, or was supposed to work, and enacted that kind of order. For all intents and purposes, this *is* state order, not its copy; rather, it is building the state through what Oppermann (2015: 199, 211) calls *parastatal* groups. In PNG these comprise a large number of more or less formal groups ranging from so-called civil society and business and kin groups to formalized informal courts, village governments and bureaucratized "traditional"

authorities. They are only loosely integrated with existing bureaucracies, but not free of the state and certainly not antagonistic to it. They are sometimes instituted by the state, as in the case of village courts or school boards, and sometimes come to life without state input (Oppermann 2015: 211)—as on the Masrau plantation. They are not mimicry, but a continuation of the actually existing state and part of PNG state ideology which valorizes "the local", sometimes to the point where institutions such as village courts bear a substantial organizational burden on which the state relies, but which it supports only scantly (Oppermann 2015: 211; also Lattas 2011). At other times these parastatal groups become a corporatized form of governance, as in the case of landowner companies (Lattas 2011: 90) or on the plantations.

Uneven territory

The outcome in Masrau seems to be a neatly organized plantation. In 2011 the security guard slashed a young male worker with his bush knife during an argument, which angered the worker's friends who forced the security guard to flee from the plantation. By the time of my visit in 2012 he was still gone, with only the stoned windows of his apartment as a reminder of what had happened, yet people continued to work on the plantation as usual and without disturbances. Nonetheless, while the workers have made the plantation conform to an idealized state order, and enact it even when attacked by the security personnel, the plantation has not simply produced model subjects of the state.

In 2014, during a follow-up visit to Wide Bay, I heard that all the men from a particular Mengen village had deserted the plantation. Due to grievances over local electoral politics, people from another Mengen village had accused them of sorcery and managed to get the police to the village, largely because of their close connections with the provincial administration. People from the accused village fled into the rainforest where they hid for several weeks until the police left the area empty-handed. The male plantation workers from this village felt like they made overly easy targets for the police in the "legible environment", and all of them deserted the plantation and stayed in the village after the police had departed. This shows that legibility is a matter of degree, and that territorialization in Pomio is uneven. Plantations, as quasi-state spaces, are extremely legible environments, and places where police routinely stay on their way to the rural areas.

Villages in Wide Bay are legible environments as well. Missionaries and the colonial government encouraged people to leave their smaller and more dispersed hamlets and move to hamlets near the coast and along main trails. By the 1970s the Wide Bay Mengen had abandoned their inland settlements and moved to the coast. Yet, because of the lack of road connection, even contemporary coastal villages are hard and expensive to reach from administrative centers as travelling takes place in boats, so the police come to these villages only if their travel expenses are paid; for example, the police come to Pomio when requested to do so by logging companies operating in the area (see also Lattas 2011). Thus, while harder to reach, the villages are still "legible" to outsiders, as the example above shows. For the Wide Bay Mengen, the inland forest is

dotted with places of significance, such as abandoned settlements, and a network of trails—both used and forgotten. For someone who has not dwelt in the area, it is a confusing landscape where travel is laborious and one is likely to get lost. When rural people want to avoid the violent arm of the state, they move back to the forest.

However, female workers from the village in question stayed on the plantation because electoral politics are a nearly exclusively male sphere and sorcery accusations are made only against men. Places and infrastructures are materializations of different social relations and historical processes which have created them, and are one of the media through which these relations and processes become manifest (Anand 2011; Stasch 2013). Due to this, they are rarely neutral. For example, in the Eastern Highlands of PNG, women's access to health services is affected by the relationships of their husband's kin: if an aid post is located on the land of a group that is in conflict with a woman's husband, the woman cannot simply make use of it (West 2006: 95). Similarly, for the Mengen men from the accused village the plantation became an unsafe place because the close relations between their accusers and the state administration became manifest through the legible space of the plantation, where police can operate more easily.

6.4 Conclusions

The Ili-Wawas "agroforestry" project was set up by local politicians to overcome the marginality of the Pomio region. For them, the Pomio district was like a frontier where the presence of the state and its services at national and provincial levels was weak. To this end, logging and plantation companies were contracted to build the road and fund services in exchange for logging concessions and land for plantations. Pomio also seemed like a frontier to the companies: a place with seemingly unused resources and cheap labor. Indeed, the opportunity to lease land for up to 99 years from its customary owners and the demise of cash-cropping had re-opened the land and labor frontier in Pomio.

As the companies were given a prominent role in delivering infrastructure and services previously associated with the national state, I set out to examine the spaces of governance and territorialization produced by plantations in Pomio. Plantations have historically been tools of governance: the means of occupying, pacifying and bringing new land into development, and supplementing the work of colonial administration, as Maxine Dennis (198-: 244) has put it. Important as road infrastructure is in expanding the reach of state institutions (Ferguson 1994; Tammisto 2010), this was not the only "state effect" they had. The new plantation in itself became a state-like and governed place. In addition to the more predictable effects associated with plantation production, such as the re-organization and control of people, the plantation had become organized like a government ward with elected representatives, without actually being one. Even more striking is that this organization was not a top-down imposition, but the initiative of experienced plantation workers.

On the Masrau plantation several processes concerned with creating state-like order or even the state, converged. While the company was engaged in organizing

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the plantation "from the top down" according to the needs of production, the Mengen workers organized the it from the bottom up to resemble ideal forms of state order, or village-level government. These workers, many of whom had considerable experience of plantation labor from West New Britain and elsewhere, had risen in the company hierarchy, and certainly empowered themselves by creating organizational structures through which to interact with the management. They created state-like forms, not so much to legitimate existing inequalities, like the Bugis elites in Timmer's account, but in order to promote claims of what the state should be like (c.f. Timmer 2010: 707, 711). They did so by out-doing the state, to borrow Opperman's (2015: 215) apt expression. The workers did not just want to be seen like the state, but also created state structures where they were absent on their own account. As the workers were proud that state officials were positively surprised, it seems the workers created state-like order so that the state could adopt it and make it official (c.f. Timmer 2010: 704). They acted in anticipation of the state, so to speak.

One reason for this may be that while the companies produce certain kinds of "state effects", their interests are more limited. The state-like aspects of plantation production are, as noted, suited primarily to the needs of production. Like the German colonial administration which hoped that the ventures of the NGC would fund the administration of the colonies (McKillop and Firth 198-: 87–88), the local politicians of Pomio hoped that the companies would fund services and infrastructure that Pomio lacks. In the case of German colonialism, governance via a company proxy did not work out and the imperial administration had to take over, for better or worse. In their turn, and rather than creating a uniformly governable territory, contemporary companies have created an uneven space where some places are more governable than others. Indeed, plantations seem to benefit from this uneven development which upholds frontier conditions (Gregory 1982: 129). This is in line with James Ferguson's (2005: 378–80) observation that capital, particularly the extractive type, often creates highly selective territorialization, enclaves and "patchy" governance. While the plantation company produced organizational forms suited to its needs, the Mengen workers built up from below those forms that they wanted from the state.

Although James Scott's (1998) analysis of state-craft has been highly illuminating (and I have relied on it a great deal), it paints a too homogeneous picture of the state (e.g. Jansen 2014). State-like order, or indeed state order, is produced in a number of locations, by different kinds of institutions and from multiple directions, as several "new anthropologists" of the state have noted (e.g., Fisher and Timmer 2013; Jansen 2014; Oppermann 2015; Timmer 2010; Trouillot 2001). The Masrau case is one example of this, a site where different actors—local politicians, company representatives and workers—bolster the workings of the state for different purposes. In West Pomio, the "agroforestry" projects have caused disputes among the local population, and opponents of the projects have been coerced by the police (Lattas 2012). As noted, it seems that on the Masrau plantation, the workers enacted those aspects of the state—organization and representation—that they wanted from the state. When they felt threatened by the police, many of them fled the plantation.

Even though the plantation became a state-like place, the Ili-Wawas project has

not simply produced easily governable subjects. When Mengen workers became fed-up with the control exercised over their labor, felt oppressed or were indeed threatened by the violent arm of the state, they left the plantation and returned to the villages—or hid in the forest. While experienced workers made claims about what the state should be like by constructing a local facsimile on the plantation, others, often those at the bottom of the company hierarchy, fled from it. Different places are associated with, and materialize, different kinds of social relations and historical processes (Stasch 2013: 555). As Rupert Stasch (2013: 555) has noted, some spatial formations, or places, materialize multiple social principles and historical processes. They are thus loaded with different meanings, so to speak, and the spatial formations can be used by people to mediate between the different meanings.

As the bureaucratized religious-political Kivung movement shows, the Mengen have a long history of creating their own alternatives to the state (see Lattas 2006). As the above discussion has demonstrated, however, they also build up the state locally. It seems that in the frontier context of Pomio the state has indeed become literally localized: confined to certain locations, but not present in others. The integrated logging and plantation project created an uneven space with differently "loaded" places, some of which were more legible and governable than others. In the next chapter I will look more closely at how the different places, such as the village and the plantation, are evaluated by the Mengen and how people move between them in order to live out or shun the different relations each encourages (Stasch 2013: 565).

7. "Life in the village is free.": labor and the poetics of place

"Life in the village is free."

This was a phrase I often heard during my fieldwork. People from Wide Bay used it to compare life in the rural villages with that in the towns. In this discourse, towns were sites of money use and commodities, places where people had to pay for everything, whereas villages were the opposite, a contrast used by both the Sulka and the Mengen living in villages as well as those holding salaried positions in towns. Those with less access to money were especially aware that in town one indeed had to pay for everything, even for the most basic things such as food and accommodation. In the villages, on the other hand, inhabitants produced their own subsistence. People also used this phrase to contrast plantations and villages with each other. In reference to plantations, life being free acquired a new nuance. Plantations were not only places of wages and the use of money, but also of regimented and controlled labor. In the village, one worked as one pleased (TP: *long laik*) whereas on the plantation one had to work according to the commands and schedules of others.

In this chapter I analyze the Masrau plantation as a place of controlled or alienated labor, wages and the use of money. As a *place* it is very different from the village. Vast areas of forest have been cleared and people who had worked on the plantation described it to me as a "desert". When I visited it myself, I too was struck by the look and feel of the seemingly endless straight lines of oil palms, and the hills which had been turned into terraces. The nearby environment of the Wide Bay Mengen villages is characterized by swidden gardens, fallowing forests in different stages of growth and dense rainforest extending into the inland areas. It is dotted with small places of importance: streams, burial sites, abandoned villages and fallowing gardens. For those who inhabit it, the village landscape is a materialization of their histories and activities (see Chapters 2 & 3). The plantation, on the other hand, is made into a "legible" environment, a place more easily administered and controlled by the management (Scott 1998: 30). It too, is a materialization of histories and relations, but of very different kinds.

The new oil palm plantation differed from the village in important ways, not only in terms of landscape and spatial features, but also due to the different kinds of relationships to which it gave rise. The two places were associated with, and stood for, different ways of life with different relational and historical connections. And when people referred to the village by noting that life there is free, or that on the plantation one is a slave, they evoked these relations and histories—condensed in the place, so to speak. As Rupert Stasch (2013: 555) aptly notes, certain spatial formations can hold special historical power because of the multiple relational connections they mediate. The more relations and processes a place stands for and mediates, the more "poetically dense" it becomes (Stasch 2013: 555, 560). "Poetical" here refers to the possibilities of linguistic artistry to highlight relations of identity and difference (Stasch 2013: 560). In other words, when a sign has multiple, and even contradictory, meanings it is "poetical" and the more meanings it has, or mediates, the "denser" it is. Poetics of space, according

to Stasch (2013: 560), is the process in which multiple elements of wider cultural and historical fields are made present in a particular spatial form or place (see also Larkin 2013: 334). Plantations as ambiguous places are thus poetically dense.

As I have shown in previous chapters, places for the Mengen were materializations of different types of relations. In societies which are spatially oriented, poetically dense places can be used to mediate history and historical processes (Stasch 2013: 566). First, as noted, the places stand for a multitude of relations. Second, poetically dense places can be contrasted with other places, and this makes a frame around which "many domains of life can be organized in a single broad polarity" (Stasch 2013: 566). Contrasting the village and the plantation is thus a way to reflect on the different relations and ways of life associated with them. But people did not just contrast these places in their talk, they also *moved* between them. In the previous chapter I described how entire families from Wide Bay villages had moved to Masrau. Many young people from the village in which I principally stayed were working on the plantation. People noted how it made the village feel quiet. Then, when one of the village elders died, they all returned to take part in the funeral and mortuary ceremonies, and suddenly the village was bustling with people busy with the funerary activities.

People can use spatial heterogeneity as a way to cognize different relations and also to live them (Stasch 2013: 566). Stasch (2013: 566–67) makes this point for the Korowai of West Papua who move between older and more dispersed forest settlements and newly established villages to shun and pursue the different forces associated with those places. This, I argue, was also the case for the Mengen and their movement between villages, in which life was free, and plantations, where one worked for money under the control of others. Movement between these two places was, as Stasch (2013: 565) puts it, a way both to integrate disparate sociocultural principles into one's life and to purse different values. In the previous chapter I situated the Masrau plantation in a larger historical and political-economic framework and focused especially on the social relationships that constituted governance and state formation. In this chapter, I will look more closely at the Mengen worker's life on the plantation. My aim is to unpack the plantation's poetical density by discussing labor relations, use of money and how the plantation articulated with the village.

7.1 Life on the plantation

> We three rise to go and leave
> you to the village left behind
>
> I cry for my child—my leaf of *rin*, my leaf of *papi*
> muteness overcomes me for you in the place of Masrau
>
> I lift my legs into the boat and my thoughts return
> to my child left behind
> – lament song composed by Elizabeth Manmanweng (recorded in Wawas
> village 2.11.2011)

In this lament Elizabeth Manmanweng describes her sorrow as she leaves her young son in the custody of relatives when she and her husband go to work on the plantation. The Mengen lament songs are a genre mostly, but not exclusively, composed by women, in which they publicly express personal sorrow, or grief, longing and nostalgia (M: *lonane*). They are about sorrowful events, such as the death or absence of a relative, but also disputes and accusations againstpeople held dear, and are publicly performed during initiation rituals when very old songs, composed by people long since gone, as well as new, previously unperformed songs are presented. While a thorough analysis of the lament songs is not possible here, suffice it to say that—among other things—women turn personal experiences into shared history through them. They are documents of their time, as they are often sung generations after they were composed, thus allowing the audience to contemplate things that have moved composers in the past. Manmanweng's song aptly illustrates a common experience. As described in the previous chapter, many of the Wide Bay Mengen labored on the new plantation. Indeed, the young often wanted to go because for them it was a welcome change from the routines of village life. On the other hand, work on the plantation was hard and people longed for relatives they had left behind. It is this ambiguity of plantation life on which I focus in this chapter.

When I visited the Tzen plantation in Masrau in 2012, there was only one compound in which workers lived. (Later, when the plantation expanded, new compounds were established.) However, there were stark contrasts in how the housing of the different groups of plantation personnel was arranged. The supervisors were living in new barrack-style permanent houses with little cooking huts and shared toilets. The workers, on the other hand, lived in huts they had themselves built from bush materials and corrugated iron provided by the company. The Sulka and Mengen workers lived separated according to gender and the male and female areas were divided by cordyline plantings. People from the same villages shared houses and different language groups gathered together. According to the workers, this was not the outcome of deliberation, but rather how things had turned out as new workers kept coming and building their houses. Their water supply was a small stream nearby and they had no toilets. The shacks were partly hidden by fast growing decorative plants and banana trees they had planted, much in the same style as in the villages. In fact, the contrast between the workers' area and the regimented houses of the supervisors was striking. Whereas the latter was a picture book example of what James Scott (1998) calls a legible environment, easily grasped and controlled, the former was its opposite, with houses built on demand and not according to requirements of control. The area inhabited by workers was "weedy", to use Anna Tsing's (2005: 174) metaphor for describing seemingly messy and unruly landscapes. "Weediness" is the opposite of the allegedly disciplined order of monocultures. Unregimented social life, which creates connections across different categories, is also "weedy". (Cárdenas 2012: 228). Many of the practices by the Sulka and Mengen workers on the plantation were weedy, as I will show more in depth below.

The plants which covered the workers' housing area served both aesthetic and livelihood needs, and provide an example of how the workers creatively organized life on the plantation; yet we should not overtly romanticize its weedy aspects. The poor state of the housing was a common complaint and some noted how a "proper company" would

have started out by building houses for the workers. The lack of proper toilets coupled with dependence on nearby streams for water was a potentially dangerous combination. The houses of the Sulka and Mengen workers were simple dirt-floored huts, which in some cases the workers had hooked up to the company's electricity network. There were also differences between the living conditions of workers employed in different tasks or from different backgrounds. Some loggers lived in huts or tents in the bush while Indonesian logging contractors lived near the compounds in metal shipping crates with windows cut into them. The abysmal housing of the Indonesian workers reflects their difficult position: migrant workers totally dependent on the company in a foreign country. Workers from Pomio at least had the possibility to vote with their feet and leave—something which they often did.

The poor condition of housing in general and its uneven quality between the different groups of workers is not unique to the oil palm plantation in Masrau. These are common features of plantation agriculture. In the US, for example, immigrant workers on tobacco farms live in harsh conditions in labor camps, and agricultural workers are the worst housed group in the US (Benson 2008: 601; 2010: 57). Peter Benson (2008: 603; 2010: 57) describes how tobacco growers justify this situation by portraying the immigrant workers as less deserving, adding that the quality of housing is better "than in Mexico", for example. Or they shift the blame for trashed houses onto the workers themselves, ignoring the conditions in which this trashing occurs—such as too many people using the same facilities. For the immigrant workers the conditions of the camp are not only uncomfortable, but also demeaning. Thus the camp is a "dispossessed space" (Benson 2008: 601, 607). This resonates with the plantation in Masrau and more widely with plantations in general, which are often "zones of poverty" (Borras, McMichael, and Scoones 2010: 588; see also Taussig 1980: 89). Interestingly, the migrant laborers on tobacco farms used the term "campo", which literally means "work camp", to refer to low wages and other poor conditions of farm labor, remarking, for example, that "this paychek is *campo*" (Benson 2008: 590). This is an example of the "poetic density" of the work camp, in as much "*el campo*" is used to refer to—and make sense of—a broad spectrum of social relations and processes, such as poor working conditions and hierarchical labor relations (Stasch 2013: 555, 560).

According to Peter Benson (2008: 590), the unequal relations of farm labor amount to structural violence in that they represent the systemic constitution of inequality and suffering. The cause and maintenance of unequal labor relations is a result of, and perpetuated by, a convergence of large-scale political-economic forces and intimate interpersonal relations (Benson 2008: 594, 596, 620). Tobacco growers in the US are at the mercy of big agribusiness companies with flexible networks for buying tobacco. One way for growers to compete in the international commodity markets is to cut the costs of wages and worker housing, which systemic government neglect of labor law enforcement allows. (Benson 2008: 594; 2010: 57; 2012: 135, 173). Equally crucial are the stereotypes of immigrants that contribute to their being perceived as less deserving. The negative perceptions of workers by growers and their justifications for the inequality do not result from a lack of engagement between the workers and growers. Rather, how people see others also legitimizes their treatment (Benson 2008: 596, 620), and how the workers are seen is based on stereotypes of immigrants as coming

from "dirty and poor" places and hence being used to harsh conditions, emphasized by the spatial composition of the camps which also precludes workers having family homes (Benson 2008: 601). Benson (2008: 620) notes how co-presence and face-to-face interaction do not in themselves reduce alterity, but—through mechanisms such as stereotyping—perpetuate it (see also Bashkow 2006; Stasch 2009).

The situation in Masrau was similarly produced. During my visit to the plantation, the plantation manager told me that the houses inhabited by the supervisors are intended for the workers and new houses for the supervisors were being built elsewhere. According to him, the workers and supervisors should live separately in order "to maintain a standard". The manager's house was also set apart, built on a hill overlooking the nursery and worker compounds. These spatial divisions maintain and reflect the hierarchies of plantation work and contribute to how different groups of workers are perceived. The plantation manager also noted that with the plantation the company was trying to bring development to New Britain and to give people the chance to earn cash income, the commonly voiced aim of these projects. Yet these statements also implicitly present the workers as poor, indeed primitive, people, who should be grateful for the opportunity to be able to earn money on the plantation—a variation of the "better than Mexico" theme.

Regimented work

> Work there [on the plantation] is good. They don't beat us.—woman in her mid-20s, 2011-07-13
>
> TP: *Wok long hap i gutpela. (. . .) Ol i no save paitim mipela.*

This is how a young Mengen woman described work on the plantation to me. In my interviews with plantation workers—mostly young people from the villages in which I conducted fieldwork—I usually asked about plantation work. In structured interviews in particular, workers responded in characteristically reticent Mengen fashion by saying that it was "only good" (TP: *gut tasol*). After the actual interviews, when conversation was more relaxed, they elaborated and gave a more detailed picture. Most of my interviewees and friends noted that pay was often an issue. The Tzen plantation had, according to an experienced oil palm worker, implemented minimum wages (PGK 2.29/h), unlike other oil palm companies. Those workers who were employed at the nursery and did the planting were paid according to completed tasks and thus the fortnightly wages fluctuated. Workers were not paid for days on which they did not work, such as when sick. Others noted that they did not understand subtractions from wages and this caused arguments with supervisors. The young woman quoted above noted that often the Mengen workers did not complain, as direct arguments were avoided among the Mengen.

The comment above is striking: work on the plantation is good, because workers are not beaten. During the interview I was so surprised by this comment that I failed to ask what the young worker meant. People often noted that in the colonial times patrol officers (TP: *kiap*) and plantation supervisors would beat villagers or workers,

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for example if the village was not properly cleaned when the officer arrived or when workers failed to comply to the rules of the plantation. Indeed, a man in his 70s told how the class and racial segregation on plantations was humiliating: workers were not allowed to talk to the managers family, were allowed to the plantation store only one at the time and had to point out items they wished to purchase and so on. The woman's comment is probably a contrast to the the past when workers were outrightly abused on plantations. It however also raises questions about domestic violence. Some Wide Bay Mengen men perpetrated gendered violence, which was to a degree regarded as a matter between the spouses. Men could, and were, however assigned to pay compensations to their victims in village meetings and village courts. In some cases, women had been killed by men in acts of domestic violence. In one case it had been an outright murder, and the murderer had fled the village, while another man had served a jail sentence for manslaughter. The Catholic church and its local representatives, NGOs and the conservation association also condemned domestic violence. The worker quoted above was not married and there was no domestic violence in ther family.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the workers with whom I spoke drew attention to the fact that on the plantation one works not as one pleases, but under the command of others. This is one of the defining features of a plantation, characterized by a rigid division of labor and class-distinction between workers and managers, among other things (Dennis 198-: 219, 237; see also Benson 2008: 600; Bernstein and Pitt 1974: 514). Work on the plantation in Masrau, like elsewhere, was indeed regimented and highly divided. Workers were employed in different sections with their own tasks, all of which were necessary for the proper functioning of the plantation. Skilled workers were needed as mechanics, carpenters and electricians, and maintained and built plantation equipment and buildings. Some workers were employed at the saw-mill making lumber. As the plantation was new, clearing the forest was a major task and loggers were in high demand. Many of the specialized tasks, such as loggers and carpenters for building, were performed by workers employed by contractors. These jobs in particular were open to young men with vocational education or skills acquired through previous work experience.

Some men from the Wide Bay Mengen villages had become skilled in using heavy chainsaws and cross-cutting large logs during the logging operations of the 1990s. Others had also learned to "rip" planks from logs with a chainsaw to provide villagers with building materials. These men were in high demand among the contractors as loggers. Not only were they proficient with chainsaws, but due to their background as swidden cultivators, they were also skilled in felling large trees—a hard and potentially very dangerous task. A friend of mine who worked as a logger on the plantation told me that many loggers left the work because they were afraid. Rural men, on other hand, did not work in a rush; they studied the trees before felling them and knew how to make them fall in the right direction. He noted how his body (TP: *skin*) knew the trees—referring to the embodied knowledge of how to behave when felling trees. He took pride in his skill and the fact that he worked carefully, avoiding unnecessary accidents and performing work that was heavy and dangerous. Yet, like other Mengen men who had worked as loggers, he was dissatisfied with the low pay (PGK 2.29/h) and because they were not compensated for injuries:

The contractor does not pay for our blood [if we are hurt].

TP: *Desla kontrak i no save baim blut bilong mipela.*—man, 39 years, 2011-10-27

The bulk of the workers were employed to do the unskilled labor at the nursery and in the field, a group which included most of the workers from the Wide Bay villages. The work was also gendered in as much as while both men and women were employed as unskilled labor, no women were employed as skilled workers—at least from the villages in which I conducted research—although one served as a supervisor at one point. Work at the nursery and "in-field" was the main type of labor on the plantation—the dull and repetitive tasks needed to plant and maintain the crops. At the nursery this consisted of planting seedlings—filling plastic bags with soil, planting seedlings into the bags and lifting the bags of oil palms ready for placing on tractors. In the field slashers cut the grass and weeds around the palms with long knives. During my visit I was able to follow a planting section through their routines: some stayed at the nursery, while those working "in-field" dug holes, unloaded and aligned the seedlings, fertilized holes or planted the palms.

Each worker performed only one particular task and was paid according to how many palms they planted or holes they dug. During the day on which I carried out observation, the crew of about twenty planters "in-field" had been given the task to plant 700 palms; fewer than 600 was unacceptable. Needless to say, the work was extremely hard. The seedlings in their plastic bags were heavy and the palm stems have sharp needles. After rain the bulldozed soil turns into a field of mud where walking, let alone digging, is demanding and there is no shade whatsoever. Most of the workers went barefoot as rubber boots had to be bought, and only a few had gloves. The sprayers, who spray pesticides onto the grown palms, likewise complained they had no protective gear of any kind. A middle-aged Mengen man working as a planter said that the work is extremely hard, but had to be done to raise school fees, without which there would be no educated people (TP: *saveman*).

The regimentation of work was a striking feature. The workers were divided into sections each with its particular tasks; the work day started at five o'clock with the ringing of a bell which called the workers to the assembly area where they stood in lines according to their section, with their supervisors standing in front of them. After the plantation catechist had read a brief prayer, the plantation manager allocated tasks to the assistant managers and supervisors, who then instructed the workers in their sections. This all bears an obvious resemblance to military camps and other "total institutions". Thus, as Michael Dove (2012: 23) notes, plantations are not just agronomic sites of exploitation, but epistemological and political projects producing social relations of certain kinds. Dove likens the estates to Foucauldian panopticons, where power is not only asserted through the surveillance of everyday life, but also through more discreet and seemingly apolitical structuring of these lives through the "conduct of conduct" (Dove 2012: 30; see also Chapter 6).

The workers were obviously very aware of this, and people often left the plantation when they had had enough—often without any forewarning. As in Dove's (2012: 222)

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description of rubber plantations in Borneo, where Dayak workers are often regarded by the managers as hard-headed and lazy, so too the manager at Masrau told me that many of the workers "are not yet accustomed to work". In the sense of being able and willing to do physical work this is, of course, not true at all. The inhabitants of Wide Bay, as well as other rural areas of PNG, were accustomed to extremely hard work in their swidden gardens and performed physical labor on the plantations that was exhausting. In fact, because they were experienced in felling large trees in their gardens, the Mengen were valued as loggers, underpaid yet dangerous work. Rather than being about what the workers were or were not accustomed to, the question was about political relations on the plantation; this is obfuscated by statements such as people "do not know how to work" and spurious explanations that their unwillingness to submit themselves to certain relations is because they lack skill—as Dove (2012: 195, 225) notes. The portraying of workers in this light was, as noted above, a way in which class distinctions on the plantation were maintained.

The workers with whom I spoke seemed all to prefer the "taskscape" of the village, to borrow Tim Ingold's (2000: 325) expression, where the rhythm of work comes from the task at hand rather than being determined by abstract time, as on the plantation. Yet, despite the extremely hard work on the plantation, it seemed to me that for young people especially, work there also provided a welcome change to the village routines. The logger mentioned above said that his brother, an experienced plantation worker, told him to leave village work and come to the plantation to "relax" (TP: *malolo*) for a while. Another young man explained that he took on plantation work so that "the mouths of the elders could get some rest", referring to the control and discipline of the elders. A young woman described how she and other young villagers had decided to go to the plantation:

> We were [in the village], and *kastom* was over, so we thought about going. Us women said: "Oh, we're tired of gardening work, let's go to Masrau to make us some money." –woman in her mid-20s, 2011-07-13

> TP: *Mipela i stap, wok kastom i pinis, mipela tingting long go. Mipela ol meri i tok: "Ai, mipela i les long wok gaden, yumi go wokim mani bilong yumi long Masrau."*

Despite the hardships of plantation life, wage labor was for young people a way to ascertain their independence, see different places and live among their peers in a different setting than the village. Before going to the plantation, the young women had asked male village elders for permission. The men granted it, but however in strong terms urged the women not to become pregnant on the plantation. In one case, a young woman did not want to return to her home village after becoming pregnant on the plantation—despite her relatives urging her to return and assuring her she would not be ostracized.[22] While young women initially sought the approval of their parents and

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[22]Having children in marriage was the norm, but it was not uncommon for women to be single parents. These women or their childrenwere not ostracized and took fully part in the social life of their community.

village elders, ultimately the decision to go to the plantation was negotiated within the respective families, and many unmarried women worked or had been working on the plantation, they seemed to be able to control their work. Indeed, in many families the remittances by young people working on the plantation were highly valued.

7.2 *Wok mani*—wage labor

When discussing my plans to visit the plantation with my adoptive brother—a highly educated young man—I mentioned that I was interested to know why people go to the plantations. He looked at me as if I was rather thick and replied: "What do you think? Money of course." Phrasing my answer badly, I said that so much was obvious, but money for what?—thinking about the wide range of needs from school fees to tools as well as the creative uses of money in Melanesian societies (see Robbins and Akin 1999). Interpreting my answer in a way I did not intend, my brother angrily replied: "Do you think we do not need money?" In my opinion, his reply clearly illustrates two important points. First, people take on wage work because they need money. This is a deceptively simple statement, for as the discussion on labor mobilization shows (see Chapter 6.1), the need for money is not an endogenous property of it, but often has to be created; consequently, people need money for a variety of reasons. Secondly, it shows that the Mengen were painfully aware that, as rural cultivators who grew their own food, they were often thought to live outside the money economy—thus needing less money. This is an important and complicated point.

As growers of their own food the rural Mengen were indeed less dependent on money and more secured against, say, rises in food prices than the urban poor. In a classic Marxist sense the Mengen were not free labor, or proletarians, as they owned their land and also had something else to sell besides their labor time. The Wide Bay Mengen can be better thought of as peasants. I use here Michael Watts' (2009: 524) definition of peasants as people distinguished by their direct access to land as a means of production, their predominant use of family labor, their partial engagement with markets and their subordinate position in larger political economies (see also Meillassoux 1973: 81; Meggit 1971: 208–9; Wolf 1966: 18, 25). More precisely, the rural Mengen with whom I worked were food-producing peasants who gained monetary income from cash-cropping of copra and cacao as well as occasional compensations from logging (see Chapters 4 & 5), but were not solely dependent on money for their livelihood (Bernstein 1979: 429). This gave them a degree of autonomy and security. With reduced possibilities of selling their produce, however (Allen 2009: 296; Allen, Bourke, and McGregor 2009: 477, 486), the importance of wage labor as a source of income had increased, as described in the previous chapter.

That the Mengen needed money was obvious. People from the rural areas of New Britain have been involved in wage labor and commodity relations for about 150 years. During colonialism, commodity and wage labor relations did not just develop by themselves, but had to be imposed through measures such as the introduction of taxes payable only in government money in order to transform rural peoples into workers and small-scale commodity producers. Likewise, some European-made commodities, such

as steel tools, were quickly incorporated into non-capitalist modes of production, while others were quite blatantly advertised and imposed in order to tie the independent New Guineans more tightly into the market economy—with "tobacco schools" providing a case in point (Firth 1972: 365). During the time of my fieldwork, money was especially needed for school fees, which were very high at the high school level. In addition, basic items such as tools needed in swidden horticulture, clothing, medicine, household utensils, building material and so on all required money, along with boats, outboard motors and gasoline required for transportation in an area where roads were few and unconnected. Money and commodities were a part of everyday life and needed for the physical reproduction of people.

In my interviews and discussions with villagers who had been or were working on the plantation, I asked if they had certain explicit needs for money which prompted them to take on wage labor. Young people in particular noted that they had "aims" (using the English expression). The youths of Tagul, the "pioneers of Masrau", told me that they wanted to revive a village band formed by their parents and buy instruments. Along with the general needs and school fees mentioned above, one of the most common answers was corrugated iron (TP: *kapa*) used for roofs. In the Wide Bay villages, a household had at least a "cooking house", which was home to the married couple and female children. These were often thatched because that offers better ventilation, although it has to be replaced every seven to ten years. In addition many families had separate "sleeping houses" which were also used to store belongings and were invariably built with roofing iron. In the past, unmarried women lived with their parents in the cooking house, and young boys in the men's house. Nowadays young people usually build their own sleeping houses which they share with same-sex siblings. In several Wide Bay Mengen villages, some young men also lived in the men's houses.

Roofing iron might sound trivial, but it highlights an important issue. The young who went to the plantation were ultimately oriented towards the village. Their aim was not to become full-time laborers and leave farming, but to return to their village and continue life there. This contradicts Tania Li's (2011: 295) provocative notion that there is no reason to assume that people would prefer not to make a transition from subsistence agriculture to wage labor—a view which suggests that rather than being an attachment to an "ancestral way of life", subsistence farming for many is the only way of survival because transition to wage labor is not possible. However, while Li is probably right in pointing out that there is no reason to categorically assume that all subsistence farmers want to remain in that role, most of plantation workers with whom I talked definitely wanted to return to the village and build houses for themselves there.

The wages at the plantation were not high. The minimum wage was PGK 2.29/h and, as noted above, most unskilled laborers were paid according to the tasks performed.[23] The fortnightly wages paid to planters and nursery workers were usually somewhere between PGK 150–200—less if the worker missed workdays. Workers occasionally complained about the low pay:

Sometimes we complain. ... They say: "Now, I am not able to change the

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[23]In 2012 one (1) Papua New Guinea Kina (PGK) was about 0.5 US Dollars (USD) and 0.4 Euro (EUR).

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wages, because the company is new ... and has not much money." That's what they tell us, you just keep working. –man in his 30s 2011-07-17

TP: *Ol i tok: "Nau, mi no inap senisim ol pe bikos kampani i stat nupela ... na nogat planti mani yet." Olsem ol i tokim mipela, yupela wok tasol.*

The plantation at Masrau was not only a site of monetary income, but also one where money could be spent. The plantation had at least one store where workers and their families could buy basic commodities such as rice, tinned food and other household items. A new supermarket operated by a Chinese trader at the nearby "growth-center" at Tol offered a wide variety of items. If workers bought their food from the store, however, their wages were quickly spent so for many the plantation was a site of *not* using money. One widely practiced way to do this was by growing their food on the plantation in garden plots: sweet potato, a fast growing staple, but also taro and yam as well as other foods also grown in the villages. The garden plots were dug in the cleared areas and gardening at the plantation was faster, because no large trees needed to be felled or fences built; as the forests were clear-felled, wild pigs moved away into forests that were not logged. Some workers also planted their food crops amidst the oil palms where they grew well as long as the oil palms were young, but when the palms started to carry fruit the soil became too depleted of nutrients for food plants to flourish. During the early years of the plantation growing food was easier, as the cleared areas were nearer and the oil palms not yet planted or only seedlings. People noted that during that time food grew fast and plentifully—it was after all planted on land cleared of old-growth forests—to the extent that food from the plantation was occasionally sent back to the villages, often as contributions for feasts. But when the oil palms started to mature, the situation was reversed and relatives began sending food baskets to the workers on boats going to the plantation. Growing food was important for many workers. Garden food was often preferred to that which was store bought as it was considered "strong" and more nourishing (see also Bashkow 2006). Likewise, with the low wages, it allowed the rural Sulka and Mengen workers, who were skilled gardeners, to save some of their income.

Planting food amidst the oil palms or cultivating gardens on recently cleared areas was one of the weedy ways in which the workers coped on the plantation, but it also had its downside. As noted by Bernstein (1979: 436), among others, the value of commodities produced by peasants—by gardening in this case—is often lessened through their use-value production, in that their reproduction is "subsidized" by it. I argue that this applies to the Sulka and Mengen wage workers, as the value of their labor commodity was lessened precisely by this subsidy. Or to put it in more conventional terms, the workers could—and were partly willing to—work at low wages with the help of swidden horticulture at home or on the plantation. In fact, the availability of cheap manual labor often enabled investment in estate plantations in the first place, something achieved by maintaining existing social relations and non-capitalist modes of production (Bernstein and Pitt 1974: 519; Meillassoux 1973: 89). As Bernstein and Pitt (1974: 515) have noted, plantations often co-exist with a substantial peasant sector. Thus, under Australian colonial rule, maintaining "traditional society" and land rights through "protective" laws was also in the interests of the colonizers in order to

maintain the labor supply (Fitzpatrick 1980: 83), particularly after commodities had become necessities. While this is not meant to suggest that the Sulka and Mengen were acting against their own interests, it does illustrate the labor dynamics of contemporary plantations—with the obvious implication that, in this regard, plantations have changed little over time.

7.3 Converting labor into work

I first met many of the workers whom I have cited in this chapter after I had been conducting my fieldwork in Wide Bay for a few months. The absence of people in many Wide Bay villages was striking (see Chapter 6) and in Toimtop where I mostly stayed, it was mostly the young who had left for the plantation. Then the last founding member of the village died of old age, and they all returned to her funeral. Suddenly the village was busy with people engaged in the tasks of mortuary ceremonies: digging the grave, collecting firewood for earth ovens, carrying pigs, bringing in food and staying with the family in mourning. It was during this time that I conducted my first interviews with those working on the plantation and heard about their life there in informal discussions. The young people had not come home empty-handed; they brought with them bales of rice to be served during the ceremonies as well as money. I was told that earlier, when food grew well at the plantation, they had also brought garden food to be distributed during the funeral of a fellow villager.

During these discussions I learned about the "aims" of the plantation workers and that very few had actually attained them. This was not only because life on the plantation required money, but also because workers often gave substantial amounts of their wages back to the village as various contributions (TP: *kontribusen*) to local needs: informal requests by relatives to help pay their children's school fees or formal collections to contribute to ceremonial exchanges, church activities and the like. Some had even gone to work on the plantations in order to accumulate money for their relatives' *kastom*, usually bridewealth gifts. A good friend of mine told me that his father had asked him to go to the plantation to help the family gather money for his cross-cousin (M: *ruvung*), who was to be ordained as a priest. The clan mates of the future priest and his cross-cousins had formed a "family group" (remarkably similar to the *rglie* group, see Chapter 2.3) to finance his studies, a permanent house and the expenses of his ordination feast. Each household involved had agreed to come up with at least PGK 1,000.

My friend had contributed PGK 600 in cash along with various transportation costs. Another young woman told me she she had contributed PGK 450 to another seminarian, PGK 50 for a mortuary feast and PGK 200 for the school fees of relatives. The contributions were high, compared to the relatively low wages earned on the plantation (see previous section). As noted, requests for money, both formal and informal, were common. During a village meeting in which the condition of the village church was discussed, a village elder whose two children worked in Masrau proposed that maybe a new round of contributions could be asked of the workers. In my conversations and interviews I asked the workers if they resented paying the contributions or not reaching

their "aims". Nobody would admit to it and mostly I was told that this was just basic reciprocity; they had been helped by relatives when they attended school and now it was time to help out in return. The workers seemed to share their money in much the same way as they would share things such as food, betel nut or tobacco with their fellows. I use here Thomas Widlok's (2013: 14–17) definition of sharing—a complex social practice performed out of a feeling of obligation and often initiated by the receiver and without an expectation of return on part of the giver (see also Chapter 9).

Socially reproductive rituals, dubbed *kastom* in Tok Pisin, also required money. Money and other store-bought commodities had become an integral part of the gift exchanges without which no Mengen ceremony would be complete. Most explicitly this was the case in bridewealth exchanges where cash money was part of the gift. The bridewealth consisted of (in order of the importance given to the items) shell money, pigs, garden produce, money, store-bought loincloths as well as foods (rice and tinned meat). The amounts of cash given could be thousands of Kina, certainly up to PGK 5,000. (The highest bridewealth exchange that I heard of was PGK 9,000 among the Sulka—considered excessively high by many.) In addition to the other commodities which are given, money is sometimes used to buy pigs and even shell money. Only domestic pigs, raised by the giver or bought, could be given as gifts. Other exchanges, such as those held during initiations or mortuary feasts, do not feature large amounts of cash, which is given as minor gifts to individuals (ranging from PGK 5–100 per person), but money is also required for rice, tinned meat and pigs, so in total the money involved in socially reproductive rituals can amount to considerable sums.

As the Mengen exchanged substantial quantities of commodities as gifts, it is tempting to say that they have successfully "domesticated" them, or that the ceremonial exchanges converted commodities into socially reproductive gifts. This indeed is part of the story. The idiom of hard work (M: *klingnan ti main*) was used to describe socially productive work, from gardening and tending plants to nurture given to relatives (see Chapter 2), and it is this that also makes things valuable: giving wild pigs in ceremonies, because they can be "simply" hunted in the bush, would incur great shame as they are not valuable because no hard work is invested in them. Pigs bought from elsewhere, or even from fellow villagers, however, were a common feature in Mengen rituals, because, as a young man explained to me, acquiring money was hard work. It was, however, not the physical properties that makes something "hard work", but *how* the results of work are distributed and to what ends (Robbins and Akin 1999: 15, 23, 34; also Fajans 1997: 70). If and when money was shared and given as gifts to contribute to the well-being of others, it was nurturing and that made it "hard work". Or, to put it simply, giving money was seen as a socially positive act, as James and Achsah Carrier (1989: 190) noted about the remittances that workers from Manus island send back home. As a young man, who had worked for several years on the plantation, once said to me:

> I need money to build a house. For bridewealth. And to take care of my family. –man in his 30s, 2011-07-17

> TP: *Mi nidim mani bilong wokim haus. Baim meri. Na lukautim femili.*

The workers on the plantation used money to take care of their relatives and

finance village projects and ceremonies. In short, they reproduced social relations in the village. This does not mean that things do not change. Plantations have, since their establishment in the late 19th century, been places of contact between Melanesians and Europeans and between people from different parts of Melanesia (Keesing 1986; Michel Panoff 1969a) and thus have a substantial time depth as well as regional scope. Through this network, new commodities in the form of things, stories, spells and ideas spread throughout Melanesian societies (Keesing 1986: 163, 169). The Mengen, for example, keenly observed other people's customs and brought things of interest back to the village—particularly new crops, dances and spells (M. Panoff 1969a). Christianity too spread via men who had worked on plantations (Keesing 1986: 165). For example, the founder of the village in which I later conducted my fieldwork was baptized on a plantation. His daughter, a woman in her sixties, who often took time to explain various things to me, recounted how her father brought a new bean variety, and Christianity, to the village:

> My father brought it with him and people say that he got it and planted it because he was fond of it. But when he planted it, nobody would eat it. And [the beans] would rot, because nobody used to eat them. You know, because its skin is like that of a snake called "lazy man" and everybody was afraid of it. My father took it when he was working at the plantation at Karlai. And the first missionaries came and encountered him there and baptized him. And he came to the village and brought the snake bean with him.—2011-12-28

> *Papa bilong mi i bin kisim i kam na ol i stori olsem em i kisim na kam planim, bikos em i laikim. Tasol taim em i planim, nogat man i save kaikai. Na save go stink nating, bikos em wan i save kaikai. Tingim, bikos skin bilong en olsem wanpela kain snek ya. Ol i save kolim "les man" na ol i save poretim gen. Papa bilong mi i bin kisim taim em i wok long plenteson long Karlai. Na ol first missionaries i kam, bungim em long hap na baptais long hap na taim em i kam logn ples em i karim desla snake bean i kam.*

Likewise, the medium of plantations also spread ideas of resistance to colonialism—from the so called "cargo movements" to the news of the strike in Rabaul in 1929 (Gammage 1975; Keesing 1986: 166). The Melanesian "plantation cultures", as Keesing (1986: 168) calls them, have been profoundly creative spaces, because islanders from different parts of Melanesia as well as Europeans often had to invent appropriate social practices extemporarily in the face of questions of life (and death!) on the plantations. The plantation in Masrau was, similarly, a generative space, where people from different parts of Pomio, PNG and other countries met and established new relationships. Young people from nearby Wide Bay villages, for example, often paired up on the plantation in marriages that, while they followed exogamic prescriptions, omitted—at least initially— many steps of the customary exchanges between the spouses' clan groups. Young workers also married people from other parts of PNG, either following their spouses or bringing them back to their villages. This too, was the reproduction of a well established convention: the Wide Bay Mengen have been marrying into other linguistic groups for a long time and often these contacts have occurred on plantations.

The kin relations established on the plantations were not just confined to marriages. A friend of mine who worked as a logger on the Masrau plantation said that he had adopted an older man from the Highlands as his father. The old man had come to work on the plantation, but could not keep up and was alone. My friend told me how sorry he felt for him, and that he had proposed that he come and live with the loggers in their forest camp and guard the loggers' hut during the day in exchange for a small allowance paid by the logger. The old man agreed and over the course of time as the relationship deepened, the logger started calling the old man his father, as did the logger's sisters. This initially surprised their fellow villagers who commented that the man was from another part of PNG and not really their father; but the sisters noted that the old man always fed them and never refused any of their requests and the villagers came to agree that he was indeed a real father. Finally the biological father of the logger started to call the Highlands man his brother. This case of adoption was certainly the most unusual one encountered, but demonstrates both how care and nurture are the basis of Mengen conceptions of kinship (see Chapter 2) and also the generative nature of the plantation spaces.

In the latter sense, the new oil palm plantations are also reproducing a fairly established social order of contact. In the past, "Melanesian plantation culture" was very much a male concern—for the obvious reason that it was mainly young men who worked on them (Keesing 1986: 166). Subordinated and exploited on the plantations and developing their relations from a subaltern position, the young men also had a common "class interest" in sharing knowledge and ideas with each other because of the generally subordinate position of young men in Melanesian societies (Keesing 1986: 165). The knowledge and commodities acquired on plantations brought new power to the young men. There was an important difference between the old plantations of the colonial era and the oil palm plantation in Masrau, however; in the Mengen case substantial numbers of women had taken on migrant wage labor for similar reasons as men: out of economic necessity, to finance the projects of their kin and so forth. Married women with children had also started to take on periods of plantation work and traveled to the plantation in groups. As noted in the last chapter, sometimes women were freer to move to the plantation because men felt persecuted by the police who could operate more easily on the legible space of the plantation (see Chapter 6). An older woman remarked to me that they go to work to pay for school fees and family needs and to make sure that the men do not blow the money away. The income from wage labor was then controlled by the earner, and for married women wage labor was a way to ensure that the monetary needs of the family and children were met.

Nowdays both single and married women from Wide Bay villages have become procurers and holders of the money needed for both social and physical reproduction of the village. In the Wide Bay villages in which I worked, women had for a long time earned money through the making of copra and small-scale marketing. Wage labor on a substantial scale, on the other hand, was a fairly recent phenomenon—greatly increased by the new plantation in Masrau.

7.4 Conclusions

The rural Mengen went to the plantation for varying periods of time, but most of them remained oriented towards the village. People explicitly said they want to return; they valued village life more than plantation life and their plans to use their wages usually involved a project in the village. Likewise, much of the money was channeled back to the village; alienated wage labor was, so to speak, "converted" into "hard"—that is, socially productive—work. People moved between the village and the plantation to live out different relationships, as did the Korowai of West Papua, for whom living in close proximity in the village is associated with communal values, while the dispersed life in the forest is associated with the value of autonomy (Stasch 2013: 557). Much in the same way young people moved to the plantation to escape the routines of village life, see new places and pursue their aims. But, more importantly, people often went to the plantation and to work in other salaried positions in order to finance life in the village. The village and the plantation then, as places of different kinds of relations, articulate with each other.

As research on peasant economies has shown, plantations greatly benefit from the subsidies of the surrounding peasant sector, in as much peasants whose livelihood is secured from subsistence agriculture can work for low wages (Bernstein 1979: 436; Bernstein and Pitt 1974: 515; Dennis 198-: 232 Fitzpatrick (1980), 83; Meillassoux 1973: 89; White and Dasgupta 2010: 599). Important as this notion is in capturing many real dynamics between industrial agriculture and the surrounding countryside, it often reduces the role of the village to a passive source of subsidies and labor, stripped of its own dynamics, as James and Achsah Carrier (1989: 9–10, 228–29) aptly note in their study of migrant labor in Ponam, on Manus Island. Remittances sent back home by inhabitants of Ponam have contributed in various ways to the social life and dynamics of Ponam and the Ponamese division of labor in which migrant workers' channeling money back to Ponam has been a central adaptation to colonialism (Carrier and Carrier 1989: 228–29).

The comfortable life in Ponam also encouraged migrant workers to send money back there and maintain good relations with their home village (Carrier and Carrier 1989: 183–84). This is a central aspect of the dynamic between "village and town"; James Ferguson (1999: 132, 140, 164) shows, for example, that for the urban workers of the Zambian mining belt one retirement strategy was to move back home to the rural areas, but that this was only successful if they had maintained good relations with their rural kin. The village orientation of the Wide Bay Mengen workers was also exemplified by their attitude to regimented labor and the controlled life at the plantation. While the young in particular went to the plantation not only to make money, but also to experience something new, the workers clearly preferred the freedom of their own work pace in the village.

As I have attempted to show in this chapter, the relationship between the new oil palm plantation and the Wide Bay Mengen villages reflects both these dynamics. On the one hand, the plantation gains important "subsidies" from the villages in terms of cheap labor. People in the villages send food to their kin on the plantation and the workers make use of their skill as gardeners to get by on the low wages. On the other

hand, the plantation is a site where people make the money required for the social and physical reproduction of life in the village. The Mengen, while independent in terms of subsistence, do not live outside the money economy; money became a necessity a long time ago. Here it is important to remember Henri Bernstein's notion that more important than trying to establish the degree of commodity production in relation to subsistence activities, is whether commodity production and money have become social *necessities* (Bernstein 1979: 426; also Foster 1995: 26). This means that even if the Mengen villagers needed relatively less money than the urban proletariat, for example, they still need it and have to get it somewhere. In addition to cash-cropping, working for varying periods of times on plantations has been a part of the Mengen itinerary for a long time since the end of the 19th century (M. Panoff 1969a), thereby reproducing the labor dynamics of the export-agriculture plantations of the colonial era (see Chapter 6).

The circulation of things between the village and the plantation exemplifies the relationship between the two places from the point of view of the workers and villagers. The villagers send garden food by the basket to the plantation and occasionally also go there to sell betel nut and fruits. This village produce is "converted" into money and wages, much of which the workers give to their relatives in the village. When shared and given in this way, it is "converted" again into "hard work", which makes relatives. In the early years of the oil palm plantation, when the workers' food plants grew well, garden food was also sent to the village—especially as contributions to socially reproductive rituals and ceremonies. The plantation then, produced necessities for the reproduction of the village as much as the village subsidized the plantation. Nevertheless, my drawing attention to how the Mengen workers used the money to reproduce valued relations is not intended to downplay the fact that plantation work is done out of necessity and that life and work on the plantation are hard and underpaid.

Despite this, young people went to the plantation, not only out of economic necessity, but to "relax", as one Mengen worker expressed it, to escape the routines of village life or when feeling oppressed by the demands of the elders. Even though people as a rule channeled their income to their relatives, the plantation was also a place to act out one's individualism through consumption, much in the same way as people in Porgera regard the Porgera Highway a "place of money" as described by Jerry Jacka (2015: 203–8). Furthermore, people who have severed ties with their kin or fear for their safety due to sorcery accusations might leave the villages for good and go to faraway plantations. Like the Porgera Highway (Jacka 2015: 208), the plantation was a profoundly ambiguous space for the Mengen.

I began the chapter by referring to Stasch's notion of the poetics of space, namely, how certain spatial formations mediate historical and social processes because of the multiplicity of relations "condensed" in them (Stasch 2013: 555). In this chapter I have sought to unpack the "poetical" qualities of the plantation and show how the plantation as a place was in direct and complex relations with the surrounding villages. The plantation was seen by many rural people who still retained their own land for subsistence agriculture as a necessary site for getting those things that could not be procured in the village. The plantation then was an ambivalent place in which much needed money could be made, but where life was decidedly less free than in the village.

Movement between these two distinct places was important, and allowed people to combine disparate sociocultural principles in their lives (Stasch 2013: 565). Here Stasch points to the importance of the *difference* between these places in order to make sense of, and live out, different kinds of relations.

This, I think, explains the feeling of many of the Mengen with whom I spoke, who saw the plantation as necessary and in some ways as useful—in its place, but only as long as it stayed in its place, and did not colonize the village.

Photo 19: Terraced hills of the oil palm plantation

Photo 20: Young women working as "slashers" cutting grass around the oil palms

Photo 21: Houses of the supervisors

Photo 22: Oil palm workers in their hut

Photo 23: Workers' huts amidst food and fruit plants

Photo 24: Oil palm nursery

Photo 25: Rainforest cleared for oil palm

Photo 26: Plantation buildings

Photo 27: Section of planters transporting palm seedlings from the nursery to be planted

Photo 28: Bridewealth: relatives of the husband add cash money to the gift

Part IV: Community Conservation

8. Conserving the forest, organizing people: conservationists as organic intellectuals

You three, you speak with one voice about
Your logging, as if he was of a different vine

I mourn my son, he just looks down
In front of your faces due to your talk

Oh, if only his grandfathers lived
They would answer the talk for him

In this wailing song a Mengen woman mourns her son who was criticized in the late 1980s for speaking out against a proposed logging operation at a large meeting where several Wide Bay villages had gathered to discuss the possibility. The woman was one of the few who had opposed it back then; when the first logging proposals were made, she notified her son who was attending teacher's college in the Highlands. He wrote back to his parents, urging his mother to prevent their clan members from signing any documents for fear that his less educated relatives would not understand the implications of logging contracts. He returned to the village to persuade his clan members not to allow logging on their clan land and was later joined by his younger brother, also a highly educated young man. Initially their opposition to logging was criticized by others, as described in the wailing song. What the mother found most distressing was that the clan ("vine") was not united and that her son was criticized by his sisters as if he were from a different clan with nobody to support him.

As described in Chapter 4, logging became an issue towards the end of the 1980s when Wide Bay Mengen men wanted to establish a LOC covering the area from the southernmost Wide Bay Mengen villages all the way north to the Sulka areas. For a variety of reasons discussed previously these plans never materialized, but even at the planning stage they were already opposed by a minority of locals. Among the Wide Bay Mengen, the woman quoted above was opposed because, according to her, as a woman she had to think about her clan land in respect of her children, whereas her brothers were thinking about benefits in the shorter term. Moreover, as her children were acquiring good educations, she wanted them to use their knowledge "on their land". She was supported by her husband, a Sulka man, who as a teacher had traveled widely in New Britain and was dismayed by the loss of forests and land among the Tolai living around the provincial capital. Older women opposed the proposed logging among the Sulka as well. The Sulka and the Mengen women who first opposed logging were affinally related: the husband of the Mengen woman was of the same clan as the Sulka woman. During my initial fieldwork in New Britain in 2007, I interviewed a Sulka activist, who was of this same clan. In an interview, the activist explained why her clan-mother opposed logging:

Many of the traditional boundaries and landmarks where our grandparents

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 clan mother] wanted the children too, the future generations, to know them. For them to be able *to see* those landmarks [my emphasis].—woman, in her mid-40s, 2007-08-09

TP: *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.*

Both among the Sulka and the Mengen the impetus to oppose logging came from older women who distrusted logging due to their longer temporal perspectives—with a view both to the past and the future. They were concerned for swidden horticulture, for the role of the forest in providing basic needs and for the places linking the clan to its land (see Chapters 2 & 3). The women's central role in swidden horticulture as the tenders of people and food plants, as well as their positions as the reproducers of the landholding matriclans, made them attentive to the dangers of logging. In a similar locally initiated conservation project among the Maisin of PNG, it was the women in particular who wanted to save the forests (Barker 2008: 203). More crucially, women's formal position as maintainers of the matrilines among the Sulka and the Mengen probably gave them special authority to voice their concerns compared with women in situations where landholding is organized differently, such as in the Highlands (c.f. West 2006: 121). This obviously does not mean that the Mengen women uniformly opposed logging or that all Mengen men were inattentive to its dangers.

The younger and more educated relatives of the elder women, both male and female, distrusted logging on the basis that it might not bring lasting development (see also Barker 2008: 181; Lattas 2011: 91). They feared the royalty money would just be spent on consumption, that logging trails would not provide adequate road infrastructure and so on. They also conceptualized and organized the opposition to logging as "conservation" by setting up conservation associations and forming links with NGOs, national and international alike. As happened elsewhere in PNG, some of the young educated people held salaried jobs which they abandoned in order to return to their villages and contribute to the emerging conservation work (Barker 2008: 180; Kirsch 2014: 65). In the Mengen case, the eldest son of the woman who first opposed logging was soon joined by his younger brother, a university graduate, who left his salaried job and came to Toimtop, his home village, to work on conservation. Like many LOCs (see Chapters 4 & 5), the Mengen conservation association was explicitly set up as a village project with a committee containing representatives of all the clan groups present in Toimtop. The conservation area, however, was specifically vested in the clan group whose members had initially opposed logging and proposed conservation. Unlike in the Sulka case, the Mengen conservation area was not formalized as a Wildlife Management Area (WMA), a locally managed conservation area; nonetheless, the Mengen were successful in securing donations and help from NGOs (discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter).

In this chapter I describe how and under what conditions the educated Sulka and Mengen of Wide Bay re-framed their opposition to logging as conservation. They were familiar with "conservation" as an international discourse and practice; however, as I show in the first section, their organized opposition to logging, framed as conservation, should be understood in relation to the marginal position of Pomio within the province, which made many rural inhabitants initially receptive to logging (see Chapters 4 & 6). Likewise, it should be related to social movements through which the rural inhabitants of Pomio have sought to address this marginalization and uneven development in the past. In the following two sections I demonstrate that conservation in Wide Bay was not just about "conserving the forest", but a movement with broader environmental and political aims. The conservationists questioned the notion of development based on natural resource extraction, and sought to educate their fellow villagers on operating within the state framework and to further the position of the rural population as rural cultivators within the political and economic structures of the province and country. Because of this, I analyze the conservationists as *peasant intellectuals*. The term "peasant" is the analytical category which I use to highlight questions of class and its relations among the rural cultivators in the province (see Chapters 6 & 7). In doing so, I compare the Wide Bay Mengen conservationists with other environmental activists and conservation projects in PNG.

8.1 Community conservation in Wide Bay

The Wide Bay Mengen conservationists started to organize their project in Toimtop village in the 1990s. At that time logging was underway further south, around the villages that had formed the Balokoma LOC. When logging extended north under subsidiary LOCs and reached the areas to be conserved in the late '90s, a dispute broke out. The conservationists claimed that logging had crossed their clan-land boundary, while members of another clan, active in the subsidiary LOC based in the neighboring Wawas village, claimed that the parts of the conservation area, namely the land area of the "conservationist clan", belonged to them. While the dispute was seemingly between two clans over a boundary, there were a number of actors involved and the dispute created numerous cross-cutting lines of opposition and support. The subsidiary LOC, supported by the Malaysian logging company, backed up clan members disputing the conservationists, who in turn received support from national NGOs. As the LOC and the conservation association were based in neighboring villages forming a single government ward, the issue was complicated further. Some young members of the "conservationist" clan living in Wawas, where the LOC was based, supported logging and noted that their clan was "split" between the goals of logging and conservation. According to them the conservationist members of their clan were interfering with their logging project. The conservationists also faced opposition in their own village from people bent on logging, and at one point they were even threatened by youths from Wawas acting on behalf of the LOC (see also Lattas 2011). The dispute dragged on, partly due to misunderstandings, until it was finally settled in the Local Land Court in favor of the conservationists.[24]

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[24]I have discussed the dispute in greater detail in my MA thesis (see Tammisto 2008: 59–65).

The conservationists were successful because they provided a more convincing case of their claims to the land. A Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)—a community mapping project—conducted in Toimtop some years earlier in preparation for the conservation project was significant, as the opposing clan could not explain why they were disputing a boundary that had been agreed upon in the PRA. Knowledge of the history of the clan and the land areas were important not only in court, but also in terms of the division within the conservationist clan. Elders of the clan did not want logging and they passed the clan histories to the conservationists—the educated sons of the woman who first opposed logging. This support, as well as the victory in court, raised the two brothers to positions as clan leaders. As noted in previous chapters, clan leadership among the Mengen rested on leadership qualities that included knowledge of clan histories, good oratorical skills and the ability to defend the land from outside claims. In the context of the resource economy and formalized disputes, education and the ability to deal with state institutions further added to the two brothers' authority—much as in the case of LOCs (see Chapters 4 & 5).

After the court case the relationship between the disputing parties began to normalize. Logging was conducted further south in areas where clans and communities allowed it, and the Mengen conservationists focused on developing their organization. They sought to formalize their area as a WMA, but for reasons unknown their application did not proceed and became buried in the bureaucratic process. However, they were able to enter into successful co-operation with several NGOs and donors and, as a result, secured important benefits and organized a number of workshops and training sessions for the villagers on issues that ranged from alternative income strategies to the compiling of local botanical knowledge and paralegal training.

The Wide Bay Mengen conservationists thus engaged in attempts to provide training and education for their fellow villagers so that they would be less dependent on income from logging. Self-empowering associations such as these are not a new thing in New Britain. The Wide Bay Mengen conservationists explicitly regarded a co-operative society formed in Toimtop village at the turn of the 1960s as a predecessor to their association. Formed by their parents, it was a copra co-operative which had a license from the Copra Marketing Board to buy locally produced copra. Encouraged by missionaries and state officials, the villagers had established a copra plantation on a parcel of land provided by the clan which claimed the area. Through the society the villagers bought the plantation from the landowning clan, established businesses such as trade stores, bought boats, funded school fees and bought materials for the village church—still regarded as the biggest success of the society. The establishment of the co-operative coincided with the closing of the labor frontier (Gregory 1982: 155–57) and the control of smallholder cash-cropping by local co-operatives in the Island region of New Guinea (Foster 1995: 50, 55) (see also Chapter 6.)

"The Society", as the co-operative was called, disbanded in the 1980s. According to some villagers this was because of mismanagement of funds and unsuccessful business ventures such as hosting a bar, while others claimed that the society had attained its main goals when it bought the village plantation and built the church. Further reasons for its demise included competition from other local co-operatives and the decreasing

regularity of visits by copra-buying ships, which ceased altogether in 1996. (See Snowden (Snowden 198-: 202) on the lack of transport and the collapse of co-operatives.) Its founding idea had been to empower rural people through cash-cropping and I was told by an original member whose children had become active in the conservation association that he had been inspired by co-operative associations among the Tolai of New Britain. In the late 1960s there were large-scale protests among the Tolai against the Australian administration (Whitehouse 1995: 30) and they set up the influential *Mataungan* Association, which strove for self-government, reclamation of alienated lands and empowerment through cash-cropping (Whitehouse 1995: 31, 34, 36). The Mataungan spread to other groups in New Britain as well; the Uramot Baining, for example, were initially sympathetic to what they perceived as its radical ideas (Whitehouse 1995: 32).

Around this time the politico-religious *Kivung* (Gathering) movement also emerged in Pomio. Unlike the strictly secular Mataungan, the Kivung was a millenarian movement focusing on ritual action and spiritual transformation (Lattas 2006: 132; Whitehouse 1995: 36). However, it was also "nationalistic" as it united different linguistic groups in Pomio ranging from the southern Mengen, Kol and Mamusi areas north to the Sulka and the Baining. One reason for its success was that it sought to empower the rural inhabitants of Pomio who perceived themselves to be in a marginal position in relation to the Tolai (Lattas 2006: 132, 139; Whitehouse 1995: 36). The Kivung also became a successful political movement, holding the parliamentary seat of Pomio from the commencement of self-government in 1964 until 2002 (Lattas 2006: 32; Rew 1999: 140, 143; Whitehouse 1995: 45). I was told that the movement had been active in funding and establishing a high school for Pomio and had paid for the education of talented students. Kivung members are highly bureaucratic in their ritual practices, which Andrew Lattas (2006: 135, 148) interprets as the mimetic replication of administrative practices and the creation of local and alternative grounds for participating in politics, government and the cash-economy; in other words, a mode of localizing power (see Chapter 6 on bottom-up state formation).

In 2002 the Kivung lost the national elections to Paul Tiensten, the initiator of the Ili-Wawas plan and a supporter of economic development based on natural resource extraction (Tammisto 2008). Lattas (2006: 140) notes a tension between the Kivung and supporters of logging, while Whitehouse (1995: 190) writes that the Kivung was locally opposed by people turning to development associations, the state and companies. The Kivung did not regain its parliamentary power in either the 2007 or the 2012 elections, but former Kivung members have been active in opposing the controversial logging and oil palm projects in the southern Pomio areas. Likewise, the Wide Bay Mengen conservationists actively campaigned for a candidate contesting Paul Tiensten in the 2007 elections (see Tammisto 2008)—thus taking part in formal politics as well.

By briefly discussing these various movements and societies in New Britain, I want to emphasize that the Sulka and Mengen Wide Bay conservation associations were not externally imposed; on the contrary, they join a line of local political movements in New Britain. Common to these, whether copra co-operatives or millenarian movements, has been the emphasis on local governance and self-empowerment. As I have noted

previously, there is a self-conscious aspect of cultural revivalism inherent to Wide Bay conservation (Tammisto 2008: 80–84) which is a common feature of both localist movements (e.g. Keesing 1982: 237) and conservation initiatives (e.g. Barker 2008) in Melanesia.

8.2 Conservationists as organic intellectuals

In their talk, Wide Bay conservationists often used terms and catch-phrases such as "capacity building", "roles and responsibilities", "awareness" and the like. Based on this, it would be tempting see them as converts to a dogma of technocratic and de-politicized governance perpetuated by the process whereby states and transnational actors shift responsibility to NGOs and "civil society", or more broadly, "neoliberalism" (Hilgers 2013: 81; Peluso and Lund 2011: 674; West 2006, xii). Conservation in Wide Bay indeed emerged under frontier conditions in which private entities, such as logging and plantation companies, were taking part in governance and in providing infrastructures and services (see Chapters 4 & 6); NGOs and conservation projects have also played a part in this trend, as several studies have noted (C. Benson 2012; Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; West 2006). The conservation association of Toimtop, for example, which was led by highly educated people, had become a representative of the community in many instances, as I noted in the Introduction. Operating according to the norms and practices of formal governance, the association was an easily recognizable, or "legible" (Scott 1998) partner both for donors and NGOs, as well as state institutions. For the conservationists this was a way of "being seen like a state", to paraphrase Jaap Timmer (2010); in other words, being recognized as an authority (see also Chapter 6).

In this sense, the conservation association resembled the LOCs through which Mengen men had sought to secure income and services from logging companies and promote their own authority. The conservationists were not only successful in generating donations for their projects, something I discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, but also in presenting their village as a locally well-organized, model community with the association as its representative. Consequently, when the state-owned telephone company, PNG Telikom, was expanding its mobile network to Pomio during the period of my fieldwork, and building towers across the district, Toimtop was chosen as a site, not only for its geographic location, but because it was regarded as a reliable community due to the association. Another tower, as noted in the previous chapter, was built on the new oil palm plantation.

However, dismissing Wide Bay conservationists simply as products and vehicles of neoliberal governance would miss important aspects of the work which they conducted in the rural communities. They all came from rural backgrounds and many lived in their home communities. Those who worked in towns with the local or national NGOs maintained close ties with their home villages and channeled money back, like other laborers (see Chapter 7), and hosted rural kin in their homes when the latter were in town. They did not merely seek to act as representatives of their communities in contacts with formal actors, but sought to educate their fellow villagers as widely as possible on the implications of natural resource projects and other issues. This is why

"awareness"—as the conservationists themselves put it—was a central part of their work. Meanwhile, they actively sought options for income and service provision other than large-scale natural resource extraction projects which they felt threatened the local population with dispossession; they also sought to improve the lot of the laborers on the newly established oil palm plantation. Furthermore, the conservationists often took part informally in situations that arose in their home communities, such as when people had to deal with the police or other officials—simply because they were proficient in dealing with the administration.

The "awareness" work of the conservationists was significant. Before the start of my fieldwork, around 2010 and 2011, when the land lease boom (see Chapters 5 & 6) was at its height, officials of the provincial Department of Lands and Physical Planning came to educate Wide Bay villagers on the lease / lease back schemes, allegedly encouraging people to enter into deals which would have enabled the department to sublease their lands for development projects. The proposals by the Lands Department were part of the program introduced by the government to encourage people to voluntarily "mobilize" land they held under the customary title: in other words, to encourage them to lease it out for development purposes. Under PNG's legislation, land could not be alienated, but it could be leased for periods up to 99 years (Filer 2012: 599). An official of the Lands Department told me that the leases are "more flexible" and better suited to PNG where people do not like the concept of individual freehold titles. During the presentation, the local conservationists inquired about the risks of local clans ultimately losing the land, and requested details of the full implications of the lease agreements. As a result, people refused the agreements, with the conservationists arguably preventing large-scale dispossession.

Shortly afterwards, in 2011, a governmental Commission of Inquiry was set up to probe the leasing schemes and the granting of new leases was put on hold. The commission's investigations found numerous faults and wrongdoings in the lease cases, and the findings were published—although this did not halt existing projects; later, however, in 2014, Prime Minister Peter O'Neill declared that all illegally obtained leases would be canceled (Miae 2014). In West Pomio, the "Sigite Mukus Integrated Rural Development Project", sister to the Ili-Wawas project, was established on the basis of the controversial leases and faced active opposition from local activists who have also made their struggle internationally known (Lattas 2012). Likewise, the plantation project in Wide Bay was being extended all the way to the border of the Sulka and Mengen areas (Chapter 5 & 6) when I visited the area in 2014.

As noted in Chapter 5, Sulka and Mengen men from Tagul and Setwei formed a new LOC and signed a logging contract with the company operating in Masrau. As the actual logging operation started, the project was contested by other inhabitants of the area due to an unresolved land dispute. A highly educated young local, who had worked for a local conservation NGO but returned to his home village, had begun to inquire about the project as the first surveyors entered the area, in order to make sense of what it was about and how to deal with it. He had also been spending time further south in the Waterfall Bay area, where his clan owned land, trying to discourage his clan members, especially the older men, from signing it away for Sigite-Mukus' oil palm

development, urging them to hold back and find other ways of funding development. In an interview I conducted with him about the two projects, he offered an analysis of what he considered to be the basic problem with these approaches. Due to its clarity, it is worth quoting at length:

> It is not up to me to criticize the government, but according to my observations the government has partly failed in its responsibility to distribute services to the people. ... Although it has established many mining and logging companies in the past years and, more recently, oil palm companies, it has not distributed goods and services fairly and equally to them [the people]. What it does, it gives the people the option, through departments like Lands and Forestry, to negotiate with them and then go to the developers [companies]. But after having helped them to bring in the developer, it leaves them with the developer and passes on responsibility to the developer or whatever company. But actually, it is its [the government's] responsibility.—man, in his early 30s, 2014-02-27

> TP: *Mi no inap kritisaisim govaman, but mi ... long observation bilong mi, govaman - long sampela sait - em i failim responsibility bilong en long distributim service long ol pipol. ... We, though em i kirapim planti mining and logging kampani in the past yias and nau recently ol oil-palm kampani, but insait long distribution of services na ol goods, i no fair na i no equally distributim long ol. So what em i mekim is, em i givim option long ol pipol tru long ol departments like Lands, Forestri na desla, so... ol pipol i negotiate wantaim ol Lands, bihain ol i go wantaim developer, but taim govaman i halpim ol long negotiate wantaim long bringim developmen, em i lusim ol wantaim developer, em i tingim responsibility em i placim antap long en, developer o husat kampani. But actually, responsibility bilong en.*

This is an illustrative quote, because it goes to the heart of the matter: in large-scale natural resource projects governmental institutions usually assist "developers", or capital, whereas people at grassroots levels often get less assistance. Or, as in the case of Commission of Inquiry, assistance comes after the fact, if at all.

More generally, the informant criticized the neoliberal approach to development in Pomio whereby the production of services previously associated with the state was shifted to companies, local communities had to trade their resources for basic services and the regulation of corporations was minimized.(See Benson and Kirsch (2010: 465) on corporate deregulation; Fairhead & al. (2012: 243, 252) on land acquisition through leases; Hilgers (2012: 81) on state support of markets; Jessop (2013: 70) and Lattas (2011) on corporatized governance.) While PNG has undergone neoliberal reforms (West 2012: 99–100), the state's involvement in natural resource projects—such as acquiring ownership in major mining ventures, subsidizing foreign investment and ending the privatization of state enterprises, carried out at the time when projects such as Ili-Wawas were being initiated—run counter to neoliberal doctrines to the extent that Filer (2013: 321) has called it "state capitalism". However, as Stuart Kirsch (2014: 231) notes, the state's lack of capacity or willingness to regulate has in practice produced

the neoliberal outcome of deregulation. In Chapter 6 I come to a similar conclusion regarding the Ili-Wawas project.

The conservationists played an important part in educating and organizing their fellow villagers to prevent their being cheated by logging companies and dispossessed of their land and, more generally, to enable them to deal better with the state and importunate companies. Here the notion of intellectuals as people or groups with directive or organizational roles, as defined by Antonio Gramsci (1971), is instructive.[25] According to Gramsci (1971: 8-9) intellectuals are not defined by their intellectual activity as such, because all human action involves some degree of intellectual activity, but, rather, by their *social role* as intellectuals (see also Crehan 2002: 131; Feierman 1990: 18). Just as the worker is not characterized as a worker by the nature of their activity, but by doing "this work in specific conditions and specific social relations", so too are intellectuals defined by their "immediate social function" as intellectuals, that is, by their place in an "ensemble of social relations" (Gramsci 1971: 8). This function is "directive and organisational", or educative, and thus intellectual (Gramsci 1971: 16; see also Crehan 2002: 131). Conversely, as Feierman (1990: 18) points out, smart people with clear and well elaborated thoughts who do not engage in organizational and educative activities do not perform the role of intellectuals—just as many of us who prepare meals on a daily basis are not called cooks (Crehan 2002: 132).

In this sense, the local conservationists of Wide Bay were intellectuals. They operated mainly in their own communities and the association's focus was very much on the community and its conservation area. As noted in the previous section, over time they had organized a variety of formal workshops designed to educate the villagers on various themes. Some of these have been rather "standard" approaches to small scale development and, as noted by the conservationists themselves, proved failures that could readily be compared with the sometimes naïve approaches of well-meaning donor organizations—butterfly farming as a case in point (see also Kirsch 1997: 108). On the other hand, with their paralegal training, the information supplied by conservationists about the legal rights of locals in concrete situations, such as negotiating logging contracts, aimed to give the rural people a more rounded picture of their position in the political economy of PNG.

I have noted previously that the Wide Bay Mengen were peasants: namely, people with direct access to land, with a high degree of self-sufficiency, who use mostly family labor. Peasants are partially engaged in markets and subordinate in larger political economies. (Watts 2009: 524; also Meggit 1971: 208–9). By helping the rural people to retain control of their land, the conservationists sought to improve their position *as* rural producers, or peasants. Gramsci's discussion of intellectuals is tied to questions of class, and the struggles between classes. For Gramsci, intellectuals are produced by classes—that is, they do not exist either as individuals or groups independently of class relations—meanwhile playing a crucial role in formulating "the incoherent and

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[25]In my understanding of Gramsci and also my framing of local conservationists as intellectuals I rely heavily on Kate Crehan's (2002) exegesis of Gramsci and Steven Feierman's (1990) work on peasant intellectuals in rural Tanzania. To give credit where credit is due, it is mainly through Crehan's work that I became aware of Gramsci and the nuances of his work beyond the concept of hegemony, and of Feirman's work on peasant intellectuals.

fragmentary 'feelings' of those who live in a particular class into a coherent and reasoned account of the world as it appears from that position" (Crehan 2002: 132; Gramsci 1971: 5). In a much quoted passage, Gramsci stated:

> Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. (Gramsci 1971: 5).

The term "social group" can be interpreted here as a code expression referring to class, used by Gramsci to thwart prison censors (Crehan 2002: 141). Intellectuals are products of the economic realities of a particular class, but also the means by which it emerges as a "class-for-itself", or achieves class consciousness (Crehan 2002: 144). They are "organic" when they have emerged from and work for a particular class; in other words, when their links to it are structural and fundamental (Gramsci 1971: 5–6, 10–12). Or, as Eric Schwimmer (1987: 82) notes, "organic intellectuals" express the ideas that in their opinions serve the interests of the group with which they identify. In the Gramscian framework, it is also the organic intellectuals of a particular class who challenge the prevailing hegemony and establish a counter-hegemony, which allows a class to become aware of its position, or move from being a "class in itself" to a "class-for-itself" (Schwimmer 1987: 82; Crehan 2002: 130, 132). Organic intellectuals may be contrasted with "traditional intellectuals" who have emerged from a particular class and are initially "organically" tied to it, but have achieved a certain amount of (perceived) independence. For example, the clergy of Italy were once organically tied to the landed nobility, but over time came to perceive themselves as a seemingly autonomous group (Crehan 2002: 141).

In another much quoted passage Gramsci (1971: 6) stated that peasants, even though performing an "essential function in the world of production" are not capable of producing their own organic intellectuals—and therefore are incapable of achieving effective class consciousness on their own. Crehan (2002: 136, 144, 152–53) notes that Gramsci was not making a blanket statement about all peasants, but was referring to Italian peasants at the time of his writing. These had long been ideologically subordinated by the Catholic Church and, as a class, were so marginal to modern capitalism that Gramsci did not see in them potential for an effective counter-hegemony, especially since modern capitalism could only be effectively challenged by a mass movement. Similarily, Andrew Strathern (1982: 142) notes that if peasants are people accepting their lot—namely a livelihood based on partial production of crops for sale, being taxed, dependent on external services, and unequal terms of exchange on markets—then the inhabitants of PNG's Western Highlands were not peasants. This is because the Western Highlanders were keenly aware of inequalities and did not accept their lot.

I do not see the acceptance of one's lot as defining feature of peasants, because in different contexts, peasants have been able to mobilize themselves as a class (e.g. Wolf 1969). For exapmle, discussing peasant movements in Tanzania in the long term, from colonial times to independence, Feierman (1990) shows that peasants could

indeed produce both counter-hegemony and their own intellectuals. In fact, in terms of pre-independence struggles, Tanzanian peasants were the best equipped to provide opposition because of their relative autonomy due to subsistence agriculture and their lack of dependence on the colonial administration (Feierman 1990: 19, 23). The multiplicity of contexts and peasants' political activity—or the lack of it—goes to show, that the peasant study framework is best used as a mode of analysis focusing on relation rural producers have in larger political economies, rather than thinkin of "the peasantry" as an uniform transhistorical category.

The Wide Bay conservationists were few in number and they were not trying to build a mass movement to overthrow capitalism in PNG. They were, however, raising questions regarding the position of rural people in their province, the state structure of PNG and the capitalist resource economy. For the most part, the rural people, or the grassroots level, comprised small-scale farmers, food-producing peasants growing cash-crops for export (coffee, cacao, copra, oil palm) and—peculiarly for PNG—owners of their own land. In the case of Wide Bay, as I have noted in Chapter 6, the rural areas with dwindling cash-crop production provided labor reserves which were essential for the new plantation projects (Bernstein 1979: 426). Thus it is, in my opinion, justified to regard the rural population of New Britain as belonging to a *class* of peasants. Consequently, Gramsci's notions of intellectuals as tied to particular classes can be used to think about a situation which is comparable to that which gave rise to Gramsci's theorizing, namely, the interrelationships of particular classes and especially the role of peasants.

8.3 "What is awareness?": challenging the extractivist hegemony

The idea that economic and infrastructural development is best achieved through natural resource extraction projects like the Ili-Wawas was being perpetuated by state officials in Pomio during my fieldwork and was part of the hegemonic discourse. The conservationists wanted to challenge this hegemony because of its adverse effects on rural people, effects including the loss of land through de facto alienation by long-term leases and the destruction of lived environments. Thus "awareness" was not only a buzzword adopted from "NGO-speak", but an important factor in challenging the "extractivist hegemony". As Stuart Kirsch (2014: 192) has shown, the information disparity between local communities living near natural resources and companies engaged in extractive industries can have detrimental effects on the communities.

Based on his long-term research on, and involvement with, struggles against the polluting Ok Tedi mine in PNG, Kirsch (2006; 2007; 2014: 190, 188) notes that activists must engage both in what he calls the politics of space and the politics of time. Using the "politics of space" the anti-mine activists followed the circuits of capital, campaigned at important nodes in the commodity chain and sought to mobilize members in multiple locales. However, because mining companies learn from previous defeats, because the manifestation of the impacts of mining is often delayed and because opposition takes a long time to mount, it is also important to act at the right points in time, thereby engaging in the "politics of time" (Kirsch 2014: 186, 190). It is essential to

prevent disasters from occurring and this requires changing how people perceive the impacts of mining as well as targeting the planning stages of new projects (Kirsch 2014: 190–91). This in turn often requires that activists learn new things quickly and that the information disparity between communities and companies is diminished (Kirsch 2014: 192–93).

The Wide Bay conservationists have used the politics of time as they have sought to educate their fellow villagers, discourage people from signing land lease deals without proper knowledge and inform people about the effects of oil palm plantations. As the news about the new logging project conducted by Nato Ltd. began to spread, the Wide Bay conservationists asked Nato directors to come and provide villagers with "awareness" by telling them what the project was about (see Chapter 5). In order to avoid conflicts between conservation and logging, the conservationists also gave their management plan both to state representatives and the Chairman of Nato. The conservationists decided to "communicate the borders" of the conservation area because it was contiguous with the logging project area. This is also a good example of adopting "territorial strategies" to protect life-worlds (Baletti 2012: 588, 593; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 387), discussed further in the next chapter. The conservationists' work probably influenced local people because, as the new logging project began, a clan excluded from the project called a meeting with the LOC and the clan with whom they were in dispute, as described in Chapter 5. One reason given for the meeting was the "lack of awareness" regarding the project.

In Chapter 5 I analyzed how the various participants of the meeting talked about clans and LOCs, and how they sought to reframe the nature of the dispute. I turn now to the statements of the conservationists who were invited to the meeting to offer their comments as observers. The conservationists took up the issue of "lack of awareness" and asked what people mean by it: is it knowledge, consent or something else? A conservationist noted:

> For me, awareness is that you state clearly to me what will actually happen on the land.—man, in his 40s, 2014-02-18
>
> TP: *Awareness long mi i min olsem, bai yu mas kam na tok klia long mi, bai wanem samting bai actually kamap antap long graun.*

After saying this, the conservationists reminded people that when they sign deals with logging companies, they enter the state system, which means that proper procedures set up by the government must followed. They then asked whether these procedures had been followed, stressing that everybody wants development, but that the way things are done matters as much the outcome. They noted that in the new logging project, "we" have omitted the proper steps (TP: *Yumi kalkalapim ol step!*) and that was why the project had run into trouble. During the meeting the conservationists acted in an explicitly neutral fashion, not taking sides in the land dispute and not condemning logging as such. However, regarding proper procedures, they took a firm stand:

> This kind of talk you throw around about the company continuing to operate despite the dispute—I suggest you to be careful with that kind of

talk. *Careful!* Because the strength, the law, it recognizes you, it recognizes all the people present. The law will serve you, the law will serve you too—we play on a level playing field. –man, in his 40s, 2014-02-18

TP: *Desla kain toktok yu tormaim olsem kampani bai wok even dispute wanenm—mi laik yupela i careful long desla kain toktok.* Careful! *Bikos the strength, the law, em i luksave long yu, em i luksave long olgeta man i sindaun. The law will serve you, will serve you—we play on a level playing field.* [Note code-switch from Tok Pisin to English]

This quote clearly illustrates the Wide Bay conservationists' relationship with the law and the state. They were proficient in the legislation of PNG and knew how institutions worked, or at least were supposed to work. Law, as Kirsch (2014: 86–87) notes, is often regarded by skeptics as favoring the powerful and as a way to depoliticize conflicts and alienate subalterns from their own language. These are legitimate concerns, and the legalization of politics has been said to be a characteristic of neoliberalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 115). On the other hand, the law may be a more open-ended resource for promoting economic and social transformation, as Kirsch (2014: 86) suggests in relation to the campaign against the Ok Tedi mine by the Yonggom activists of PNG. Corporate lawyers can often outspend their opponents and lawyers working for the Ok Tedi mining company sought to influence legislation in PNG, which would have criminalized the PNG activists' involvement in a case against the company in Australia (a maneuver for which the company was judged to be in contempt of court). Thus, while the law is certainly not a "level playing field", the Yonggom activists were able to secure important legal victories, making the company accountable for the pollution it had caused (Kirsch 2014: 89, 97, 104). Likewise, being able to utilize the law was definitely a strength of the Wide Bay conservationists. After they won the land dispute in court, the position of the conservationists was strengthened both within their own clan as well as in relation to local supporters of logging and the logging companies.

This reliance on the law and the "proper system of the government" has two principal, connected consequences: first, it legitimizes the state as an institution and as a source of authority; and second, it is a claim for the state institutions to work in particular ways or, more simply, a political argument regarding the preferred role of the state. (See also the interlocutor's remark earlier in this chapter about the state's failing in its responsibility vis-à-vis the rural population.) In the specific case of the new logging project, these statements were also intended to destabilize the hegemonic position of natural resource extraction that its proponents, by portraying it as the "will of the government", sought to grant it. Both in the meeting in question as well as in other instances the conservationists reminded listeners that the state (TP: *govaman*) was not a monolithic actor, but consisted of different institutions. According to them it was a *system* in and through which actions were played out. One conservationist explicitly stated this during a conversation with another villager as we waited for the meeting to start. He noted that just because companies operate in the framework of the government does not mean that they are government projects.

Domination, according to Gramsci, rests on coercion, persuasion and the deep-rooted ideological dominance that makes the world-view of one class tacitly accepted

by others—that is, on hegemony; thus, overcoming hegemony, or creating counter-hegemony, is as important as gaining state power in a class struggle to overcome subordination (Schwimmer 1987: 81, 90; Feierman 1990: 19; Crehan 2002: 132, 138, 147, 153). In Wide Bay, the conservationists engaged in explicitly organizational and educative activity, seeking to "produce and instill knowledge", as Crehan puts it (2002: 132), and to undermine the hegemonic status sought by proponents of development through large-scale natural resource extraction. And not only that. The conservationists also sought to produce a counter-hegemonic discourse as they tried to present alternative definitions for "development". Development, as a concept, had hegemonic status in the politics of New Britain (and elsewhere!)—not least because of the term's ambiguity, in as much it can mean just about anything (Ferguson 1994). In the rural areas of New Britain, development usually meant increased income and better access to services such as roads, hospitals and so on. It also referred to changes made on the land to do with cultivated plants, especially cash crops. Finally, development was often regarded as synonymous with large-scale projects such as logging and plantations. Proponents of these projects have often accused NGOs of preventing development because they and local conservation associations have sought to ensure that people were informed about the consequences of large-scale agribusiness and have stressed the need to follow the proper procedures and guidelines set up by the state to protect local landowners. For example, in the meeting described in Chapter 5 a state official said to the disputing clan members:

> And the Tok Pisin [official or public talk][26] talk is like this: "I will put you in court and I will pull my resources out [of the project] and I do not need others to develop." You see? We NGOs, our Tok Pisin is like: "It's our forests; our forest rivers must remain—don't disturb them! Because their future... the benefits from them will come." Because you stand by this kind of thought, hit on Nato [LOC engaged in logging]!—man, in his 50s, 2014-02-18

> TP: *Na Tok Pisin ol i tokim olsem nau: "Mi bai mi putim yu long kot, na mi pulim aut risors bilong mi na mi no nidim narapela man long developim." Yu lukim? Mipela ol NGOs i save Tok Pisin bilong mipela olsem: "Ol bus bilong mipela, ol bus warai bilong mipela i stap—noken disturbim! Bikos future bilong ol... bai ol benefit bilong en i kam." Bikos yupela sanap long desla kain tingting, hitim aut Nato!*

Responding to these allegations and in order to challenge the hegemonic status of the projects, the conservationists in the meeting noted that conservation is also a kind of development and should be seen as complementary to other forms of natural resource use. Being deliberately constructive, the conservationists in the meeting emphasized the need to work together on these projects and plan them well. They also noted that

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[26]The term "Tok Pisin" used in this way refers to official or public talk and statements, regardless of the actual language spoken. For example, in land disputes it is common to note that the opponents are confused in their comments by saying that their "Tok Pisin is not straight" (TP: *Tok Pisin bilong ol i no stret.*).

they, as a clan, had sacrificed their "heart" (land) by conserving it and that this sacrifice was not for them only, but for everybody (see Chapter 9.) They said that because oil palm had "eaten" all the land around them, the conservation area would serve future generations, enabling them to experience "the work of God" (i.e. "untouched" nature). Furthermore:

> And not only the hand [work] of God! Many of the things we use, according to which we define ourselves as Mengen and Sulka, they are in the forest. ... If you grow up, if your community grows up on cacao, inside a cacao environment, then you talk cacao, you language is cacao, your children will talk cacao. That's how you will be! –man, in his 40s, 2014-02-18

> TP: *I no han bilong bikman tasol! But planti long ol samting we yumi usim, we yumi kolim yumi ol Mengen na ol Sulka, ol i stap insait long forest. ... Sapos yu grow up, sapos komuniti bilong yu i grow up long kakao tasol insait long kakao environment, yu toktok kakao, language bilong yu kakao, pikinini bilong yu bai toktok kakao. Na bai yu olsem nau!*

This is an interesting statement. On the one hand it refers to the idea of "untouched" nature, whose criteria the conserved forest fulfils when compared to large-scale logging or areas cleared for plantations, but not in light of the dwelling practices of the inhabitants. More crucially, the conservationist highlighted the cultural meanings of the forest and its role to their and their fellow villagers' identities as Sulka and Mengen, expressing his genuine concern for their way of life, culture and traditions. It was not only a strategic statement meant to impress outsiders, or paint "the locals" as guardians of unchanging nature. On the contrary, this statement was directed to fellow villagers in the context of a meeting in which I was the only outsider present and, as far as I can tell, someone whom the conservationists did not need to take into account or impress. Associated with this "tradition" and "way of life" was also the relative independence of the rural people who were able to cultivate their own food and control their own land. As noted in Chapter 7, villagers often described life in the village as "free" and the ability to control one's own time and labor is an integral part of this freedom. The local conservationists were concerned that the uncritical and unrestricted expansion of logging and plantations could threaten this.

This does not mean that conservationists rejected out of hand any use of natural resources or "development", defined as increased income, services and standards of living. Nor do I claim, having resorted to concepts such as "intellectuals" or "counter-hegemony", that the conservationists, as "peasant intellectuals", were engaged in a simplistic class struggle or trying to take over the state and establish their own hegemony. However, I do think that these concepts illuminate some important facets of natural resource politics in New Britain and how they pan out among the rural population.

8.4 Conclusions

Members of two clans—one Sulka, one Mengen—initiated community conservation in the late 1980s when logging was first proposed to southern Wide Bay Mengen

villages. Even though the areas to be conserved were the lands owned by these two clans, conservation was intended as a community project. From early on, the local conservationists were supported by their fellow villagers across clan boundaries although, at the time, many hoped that logging would grant them access to services and income. In short, the Wide Bay communities did not uniformly support or oppose logging. Initially it was older women who were skeptical about it and voiced their opposition in meetings organized by the Sulka and Mengen from Wide Bay to discuss the possibility of logging. Their opposition was framed in reference to swidden horticulture, their concern for the important places in the forest, their broader time perspectives and the hope that their children would use their knowledge "on their own land"—as an elder Mengen woman noted. Their children and younger relatives, many of whom had high levels of formal education, joined the opposition provided by the older women. It was these young relatives who first conceptualized the opposition to logging as "conservation" and successfully established contacts with donors and NGOs as well as state institutions.

In this chapter I have focused on the emergence of community conservation in Wide Bay by outlining its development from opposition to logging to the deliberate organization into "conservation" and associations. Locally initiated conservation in Wide Bay resembles other cases in PNG, especially that of the Maisin (Barker 2008). In both cases women played an important role in questioning logging from the early stages and were joined by educated younger people, and in both cases the initiative for conservation came from the locals themselves and was aided, but not imposed, by NGOs (see Barker 2008: 174, 181, 183, 203). Young people active in conserving the forest have also engaged in cultural revival (Barker 2008: 211; Tammisto 2008: 71, 74, 80–83). As John Barker (2008: 175, 181, 203) notes, in the course of a decade many of the Maisin had started to conceptualize the intact rainforest as wealth, a source of food and shelter—something rarely mentioned when they first rejected logging out of distrust for logging companies, having witnessed deforestation and uneven distribution of royalties. This differs from large-scale conservation initiatives, such as that in the eastern Highlands of PNG, which seem to be outside impositions offering a stark contrast with how locals perceive their relations with the environment and the kind of relations they would like to establish with outsiders (West 2006). Similarly, the Wide Bay Mengen who supported and initiated conservation had seen logging in their neighboring communities and over time more people came to perceive conservation as justified.

Conservation in Wide Bay was not only about opposing logging, but also about finding alternatives to extraction-based development and about empowering the rural communities. This is not a new thing in New Britain. Various movements from the Pomio Kivung and the Mataungan to the local copra co-operatives have shared this aim of creating local options for economic development while enhancing self-governance and gaining more equal participation in the larger political and economic structures of the country. The Mataungan was directed against the colonial administration, whereas the Pomio Kivung continued well after independence to further the political role of the rural population in the province. Alan Rew (1999: 148) notes that the Kivung demanded of the post-independence provincial administration the same things as the Mataungan had of the colonial administration. The Mengen conservationists explicitly positioned themselves on this continuum by claiming the village co-operative society as

their predecessor. While strictly secular, the Mengen conservationists noted that they respected the Kivung for its political efforts, even though the Wide Bay Mengen had not been part of the Kivung. In many ways, their aims have been the same, however: to improve the economic and political footing of the rural population as rural people engaged in cash cropping and subsistence agriculture.

The conservationists have sought to educate their fellow villagers as to the legal obligations logging companies have towards local landowners and the implications of large-scale land leases, as well as providing people with the means to operate in the state's legal and administrative system in general. In the national elections of 2007 (see Tammisto 2008), the conservationists supported a like-minded parliamentary candidate. In short, they have attempted to further the positions of the rural cultivators *as* rural cultivators in the province and the country. Reflecting this conceptualization and the relationship involved, I have used the concept of "peasant" (see Watts 2009: 524) to describe the position of the rural cultivators of Pomio in relation to a larger political economy and ecology framework. Furthermore, I have characterized the Wide Bay conservationists as *organic intellectuals* of the peasant class.

In Gramsci's (1971) analysis organic intellectuals arise from and are tied to a particular class and serve the perceived interests of that class. Because the local conservationists of Wide Bay were from rural, or peasant, backgrounds and because they attempted to advance the interests of their community members as rural cultivators, their characterization as peasant intellectuals is fitting. They sought to advance these interests by protecting the forests that were economically, socially and culturally central for the rural population, and by "educating and organizing" their community members more broadly. By referring to peasants, class and Gramsci, I do not claim that the rural people of Pomio identified themselves as peasants or that the rural population had a consciousness of class. As noted in my Introduction, I use the term peasant to highlight certain dynamics of agrarian political economy and to position my work with other studies of rural PNG (Foster 1995; Grossman 1984; Meggit 1971). The use of the term "intellectual" also draws attention to political struggles: LOC directors (see Chapters 4 & 5) and plantation supervisors (see Chapter 6) were engaged in organizational activities and were in that sense intellectuals as well. They too were mostly from rural backgrounds and saw themselves as working for the rural population. However, LOC directors and supervisors were also products of the forestry industry and plantation companies, whose operations they sought to advance. Hence I regard them as intellectuals who have organically emerged to represent the companies and state-capitalism and who advance the hegemony of extraction-based development.

In this chapter I have recounted the emergence of community conservation in Wide Bay and emphasized that the Wide Bay Mengen conservation association had broader aims and significance than only protecting the forest. I have focused here especially on the political commentary, organization and education of the conservationists and how they have engaged with their communities' members, the companies and the state. The conservationists also took part in cultural revival, which they combined with protecting the socially significant forests. As local activists, their work was embedded in the village communities and their moral order. In the next chapter, I focus more closely on

how the conservationists negotiated the politics of local land use, the moral economy in the village and the productive contradiction between the landowning clan and the inter-relations between the clans.

9. "We sacrifice the forest to get development.": conservation and commodification

Along with logging and industrial agriculture, conservation can be regarded as an aspect of the new natural resource economy in the Wide Bay area for two reasons: firstly, it emerged as a reaction to logging and as an inversion of it; secondly, it also utilized the forest as a resource to achieve similar goals as logging, albeit in a different way. For many inhabitants of Wide Bay, natural resources were seen as the key to acquiring the income and the services they lacked. Thus it is relevant that, for reasons discussed in this chapter, conservationists have sought to address issues of income and development by adopting the "Integrated Conservation and Development" (ICAD) or conservation-as-development model. This has involved adopting new practices and perspectives with regards the forest while outlawing the old—such as gardening. Or, in the words of a Mengen conservation activist:

> We sacrifice the forest to get development.

This statement resembles comments by LOC directors who noted that in order to gain development, in the forms of income, roads and services, one has to give something in return, which usually means agreeing to logging or leasing one's land to companies (see Chapters 4, 5 & 8). People in PNG often do not imagine themselves as participants in a commodity economy but as partners in exchange (Kirsch 2006: 89; Robbins and Akin 1999; Robbins 2003; West 2006: 46), because in many Melanesian societies, exchanges are privileged sites of making, maintaining and structuring relations (Robbins and Akin 1999: 8, 39). Thus, rather than seeking finite commodity transactions, they often hope to establish longer, socially productive relations. While commodity transactions also create social relations, they are not the long lasting or reciprocal variety valued by people in many Melanesian societies[27] (f.e. Robbins 2003). The Mengen conservation activist, using a similar expression as his relatives engaged in logging, was not talking about cutting down trees or leasing land areas, but about banning gardening in the conservation area. Sacrificing the forest referred to the non-use of it. Given the social and economic importance of gardening (see Chapter 2 & 3), banning it indeed was tantamount to sacrifice.

In the previous chapter I focused on the origin of the Wide Bay Mengen conservation association and on the explicitly political work of conservation activists in organizing and educating people, presenting alternatives to development understood as natural resource extraction and questioning neoliberal governance. In this chapter I focus on conservation as development and the role played by conservation in the commodification of the Mengen lived environment. Logging helped the Mengen to imagine the trees and their forests as resources evenly spread across their landscape (see also Bridge 2011: 820). Even before the trees were physically felled, logging had already conceptually

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[27]This obviously is not meant to imply that people in Melanesia are not familiar with commodity relations (see Gregory 1982; Robbins 2003). As I have shown in the previous chapters, the inhabitants of Wide Bay have long been involved in them and have elaborated notions of their social consequences.

turned the forest and the trees into commodities, things that are commensurate with other things on the market (Gregory 1982: 12, 19; Marx 1976: 132, 140). This had important consequences, as trees turned into commodities could be sold for money, and—perhaps more crucially—in the imagination of many Mengen, their exchange could establish relations with actors such as logging companies which would enable access services and infrastructure. This had ramifications for those Mengen who wanted to conserve their forests. As other clans began receiving royalties from logging and logging brought tangible benefits—such as roads, portable sawmills and cash-crops (see Chapter 4)—there was increasing pressure to justify conservation. This prompted the conservationists to attempt to commodify conservation. In order to market conservation, the conservation area had to be made to conform to outside expectations of "untouched nature".

On the surface, Wide Bay Mengen conservation has shifted from opposition to logging to conservation as development. Dominant actors, such as transnational conservation organizations, have employed the latter model in order to exchange the conservation of local environments for development in the eyes of the locals (Kirsch 1997: 105; Wagner 2007: 32; West 2006: 32–35). As Paige West (2006: 34) notes, in this model providing development becomes not an end in itself, but something to be exchanged for conservation. Conversely, conservation also ceases to be observed on its own account and becomes something to be provided in an exchange situation (Büscher and Dressler 2012: 367; Kelly 2011: 684; West 2006: 39). Peluso and Lund (2011: 671) call this a "nearly universal" turn from preservation for the sake of it to commodification, as the establishment of conserved areas creates new frontiers of value. As the local conservationists very well knew, the conserved area was not only forest preserved for traditional subsistence use, but also a *potential* commodity and a source of capital in the form of eco-tourism and possible carbon trade. This resembles the tendencies of neoliberal conservation which, according to Alice Kelly (2011: 684), turns protected areas into capital "in the form of environmental services, spectacles, and genetic storehouses". Moreover, the acts of enclosure, dispossession and dissolution of commons that produce protected areas, can make them look like examples of primitive accumulation or, in Marxian terms (1976: 875), the separation of producer from the means of production (Kelly 2011: 683, 685).

In this chapter I examine Wide Bay Mengen conservation in relation to questions of commodification, territorialization and the enclosure of commons. I start by discussing how the conservation area was territorialized and how the conserving clan strengthened its relations with the area. As has been the case with LOCs, young educated men—the intellectuals described in the previous chapter—have risen to positions of leadership within their clan and within the conservation association. The conservationists have used territorial strategies to preserve their forests. This has involved both communicating and defining the borders of the area, and also banning certain practices within it. Hence I ask whether conservation in the Wide Bay case amounts to primitive accumulation (Marx 1976: 875) or accumulation by dispossession (see West 2016: 12–18).

9.1 Conservation, enclosure and territorialization

It is accepted wisdom that natural resources do not simply exist, but have to be made. This means that the process by which existing things, such trees, forests, water and so on, come to be regarded as *resources* is inherently social, cultural, economic and political (Bridge 2011: 820; Moore 2015: 145). When logging companies arrived in Wide Bay in the 1990s, natural resources were created in the course of revaluation of local forests as sources of commodities by foreign companies, the state of PNG and the inhabitants of Wide Bay (see Chapter 4). The process created new actors such as local landowner companies (Chapter 5) and conservation associations (Chapter 8), as well as modifying existing ones such as matrilineages. It also generated new interest in the control of land and produced new forms of territorialization (Chapter 3, 4 & 6). Logging involved a complex set of territorializing and de-territorializing practices: concessions established new abstract territories and prescribed specific activities for them (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 388) and Wide Bay Mengen were encouraged to join existing LOCs which thus became new territorial units. As shown in Chapter 4, however, even the Wide Bay Mengen men who embraced logging resisted parts of the de-territorializing logic—especially incorporation into entities they perceived to be too large.

As resource-making is fundamentally also about territorialization and the creation of territories (Bridge 2011: 825), it is no wonder that conservationists have used explicitly territorializing strategies to protect their forests from logging. In the early 1990s the Mengen conservationists conducted a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) with the help of a Kokopo-based national NGO. The PRA is a tool used by conservation and development workers to gather relevant information—especially regarding land and resource use—in rural communities by involving the inhabitants themselves in the data collection. In the Wide Bay case this included community mapping with the goal of locally delineating the conservation area and its borders. In practice this was conducted in the village closest to the conservation area with the participation of its inhabitants as well as people from five other villages. During the sessions the villagers drew a map of the area on the ground using sticks, stones and other markers to indicate rivers, villages and topographical features. After establishing the features of the area, the participants discussed the borders of the intended conservation area and its relation to land areas claimed by other clans. When the map was completed and participants agreed to it, it was documented. According to NGO documents and the facilitators, the PRA was a success as the land boundaries were agreed upon by participants and, most crucially, clans claiming neighboring areas. In addition to this, the conservationists mapped the borders of their area with a GPS device.

The PRA became important later on when logging conducted in the southern Wide Bay Mengen areas expanded north to the borders of the conservation area. As described in the previous chapter, a dispute emerged when logging proponents claimed ownership of parts of the conserved area, which was eventually settled in court in favor of the conservationists because they were able to provide more evidence for their customary ownership of the area including the PRA. Meanwhile, the opposing clan was unable to explain why it had agreed to the borders established in the PRA, but had later

disputed them. Mapping is a powerful tool of territorialization. A map does not only represent a given area in an abstract way, thereby making it legible to an outsider (Scott 1998: 45); maps are also central in the *making* of territories (Neocleous 2003: 418). For example, colonial powers often mapped, renamed and claimed far-away places on maps *before* actually arriving there (Neocleous 2003: 418). The power of the modern map lies in the seeming authorlessness of it; in other words, we are encouraged to forget that someone has produced the picture represented by the map by abstracting, selecting and manipulating (Neocleous 2003: 421). In short, maps help to naturalize the politics of territorialization.

Maps and mapping of experienced space can also "freeze" fluid social situations—like still pictures of a flowing river, to borrow James Scott's (1998: 46) metaphor. Fixing indigenous land boundaries to global standards—with GPS technology for example—may dissolve local flexible practices of re-organizing land relations according to demographic shifts or local dynamics (Kirsch 2006: 203). (Compare this to the "entification" of fluid social groups. See Ernst (1999) & Golub (2007b), also Chapter 5.) As I was told in an interview in 2007 by an employee of the NGO which had facilitated the PRA mapping in the village, "resource mapping" can unduly highlight who owns and who does not own land in a community—creating feelings of being sidelined and strengthening existing factionalism. (For a more thorough discussion of the politics of mapping in Wide Bay, see (Tammisto 2008: 35–39)). The maps of the conservation area helped the conservationists to communicate the borders of the area—another crucial feature of territorialization (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). As noted, maps help to make local situations legible to outsiders and the Wide Bay conservationists used this strategically; the maps of the land tenure situation helped to convince the land court, which enforced their claims to the land. This is an important point, since the constitution of property is not only about the rights people acquire, but who enforces them (Lund 2011: 888). In the Wide Bay case, the land rights of the conservationists were not only recognized by their community members but, in the case of the dispute, also by a state institution. Conversely, as the court decision was widely accepted, people also recognized the authority of the state to grant these rights (Lund 2011: 888).

This recognition had important effects on landholding. The conservationists in Wide Bay decided to conserve the land owned by their clan group and the land dispute and the ensuing court case had shifted authority over that land to the conservationists within the clan. In this they were supported by clan elders, who passed the clan histories over to them. Clan histories are evidence of landownership both locally and in court, and the knowledge of them also constitutes authority *within* the landholding clan (see Chapters 3 & 5). Thus, with the help of their clan elders, the conservationists sidelined those of their fellow clan members who were supporting logging (see Chapter 8). Furthermore, the court decision, as the backing of the state, added new authority to the land claims of the conservationist clan and to the authority of the young conservationists within that clan. For example, when members of the clan who had disputed the conservationists cleared gardens in the conservation area (on fallows to which they had claims), the conservationists brought the matter to the Village Court which backed the prohibition of gardening in the area. This is an example of how customary land tenure practices in contemporary PNG have to, and are mostly able to, incorporate and accommodate

external agencies and processes: the pressures of logging, the rulings of land courts and participation in ICAD projects (Wagner 2007: 29, 31). These situations are also often points of innovation in land tenure (Wagner 2007: 31).

The establishment of a conservation *area* is of course by definition a territorializing action, an attempt by individuals or groups to influence or control people, phenomena and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. Control by territorialization excludes or includes people on the basis of particular geographic boundaries and dictates what people do and how they access resources within them (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 387–88). In the case of conservation this usually involves the prohibition of certain activities such as cutting down trees or hunting. Among the Wide Bay Mengen, too, clear rules about activities within the area were introduced. Logging, gardening and the collection of certain plants were banned, while the hunting of wild pigs was allowed. The prohibition of gardening, the main livelihood activity and a valued form of work, raises the question of enclosures and primitive accumulation, or accumulation by dispossession; conservation practices open up new frontiers of value because protected areas themselves may become forms of capital (Kelly 2011: 689; Peluso and Lund 2011: 668, 671). Conservation in Wide Bay has also become commodified in the sense that conservationists have sought to generate income through it. In the following, I analyze how and why commodification has panned out in Wide Bay.

9.2 Commodifying conservation

In the beginning of the 2000s Wide Bay conservation began moving towards the "integrated conservation as development" (ICAD) model. In 2000 Cconservation committees were formed in Wide Bay villages and in 2002, when the dispute had moved to the land court, the conservationists in Toimtop instituted an organization which was named the "Toimtop Bio-Cultural Conservation and Development Association" (Ewai 2007: 14; Vomne and Rewcastle 2011: 14). With the formation of the new association, local conservationists began to mobilize other villagers to support conservation and forge contacts with national and international partners and donors. The incorporation of the association also marks a shift from the initial idea of conserving the forest for the sake of swidden horticulture and traditional use to regarding conservation as a possible source of income and economic development. In an unpublished and NGO-facilitated draft management plan the Wide Bay conservationists stated:

> *Whilst the original action for conservation was an impulsive action responsive to consequences arising from logging, the acute realisation of traditional resource lose [sic], the emerging scientific and economic value of the biodiversity became overriding reasons for conservation.*

This shift happened gradually over the twenty-year history of conservation in Wide Bay. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the Wide Bay conservationists arranged several surveys, workshops and community mappings in tandem with national and international

NGOs. In 2003, when the land dispute was resolved in favor of the conservationists, the association began working on a village resource center and cooperating with partners (Vomne and Rewcastle 2011: 14). The resource center was funded by the World Bank and was intended to be the basis of a project for recording and archiving local knowledge, especially folklore in the form of stories, myths and songs (see Chapter 8). The center itself was a community house built by the villagers from locally sawn timber and modern building materials bought with the World Bank grant. It was completed in 2007 and has since then served as a community meeting place. It also has guest rooms for housing visitors—anticipating the possibility of eco-tourism.

In the early 2010s the Toimtop organization entered into partnership with a New Zealand volunteer program (Volunteer Service Abroad, VSA) and received a volunteer to help with eco-tourism and devising the management plan. During my fieldwork, Toimtop welcomed its first two tourists, who stayed for a couple of days in the village and visited the conservation area. Even though no tourists had been there before (or since, at the time of writing), the people of Toimtop were familiar with the idea, as the conservation area had brought several visitors over the years, including the scientists surveying the forest, NGO workers and then myself in 2007, all of whom had stayed in the guest house and paid for their keep. To help with the tourism project, VSA also donated a boat and an outboard motor to the association.

In 2011 Toimtop was selected as the site for a base station tower by PNG Telikom, which was expanding its mobile phone coverage to rural areas. Several towers were set up in Pomio District and the sites were chosen not only on the basis of the technical demands of the network, but with reference to "reliable partners" who would look after the towers. Toimtop village was chosen because the conservation association was regarded as having mobilized the community to handle such projects well and it already had necessary infrastructure in place such as a satellite phone. For the conservationists this obviously represented important recognition by the state. The mobile tower, and the satellite telephone prior to it, as well as the resource center, were also tangible—and useful—services which had come to the area as a consequence of the conservation project which also occasionally brought in small sums when villagers helped visitors coming to the conservation area[28] (see also Barker 2008: 195; Wagner 2007: 32 for similar projects in PNG).

Community conservation in Wide Bay has not remained static; rather, it has changed over the years, most significantly in terms of the above described shift from conservation for the sake of swidden horticulture, traditional use and protection of significant places to conservation as development. The chairman of the conservation association told me:

> One of the founding ideas was to conserve nature and culture, but we changed
> it into the direction of commercializing this idea. To include business into

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[28]I too paid the conservation organization for my keep and for food cooked by the women in the village. This was then distributed, with neighboring villages in which I stayed being paid and the women's group in the village receiving a portion of the money. The largest amount was spent on the renovation of the village church according to the association's decision—a project on which the uniformly Catholic community can agree.

this idea.—man, 42 years 2011-07-10

TP: *Wanpela astingting em conserving nature and culture, but mipela changing idea i go long commercializing desla tingting. Long making bisnis i go insait long desla tingting.*

In their review of the relation between conservation and capitalism, Dan Brockington, Rosaleen Duffy and Jim Igoe (2008: 10, 18) argue that from the start of modern conservation, usually associated with the national parks of the US, conservation and capitalism have been allied. Between the period 1985–1995 the number of protected areas rose greatly and, according to the authors, this was when neoliberal governance was at its strongest (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008: 1). Conservation and capitalism became increasingly compatible as neoliberalism, defined by the authors simply as faster and more excessive liberal capitalism, sought to resolve its problems with its own, market-based, means (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008: 175, 190; see also Castree 2008). Other critical studies claim that (market-based) conservation is not only a result of dominant neoliberal ideologies and practices, but also a key driver of them (Büscher and Dressler 2012: 369).

Conservation can bring, and has brought, things previously outside the sphere of markets into them, transforming them into commodities (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008: 175; Kelly 2011: 686; West 2006). Büscher and Dressler (2012: 367, 374) use the term *commodity conservation* for conservation based on assumptions that the commodification of natural resources and the social relations governing them produces win-win outcomes and optimally allocated resources. This concept can also be taken in a very literal sense, because the fictitious notion that land and labor comprise commodities needs constant upholding and legitimation (Büscher and Dressler 2012: 374). This critical literature also demonstrates that local populations are often on the losing side of the deal, excluded from previously lived areas and exploited in various ways. Paige West (2006: 185) discusses how commodified conservation can disengage people and their social institutions from their environment in ways that are, paradoxically, detrimental to the environment. Likewise, the commodification of relationships between people and their work can lead to the loss of social meanings (West 2006: 201, 211).

How do these notions apply to the case of Wide Bay? How should we interpret the commodification of conservation in Wide Bay and the increasing focus on economic development? Conservation emerged as a reaction to proposed logging and it was these logging proposals by local men and foreign loggers that revalued the forests as potential sources of commodities which could be traded for income and services. In fact, in many rural areas of PNG a key motivation for remote rural communities to enter into deals with extractive industries has been the lack or poor condition of government services (Kirsch 1997: 109; Leedom 1997: 44; Filer 1998: 278; Lattas 2011: 90). (See Chapters 4, 5 & 6) This is not only so in PNG, but is also a common dynamic in other marginal, or marginalized, frontier areas which lack government services but contain apt natural resources—such as Borneo (Heikki Wilenius, personal communication 2014).

As other villages and clans began receiving royalties and services from logging (see Chapter 4), the conservationists were increasingly under pressure to justify the

non-use of the forest. In the larger framework of things, this "commodification from below" has been identified as a common dynamic when conservation and other forms of governance become increasingly market-based (Büscher and Dressler 2012: 375). Büscher & Dressler (2012: 375) note two interrelated dynamics connected to this: on the one hand, there are outsiders exerting pressure on local communities to commodify their resources and, on the other, communities are doing it themselves so as not to be excluded from the broader market and socio-political dynamics. Of course, this does not apply to conservationists alone: logging, and recently industrial agriculture, are seen by many inhabitants of Wide Bay as ways to integrate themselves into the political and economic circuits from which they feel marginalized.

Local proponents of logging and oil palm made this explicit by noting, for example, that development does not come for free: that in order to get, one has to give. These statements are in stark contrast to descriptions of locals in PNG passively waiting for development (for example Bainton 2008: 195); rather, local communities are often active in building reciprocal relationships with outside actors (C. Benson 2012: 71; Robbins 2003; West 2006). Further, the rationale for this is frequently not only "economic", in the sense of simple stand-alone transactions (Martin 2013: 4) such as exchanging resources for infrastructure, but related to the importance of exchange in making, reproducing and structuring social relations in Melanesia (Robbins and Akin 1999). Giving, receiving and exchanging are often connected to deep-rooted notions of what it means to be a moral person, as shown by Joel Robbins (2003) in the case of the Urapmin of inland New Guinea. For the Urapmin proper humanity is enacted through exchange and sharing, which are ways to recognize, in a Hegelian sense, the other person. A key anxiety for the Urapmin has been that they have felt they lacked things of interest to Europeans and Australians, and thus have been unable to enact their humanity vis-à-vis these others. According to Robbins, many Urapmin hoped that land and resources could be such a medium of exchange and recognition, thereby making the Urapmin once again properly human within the larger framework of the state and globalized economy into which they had been integrated—but in a marginal position (Robbins 2003: 19–20, 22).

Sharing and recognition are important practices in Mengen ideology, and regarded as key values. (In fact, Sulka and Mengen conservation associations have, somewhat schematically, listed the most important "traditional values", which include sharing and recognition.) The recognition of others, *luksave* in Tok Pisin and *glang lomtan* in Mengen, was centrally important in people's discussions and evaluations of the moral aspects of each other's actions. Generous helping and giving to those whom one sees to be in need was a central feature of recognition and what people said was the "way of the ancestors" (TP: *kastom*; M: *mloai* (habit, custom) *ta ngan* (of the) *ravulung* (elders)). (See Chapter 2 on "work" as socially productive activity.)

9.3 Sharing the land or exchanging benefits?
The politics of commodification

In Mengen land use practices, people with legitimate claims to the land or particular gardening areas could "close" them to clearance. Usually this applied to single gardens and arose when multiple persons had access to them. For example, a member of a landowning clan wishing to plant a larger garden in anticipation of a ritual may prohibit affines from clearing an area to which they have user rights. These actions usually created only minor disputes, if at all, and were easily resolved in village meetings. However, the categorical enclosure of a whole area was something different. The prohibition of gardening was not only a question of livelihood, but had important emotional and social aspects to it. What made the question even more sensitive was the fact that gardening rights were passed along on the basis of multiple relations whereas landownership was vested, ideally, in matrilineal corporate groups (also Eves 2011: 359; Scott 2007: 61). Thus many people cultivated land that belonged to a different clan group in an expression of generalized reciprocity (see Chapters 2 & 3 on land use). As the members of the conservationist clan had their gardens on other clans' land, but had taken their own land out of the circuit of swidden horticulture, this might raise problems. Indeed a committee member of the conservation association took this issue up in a meeting. He noted that, especially for older people, gardens are a big deal (TP: *bikpela samting*) and, as the conservationists "eat from the land of others", the ban on gardening should be properly explained so that no problems would arise.

In fact the conservationists were well aware of this and the potential sensitivity of banning people from cultivating land to which they had long standing user rights and to which they felt attached on the basis of the work done by them and their ancestors (see Chapter 2 & 3). I asked the chairman of the conservation association about this in an interview. He noted that the ban on gardening also applied to the members of his own clan, that is, to the owners of the area, so it was not simply a matter of excluding others from the land. As the chairman noted:

> The benefits they previously received from going in [to the forest] and working gardens will be replaced. They have no more rights to garden now. In the interest of conservation, we moved them out, but our idea is that if we commercialize [conservation], any benefit that comes from the conservation area will benefit the whole community. So in a way, we didn't just block them out and pull [our area] out, but we changed [the user rights].—man, 42 years 2011-07-10

> TP: *Olsem desla benefit we ol i kisim bipo long ol i go insait wokim gaden, nau bai replace. I no mo rights bilong ol long gaden nau, ananit long control na wanem bilong conservation mipela i muvim aut desla, but desla idea bilong mipela sapos mipela i commercializim na any benefit em i kam out long desla area em i conserve, em komuniti em i olgeta lain i benefit. So in a way, mipela i no just blokim aut na pulim aut, but mipela i senisim.*

According to him, the benefits received from conservation will be, and were, enjoyed

by the whole community, and not only by the conserving clan. Thus in his view the conservationists had not denied the user rights of others, but merely *replaced* them with other benefits. This is an interesting notion. If Wide Bay Mengen land use is seen as reciprocal exchange, or exchange that strives for a balanced outcome, then the legitimation and acceptance of conservation depends partly on whether people accept "benefits and services" as a substitute for land in land-to-land exchanges between landholding groups.

Here Joel Robbins' and David Akin's (1999) discussion of exchanges and their role in structuring societies in Melanesia is instructive. In Melanesian societies exchanges are often privileged sites in structuring society, in as much as different kinds of exchanges are used to make and reproduce different kinds of relations (Robbins and Akin 1999: 8, 39). Robbins and Akin use the concept of "spheres of exchange" to make sense of the different kinds of structuring exchanges. In their model, a sphere of exchange is defined by three things: the relationship between the transactors, the modality or type of exchange and the objects exchanged (Robbins and Akin 1999: 10). In this model, one of the three aspects may "override" the others in defining the sphere, and hence the morality, of the exchange. Objects and relations can be defining but, according to Robbins and Akin (1999: 13–14), Melanesians very often stress the modality of exchange in creating different kinds of relationships, and the modalities of exchange structure society. Or to put it simply, *how* the exchange is done often matters more than what is being exchanged. For example, if kinship relations have previously been defined by the sharing (modality) of food (object), sharing money and store-bought commodities might not disrupt the relation as the modality of sharing remains constant even though the objects change. Conversely, if relatives start selling food to each other, they risk their relationship as relatives (Robbins and Akin 1999: 13–14).

Thus the substitution of land for benefits in reciprocal exchanges between clan groups can be acceptable if people stress the modality of exchange more than the objects exchanged or, more conventionally, accept that benefits and services from conservation can be exchanged for user-rights to land in exchanges that define the relations between clan groups. This indeed seems to have been the case, as people for the most part acknowledged that not logging the forest has its advantages and that conservation also brings tangible benefits—albeit more slowly than logging and not so much in the form of cash income. This does not mean that it was uniformly accepted; some members of the clan which had lost the land dispute against the conservationist clan still regarded the issue as unresolved, or claimed to have been "left out" by their cross-cousins (see Chapters 2 & 5 on the moral expectations of cross-cousin relations). Other inhabitants of the village noted that maybe gardening could be allowed on the slopes close to the village, while not disagreeing with conservation or the outcome of the land dispute. The ban on collecting roof thatch materials was periodically broken—by members of the conserving clan against the wishes of their clan leaders as well as by others—in a spirit of silent defiance. Both the ban and breaking it were occasionally frowned upon, but in general it seemed to me that people agreed that it was good to let the plants (TP: *kanda*) used for thatch re-grow. Nor did the local conservationists take any significant action—such as demanding compensation or bringing the matter to village courts—against those breaching this ban, though they enforced the ban on gardening

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by taking those who had cleared a garden in the area to the village court.

In the case of community conservation in Wide Bay, the shift towards the integrated approach and commodification of conservation was not an imposition from outside actors, such as donors or NGOs, but rather a consequence of land-holding dynamics and the commodification of the forest by logging. Many studies of conservation in PNG have noted that in order to be successful, conservation has to bring tangible benefits to the local people, who often live in remote and poor areas (C. Benson 2012: 76; Kirsch 1997: 108–9; Wagner 2007: 34; Helden 2009: 156–58). John Wagner (2007) notes that people living near a conservation project on the eastern coast of mainland New Guinea obviously care about the environment but, as local use of the environment is not very intensive, conservation of large areas is not justified from the local perspective. In such a case, for a globally justified conservation project to be successful, currently unavailable services and income must be provided (Wagner 2007: 34). On the other hand, as Flip van Helden (2009: 162) suggests, competing with extractive industries in terms of money and services is often very difficult, if not impossible, for conservationists. In the case of Wide Bay, where government services were scarce and income often hard to come by, these caveats also applied. As I hope to have shown, a further important factor is that because conservationists had taken their area out of the exchanges of gardening land between the clans, they felt they had to provide something else in return in order not to disrupt the moral economy and relations between the clan groups.

For such a replacement to be successful, others have to recognize and accept it, something often demonstrated in subtle ways rather than through explicit negotiations and arguments. In fact, for reasons of respect, the Mengen were unwilling to criticize each other openly because being criticized in public was seen as embarrassing; generally people did not want to subject others to that, often observing that it was "hard" for them to say something to someone's face. Indeed, the public critique of one of the conservationists, discussed in the previous chapter, prompted his mother to compose a wailing song for him. Obviously, arguments and public discussions did take place, but attention should also be paid to people's seemingly everyday and mundane comments, which were often not only propositional or simple descriptive statements about how people perceived things or their analyses thereof, but implicitly value-laden. They were thus performative in as much through them people sought to assert, reject, strengthen or renegotiate the framework by which actions were valued (Graeber 2001: 75, 88; Martin 2013: 181, 213).

In the following section I present an example of such a statement, demonstrating that, far from being simply descriptive, it was intensely value-laden; I also discuss how it connects with the political debates in the village.

"Kastom is not about giving for free"

Once when returning home after a day spent in the gardens, I stopped to chat with one of the local conservationists in front of his house. We talked about the ban on gardening and soon after he said that he was irritated by other villagers' notions that in villages things are given for free. Indeed, it was common for people to contrast life in the village

with that in towns and on plantations by emphasizing that in the village one is not only free to work at one's own pace, but that things are also free (see Chapter 7). Growing visibly agitated, my interlocutor asserted that these people have misunderstood the customs and tradition (*pasin* and *kastom* in Tok Pisin respectively) which are not about giving for free, but about exchange. For example, offering food to any man who comes to a men's house is not about giving food for free, but about exchange, because, "when I give you food in my village, I know you will give me the same in yours," he said.

His comments and agitation initially surprised me and made me wonder what he was making such a big deal about. After all, is not "giving for free" much the same thing as giving based on the trust that others will treat you in the same way in the future? And why did other people's comments to the effect that "giving for free" was characteristic of village life irritate him so much? Clearly, something important was at stake, but I could not figure out what it was. Only later did it occur to me that probably what was at issue was the role of the conservation area once gardening had been prohibited, and the substitution of land and user rights with benefits from conservation. And in fact, giving for free, or sharing, may not at all be the same thing as generalized reciprocity, as Thomas Widlok (2013) has argued. Widlok (2013: 19) claims that sharing is not generalized reciprocity, or a neutral baseline from which other forms of transfers have evolved, but a complex social arrangement in its own right. Sharing can be characterized as giving without expectation of return and as something often initiated by the receiver through conversation (e.g., through statements of not having) or even by mere co-presence, which obliges others to give what they have (Widlok 2013: 12, 19). Sharing, then, does not presuppose the willingness to give—in fact people may hide possessions in order not to share them—but a willingness to give up a possession in order to remain on good terms with others and fulfill one's social obligation (Widlok 2013: 21, 23).

Day-to-day village life in Wide Bay was indeed characterized by sharing as defined above. There was a strong feeling that one must share those things one can be seen to possess, and the mere presence or arrival of a person often created the obligation to share what one had at the moment, especially food, betel nut and the like. Visibility was a key thing: if others saw something that one had, it would have been incredibly rude not to offer it to them. Conversely, a woman whom I was observing preparing food for a ceremony in her cooking house quickly hid her taro shoots when she heard visitors coming. She said that if the visitors saw them, they would demand them and she would rather plant them herself later on. The ubiquitous baskets people carried were used not only to store personal items, but also to protect them from the "demanding gaze" of others. And often, when people were asked for tobacco or betel nut and had none, they would open their baskets and let others verify the lack for themselves—lest they be thought lying and greedy. Referring to these kinds of situations, Robert Foster (1995: 210) notes that in instances where seeing elicits desire and the obligation to give, controlling who sees what constitutes control over property. Hiding a desirable object from view saves it from the demands of others while, on the other hand, by putting it on display, one elicits the desire of others—which is also a form of power (Foster 1995: 210). (See also the dynamics of concealing and revealing in land issues in Chapters 3 & 5.)

In the short term, no return was expected for things shared in this way, but obviously if one did not share, one soon acquired the reputation of being stingy and greedy—and, indeed, an immoral person. But how does this relate to whether sharing is a misinterpretation of *kastom* or indeed its central characteristic? Keir Martin (2013: 7, 60, 101) has discussed how notions of tradition, or *kastom*, and statements of its proper meaning, are used by the Tolai of New Britain—for whom *kastom* is a shifting signifier whose meanings are contested—in debates about the extent of reciprocity and obligation. For example, urban Tolai with wages sometimes attempt to delimit the meaning of *kastom* to rituals, rather than to a more general practice of sharing, in order to delimit the claims for a share their wealth by their rural kin. Conversely, grassroots villagers might note that the *kastom* of wealthy relatives—even when complying with the formal rules of the rituals—is not real *kastom*, as it is not embedded in reciprocal networks at the grassroots level and does not exemplify the reciprocal spirit (Martin 2013: 126). By emphasizing that *kastom* was not sharing, that is, giving without expectation of return for its own sake, but reciprocal exchange, the conservationists were drawing attention to the fact that they still participated in reciprocal exchanges, even though they did not share their land.

There are good reasons for seeing everyday land use among the Wide Bay Mengen as the product of sharing. People gardened quite freely in areas where they had some sort of claim, and also cleared new gardens in primary forest which, as already noted, constituted a strong right of use to the particular tract, regardless of which clan owned it (see Chapters 2 & 3 on land use). Put this way, land use resembled demand-sharing. Thus withholding one's clan land from the—even if only implicit—sharing expectations of others would be immoral. However, from another perspective it makes just as much sense to argue that the use of land among the Wide Bay Mengen was generalized reciprocity, or exchange. After all, everybody cultivated land belonging to others, which amounted to identical exchange between the clans. In my opinion, however, it is beside the point to go to great lengths to establish whether land use among the Mengen was unequivocally demand-sharing or generalized reciprocity. Both points of view make sense depending on perspective and the aspects one wants to highlight. And indeed, what one wants to highlight is really the crux of the matter.

Arguing, like the man quoted above, that life in the village was exchange rather than sharing, was, in my interpretation, a statement intended to justify the conservation area. *If* land use was seen as sharing, then by enclosing their clan land, the conservationists stopped sharing it. The land was merely there, visible to others, like food on the table one does not offer to those who pop into one's house and see it. If land use was perceived as sharing, then the conservationists would have broken a central moral rule. The conservationist was obviously aware of this possible interpretation, which his comment was meant to counter by embedding conservation in the moral economy. Because if the transfer of land, food and so on was viewed as exchange—no matter how diffuse and how uncertain the return—the conservationists had a much stronger case when arguing that they adhered to the moral order despite enclosing their land, because they had replaced the object of exchange, in this case land, with benefits. Seen in this context, the statement by the conservationist makes perfect sense and one can rather clearly see what the "big deal" was.

These are large issues acted out with small gestures and brief comments. Often these were said in seemingly off-hand way, as simple asides, or stated in even more subtle ways, such as by raising one's eye-brows in a knowing fashion when saying that a neighbor had decided to sell the meat of her dead pig rather than giving it to a village member who had customary obligations to contribute elsewhere—or by commenting that in the village everything was free. Looking back at my fieldwork, I remember a number of instances in which such statements were made, which I often overlooked or did not record. Eventually, however, I reached a saturation point, after which I began to realize that these were not only random comments, but part of a discourse which, some time later, I finally began to understand. It is, I suspect, a familiar experience for those engaged in ethnographic fieldwork for a certain event, often something seemingly insignificant, to remain in the memory as something of a mystery. And then, long after fieldwork has come to an end, one reads something which provides a new, organized perspective on material gathered in the field. For me, the mysterious moment was the statement quoted above, which only later made sense to me in reference to Widlok's (2013) and Martin's (2013) writings.

The small, apparently throwaway yet meaningful statements discussed here provide evidence that the moral order was constantly being recreated and contested just as the morality of people's actions was constantly being evaluated and revalued. This took place both in explicit debates (see Chapters 5 & 8), and also through everyday comments which were performative in as much they built and reshaped the moral framework in and according to which people's actions were evaluated. And this in turn makes small statements—multiplied again and again—part of large issues since, as David Graeber (2001: 85) following Terence Turner has noted, the biggest political struggles are not only about appropriating value but about *defining* it. The Mengen scenario, in this regard, strongly resembles the debates on the extent of *kastom* and renegotiations of moral obligations among the Tolai described by Keir Martin (2013: 7, 177), and not only in content, with *kastom* being used as a "shifting signifier". The debates in both groups rested on seemingly descriptive statements which were used to assert or destabilize certain notions, a process which always involves language and language ideologies (Martin 2013: 89). The central issues, as Martin (2013: 181, 223) puts it, are the contexts in which people assert or reject certain characterizations of economic transactions and that these debates are often struggles over the applicability of different moral visions. Indeed, in the Wide Bay case, acceptance of conservation rested partly on how people characterized land use and the benefits received from conservation. The fine nuances of whether an action was evaluated as exchange or sharing are important. These negotiations, conducted in the Mengen villages with seemingly ordinary statements and fleeting gestures, were at the very root of village politics which, in their turn, profoundly affected the outcomes of natural resource projects in the Wide Bay area, just as natural resource projects like logging, initiated by "outsiders", informed and affected the politics in the village.

9.4 Conclusions

The Wide Bay conservationists have shifted the conservation of their forests from opposition to logging to an approach in which conservation and economic development are combined. Numerous studies have documented and analyzed related shifts in conservation practices globally and thus Peluso and Lund (2011: 671) call this a "nearly universal turn" in conservation practices. The logic behind the shift to the ICAD model or commodified conservation is that conservation will be better accepted locally if it brings with it economic development and monetary income (Kirsch 1997: 105; Wagner 2007: 32; West 2006: 32–35). Yet many critical studies have documented the problems of this model by noting that it results in conservation ceasing to be instigated for the sake of preserving environments while economic development becomes something given in return for conservation, rather than an end in itself (Büscher and Arsel 2012: 357; Kelly 2011: 684; West 2006: 34, 39). Conservation practices have also been linked to the enclosure of common lands, the introduction of private accumulation and the dispossession of local populations (Kelly 2011).

In this chapter I have attempted to show that in Wide Bay the explicit commodification of conservation was not only or even mainly something imposed by powerful actors on local populations. Transnational and national NGOs have helped the Mengen conservationists to engage in generating income from conservation, but the local conservationists have been active agents in this initiative. Nor is the commodification of conservation an outcome of an emerging commodification logic. Rather, the initial goal of the Mengen conservationists was primarily to prevent the destruction of their lived and socially valuable environment from logging, although it was the possibility of logging that helped the Wide Bay Mengen to re-value their forests as possible commodities and sources of income. For many Mengen logging presented an opportunity to develop the marginalized Wide Bay area and gain income. As other clans began to receive royalties from logging and as logging companies brought tangible benefits, such as roads, there was increasing pressure for the conservationists to justify conservation. (As John Wagner (2007: 34) notes, globally justified conservation might not seem so locally, when local uses of the environment are not very intensive.)

The Wide Bay conservationists prohibited gardening in the conservation area. On the one hand, this was an attempt to make the conserved areas conform to outside notions of "untouched nature" and so help to gain income from the conserved area. Later, the conservationists decided to retain the ban, as the unused forests might be sources of income via carbon credits. It was this that the president of the conservation association characterized as sacrificing the forest in return for development. On the other hand, banning gardening was also probably related to the dispute between different clans over ownership of the area: as land use among the Mengen creates claims to land areas, forbidding others to use it demonstrates and cements authority over it. In my interpretation, by banning gardening in the conservation area, the conservationists highlighted that their clan owned the land and had authority over it. This is comparable to the LOC director's wanting to highlight his authority over a disputed area by asserting that his clan should receive the premium payments (see Chapter 5). Moreover, it was a way of pursuing the value of the autonomy of the clan and its link to the land.

The prohibition of gardening in the conservation area made the acquisition of income even more important: as the Mengen conservationists cultivated the land of other clans—as was common in Mengen land use practices—but did not let others cultivate their own land, they argued that they had replaced the user rights of others with benefits accruing from conservation. In general, this substitution of user rights for benefits seemed to be accepted by most of the villagers. The issue was sensitive, however, and as I demonstrated in the last part of the chapter, seemingly small characterizations of land use as exchange or sharing were in fact about much larger issues. In the case of Wide Bay conservation they were about moral evaluation of the conservationists' ban on gardening: if land use was characterized as sharing, the conservationists did not share their land and risked the possibility of being evaluated as greedy by their fellow villagers. However, if land use was characterized as exchange and generalized reciprocity between the landowning clans, then moral justification of the ban on gardening was easier, because the conservationists could argue that they had merely substituted user rights for benefits from conservation. As noted, this characterization seemed to be accepted by others, but it still needed to be reinforced by discourse. The prohibition of socially important practices, such as gardening, in order to attract socially important benefits, could be regarded as a productive contradiction in Wide Bay conservation, that is, a contradiction that accounts for the dynamics of conservation. Likewise, the simultaneous attempts by the Mengen conservationists to cement their authority over their clan land and to take into account inter-relations between the clans by sharing benefits was a concrete way to settle the productive contradiction between the values of clan autonomy and inter-clan relations (see Chapter 2).

The establishment of the conservation area and the prohibition of certain activities raised questions about the enclosure of commons and primitive accumulation. The conservation area of the Wide Bay Mengen was less than 3,000 ha., while the average size of protected areas in PNG is 38,000 ha (in total 32 WMAs and 2 national parks, of which 11 are over 10,000 ha, 11 under 1,000 ha and 12 between 1,10–000,000 ha.—figures which are based on the listing of conserved areas in (Shearman et al. 2008: 102).) The Mengen conservation area, as a small portion of the total area used by the villagers, did not completely separate the villagers from their means of production. Relevant to this is Marx's thesis that at a certain point quantitative changes become qualitative changes. In his argument Marx was talking about owners of capital, claiming that at a certain point capitalist production necessitates that the owners of capital, or capital personified, devote all their working time to the appropriation and control of the labor of others. As long as they participate in production, they remain hybrid worker-capitalists, or small masters. Thus, for example, the masters of a trade were restricted by the guild system to a limited number of workers, and thus prevented from becoming full capitalists. (Marx 1976: 423). This is an important notion: the limited enclosure—both in terms of limited restrictions and the limited size of the area—did not yet amount to a situation which could be characterized as primitive accumulation. The conservationists were for the large part engaged in the same kind of work and moral economy as the rest, and they were not in a position to control the labor of others or accumulate on the basis of it.

This does not mean that the conservation area cannot become a means of accumu-

lation. Kelly (2011: 689) notes that dispossession and accumulation can be separated by long stretches of time, while private property is not a prerequisite for private accumulation. Although the conservation area was not private property and nor was it totally enclosed, as villagers were able to hunt and gather there, it is imaginable that it could be utilized for private accumulation—through tourism, for example. Indeed, the control over conservation by the leaders of the "conservationist clan" could result in their accumulating capital without dispossessing their fellow clan members of the communally owned land: a variation of "accumulation without dispossession" (Paudel 2016: 1007). I say imaginable, because private accumulation on a significant scale has not happened in this case.

Finally, and related to the productive contradiction of "sacrificing" gardening to get development, there was another contradictory aspect to Wide Bay conservation. In order to protect the culturally significant landscape from the devastation of large scale logging, the conservationists had to forbid some of the practices that have rooted people in the landscape and made it socially valuable in the first place. The local conservationists acknowledged, however, that the conservation area contained both primary forest and old fallows and abandoned settlements, that is, they have not tried to portray the area as ahistorical and detached from the social relations that shaped it (c.f. West 2006: 133, 218). With the possibility of logging and later the *de facto* alienation of land through large scale land leases, Wide Bay conservation can be thought of as a counter-enclosure, namely, as a way for peasants to limit the accumulation of capital (Akram-Lodhi 2007: 1445). The ability to make counter-enclosures hinges on the control of land (Akram-Lodhi 2007: 1450)—something which the Wide Bay conservationists very well knew. Indeed, in order to protect their territory as a life-world, as something "produced by the society it contains" (Baletti 2012: 578), and to put limits on extractive capital, the Wide Bay conservationists have had to adopt territorial strategies and cement their clan's ownership of the area through state institutions.

Photo 29: Rainforest within the conservation area

Photo 30: A local conservationist removes loggers' markings from the conservation area

Photo 31: Members of the "Conservationist clan" mark the conservation area borders. (The lines of lime under the man's eyes are used to deter leeches.)

Photo 32: Participants at a land dispute meeting in Sampun village

Photo 33: A local conservation activist in the Toimtop Resource Center

Photo 34: Sharing: women giving each other betel nuts

10. Conclusions

In this thesis I set out to study two questions. The first was how the Wide Bay Mengen produced their livelihood and by doing so a socially meaningful environment as well as reproduce their society. The second was how the Wide Bay Mengen take part in natural resource extraction, industrial agriculture and state formation on the resource frontier. By discussing swidden horticulture, large-scale logging, wage labor on plantations and locally initiated community conservation, I have attempted to answer both and show how the two questions are intertwined. The life of the rural Wide Bay Mengen needs to be understood in relation to the intensified logging and industrial agriculture projects in the Pomio district. Likewise, in order to understand how these projects proceeded and how the Wide Bay Mengen took part in them or resisted them, one needs to understand how the Wide Bay Mengen lived their lives. In this thesis I have shown that there is no uniform way in which "the Mengen" engaged with these projects. On the contrary, the Wide Bay Mengen, like other inhabitants of Pomio, have very different notions on how natural resources should be utilized and what in fact counts as a "natural resource". However, as I have attempted to show, the disagreements over these projects were often disagreements over key Mengen values, namely how to establish socially productive relations with other people and the land.

The Wide Bay Mengen regarded valued social relations to be a result of work, or "hard work". Work, as the Mengen understood it, was socially productive activity, or activity that produced or maintained valued social relations. Work thus comprised different kinds of activity from gardening to the holding of ceremonies. Care and nurture given to other people were the most paradigmatic forms of "work" and acts of giving food the most paradigmatic forms of care. Because of this gardening and food plants were key media through which the Mengen related to each other. The Mengen understood their social relations to be based on two important principles or values: first the autonomy of the matrilineal clan and second its link to its land and the socially productive relations between the clans. These two values were in a *productive contradiction* with each other, because they presupposed each other. In order for the matrilineal clan to reproduce itself, its members had to marry people from other clans. Likewise, clan-distinctions were needed to allow for proper reproduction of society. As I have noted throughout this thesis, the relation of these two values was a *productive contradiction*, because in order to pursue one, one had to pursue the other. Likewise, pursuing one of them too much happened at the cost of the other, and could lead to conflict. From the sharing of gardens to internal politics LOCs or the establishment of conservation areas, Mengen politics were about accommodating these two values.

This does not mean that the Wide Bay Mengen simply and mechanically reproduced a routinized social order. On the contrary, as I have shown, in the complex interactions with state officials, company representatives and NGO activists as well as the different ways of engaging with the environment, the Mengen and their environment were changed. Likewise, the Mengen have consciously incorporated different value systems in their lives. Young people moved to plantations to live out individualistic pursuits, while at the same time channeled their wages back to villages for socially reproductive purposes, thus converting one kind of value into another. Some LOC directors could use their

kin connections and authority for their own personal enrichment, while others pursued communal co-operation through logging.

In this thesis I argue that the Wide Bay Mengen have retained their value and socio-cultural order despite long and intensive engagement with commodity relations, a globalized resource economy and various kinds of state orders. The Wide Bay Mengen have been able to incorporate new practices, things and people in this order without fundamentally changing it. For example, when money and commodities were used for social reproduction, wage labor was converted into "work", while alliances and disputes between landowning clans within LOCs have for their part reproduced the clan order. To borrow Jane Fajans (1997: 284) these new practices have been valued along old criteria and the social values have been enduring. One important reason why social values of the Wide Bay Mengen have been so enduring is—I argue—that the Wide Bay Mengen have retained control of their own land and livelihoods.

By this I do not mean that "the material base" simply determines a "socio-cultural superstructure". As I have shown in this thesis, social life happens in and through the environment in general and in the Wide Bay Mengen case specifically through material media such as plants or places. As Jerry Jacka (2015: 237, 239) notes, socio-ecological systems are complex and contextual, and it would be fallacy to think that ecological impacts would not impact the local people. Jacka's (2015) notions bases on his research with the Ipilli living near the large Porgera mine in PNG. The mine's impacts have been huge both environmentally and socially. For example, some Ipilli are classed as landowners, who benefit from the mine, but many have been excluded and this has resulted in grave social problems (Jacka 2015: 233–34). Conversely, as Stuart Kirsch (2001: 174) notes, many socio-cultural practices make only sense in a given environmental context. For example, on Marshall Islands canoes are made from certain trees people tend and the knowledge of making canoes is passed on in the concrete act of teaching, which is not possible without the trees (Kirsch 2001: 174). Discussing the massive environmental destruction caused by the Ok Tedi mine in PNG, Kirsch (2001: 174–75) further notes that subsistence agriculture for the Yonggom people living near the mine was simultaneously about livelihood and belonging. As I have shown in this thesis, this held true for the Wide Bay Mengen as well. Their work—understood as socially productive activity—created and reproduced a meaningful environment in which the pursuits of value made sense.

10.1 The making of people, places and social relations

Thematically this thesis has especially focused on social reproduction, place making and state formation in the context of large-scale natural resource extraction. I have also looked closely at articulations between the social production systems of the Wide Bay Mengen and the commodity economy. This theme has been a supplementary strand running alongside and uniting the questions of social reproduction, place making and state formation. In what follows, I draw together the discussions in the study by summarizing how I have developed the themes in the different chapters. As I noted in the introduction, these themes are not separate and discrete; rather, they comprise

different aspects of how the Mengen related to each other, their environment and people from elsewhere in the course of their productive activities.

Social reproduction

A central theme which I have addressed is how the Wide Bay Mengen reproduced their society and particularly their social groups. The most central of these groups were the landowning matrilineal clans and the land-using groups composed of members of different clans. The multi-clan groups could be fairly short-lived, such as when people shared a garden, or longer-lasting, in the form of individual families or villages. In the two chapters on swidden horticulture, I showed how the Mengen regarded valued social relations—intra- and inter-clan alike—as being the result of "hard work". Work as socially productive activity comprised a variety of activities, from swidden horticulture to the holding of rituals, yet these seemingly different endeavors had the same "underlying schema" (Fajans 1997) or "value template" (Munn 1992) for producing or maintaining valued social relations. Care and nurture given to others lay at the heart of "work" and for the Mengen feeding and acts of giving food were the most prototypical forms of care. However, a variety of practices, such as wage labor or support in land dispute cases, could be valued according to this schema and hence integrated into Mengen social life (see also Fajans 1997: 11, 269). Work, or socially productive activity, was thus a key source of value for the Mengen. As I have noted, the two main social groups, the clan and the land-using group, also represented central cosmological principles (see Scott 2007) and values. Work, as the production of valued social relations, created depending on the context both the values of clan autonomy and inter-clan relations. The two values formed a productive contradiction in Mengen society, inasmuch as they presupposed each other and were to a certain degree always in tension (also Jorgensen 1981: 52; Robbins 2004: 184–86).

Throughout my thesis I show how this productive contradiction or pursuit of the two values—clan autonomy and inter-clan relations—was reiterated in social life and especially in questions regarding the land and natural resources. By this I do not mean that the Mengen simply or mechanically reproduced an old cultural order. On the contrary, the productive contradiction could be accommodated in very different ways, or people could, and did, pursue different values. In Chapters 4 and 5 on logging, I show that the coming of logging to Wide Bay emphasized questions of landownership in a new way and, therefore, questions of group belonging also came to the fore in new ways. Undoubtedly, a given area of land was owned by a given clan, but as people living on the land, whatever their clan, developed strong user rights and emotional links to it, logging posed the question of who should decide about the use of the newly created natural resources. As I have shown, logging politics among the Wide Bay Mengen revolved around this question. Most of the landowner companies established by Wide Bay Mengen men were formed along community lines, incorporating people from several clans. However, clan claims to land resurfaced in different ways. The issues of who made the decisions concerning logging and how benefits would be distributed also raised questions of how the groups were defined (and by whom). For example, some Mengen clans were internally divided into disputing subclans, while others decided to "act as

one" and deliberately did away with subdivisions.

When one Wide Bay Mengen clan group decided not to allow logging on its land, its members had to address exactly the same questions as clans involved in logging. Not everybody in the clan initially agreed with conservation, and its early days were characterized by struggles within the clan group about who had the authority to make decisions concerning land use. Meanwhile, the clan group's claim to its land area was being challenged by another clan. As I discussed in Chapter 9, the conservationists ultimately won the disputes and went on to present the conservation initiative as a community project. This was one way of dealing with the productive contradiction: while the conservation area was held by the conservationist clan, services and benefits from conservation were distributed to all community members. The Wide Bay Mengen had not signed off the lands to plantation development, and wage labor on plantations elsewhere did not create similar tensions between the clans. Mengen workers channeled substantial parts of their wages back to the villages, however, sometimes because of on-the-spot requests by relatives and sometimes for projects such as ceremonial gifts. Indeed, some people had gone to the plantations specifically to gather money for their relatives' ceremonies.

The Mengen thus incorporated a number of new practices, social forms and places into their lives by valuing them according to their "underlying schema" of socially productive activity. However—and this is crucial—it did not happen mechanically or in a uniform way. On the contrary, as I have shown in this thesis, integral to questions concerning logging, conservation and the use of commodities were debates about how the different practices should be valued. For example, did the distribution of conservation benefits constitute an adequate substitution for user rights, given that the conservationists had banned swidden horticulture on their land? Was support provided in land dispute cases by members of a different clan "hard work", as men involved in logging claimed? Under what conditions was cash cropping socially productive? Was the reciprocal ideal of village life about giving for free or about exchange? The evaluation of different practices took place both in explicit debates and disputes as well as through everyday discourse and practices.

Place making

Places were, for the Wide Bay Mengen, important signs of work, and thus embodiments of personal and group histories. They were one of the material media, or signs, through which people conceptualized and communicated social relations (also Kirsch 2006; Stasch 2003; 2009; 2013). "Place" is also an important concept in political ecology and environmental anthropology, as it provides a holistic way to think about human-environmental relations that is attentive to concrete material circumstances, politics and socio-cultural meanings (Basso 1996; Biersack 2006; Jacka 2015; Rodman 1992). All human life is emplaced, in that it happens in and through places, but in different ways. In my thesis I have focused on the specific means by which the Wide Bay Mengen made places, related to them and related to people through them. In Chapters 2 and 3 I show how Mengen swidden horticulture in particular and everyday practices

in general created places that comprised a deeply social and historical environment. Establishing gardens, orchards, settlements and burial sites all created places which in turn became visual signs, or indexes, of the people who had created them. The productive contradiction between the landowning clan and the land-using group had its spatial equivalents: places created through dwelling emplaced both the landowning clan and the land-using group, while the origin places linked the clan to its land area (e.g. Scott 2007). Because of this, places featured prominently in Mengen clan histories.

As I have shown, the relationship of the Mengen with these significant places was not static, but one of active engagement. For example abandoned villages (M: *knau*) were cleared for gardens or fruit trees felled in order to remove someone's traces from the landscape, while the coming of large-scale logging obviously posed important questions regarding the socially important landscape. In their deals with logging companies, Mengen LOC directors sought to exclude relevant places from logging, or at least those that mattered to them. In a similar vein, all apart from one of the Wide Bay Mengen LOCs were named after significant places, a choice whereby the men involved sought to mobilize the groups associated with them (see also Leedom 1997: 37, 62) and claim authority over the designated areas. Whether prompted by a cynical attempt to garner authority or to involve the whole community, however, it was a profoundly Mengen way of engaging with community members, the environment and people from elsewhere. Others were concerned by the destruction of significant places and chose not to allow logging on their land. As I discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, these concerns were initially voiced by older women, whose younger relatives then organized the opposition to logging as conservation. Like logging, conservation had its own contradictory relations to the landscape. As I showed in Chapter 9, in order to embed conservation in the moral economy, the conservationists had to pursue the commodification of conservation. This in turn prompted them to ban swidden horticulture in the area, one of the practices that had made the area significant in the first place. Notwithstanding the ban, the conservationists acknowledged the history of the area and did not seek to erase people's connections with it.

Places, as Margaret Rodman (1992) notes, are not only locally created, but are also embodiments of multiscalar interactions: logging camps, logging roads and plantations all radically altered the Wide Bay landscape and became signs of people's engagement with logging and plantation companies (see Bell 2015). In Chapters 6 and 7 I discussed how the newly established plantation at Masrau embodied different kinds of historical and political processes (Biersack 2006; Rodman 1992; Stasch 2011). Using Rupert Stasch's (2011b) concept of "poetical density", I noted how the plantation not only embodied multiple kinds of relations and socio-cultural orders, but that for the Mengen these were also profoundly ambivalent. For example, the plantation was a site of commodity relations and alienated labor—at once both desirable and oppressive. The Mengen, both workers and non-workers alike, contrasted the plantation, as a sign of those processes, with other places that embodied or stood for different kinds of orders and relations. In doing so they made sense of the different orders and reflected on their position relative to them; indeed, comparison is a common way for rural people to analyze their positions relative to other places (Stasch). Finally, the Wide Bay Mengen used the different places to live out or escape the different kinds of relations associated

with them (see Stasch 2013), and pursue different forms of value.

State formation

One of the historical and political processes embodied by the new plantation was the imposition of state or state-like order. Like commodity relations, this was a very ambivalent issue for most. On the one hand, some Mengen workers actively took part in constructing a state-like order, while others—when facing the threat of police violence—fled the plantation: another concrete example of how people moved between places to live out or shun the relations associated with them (see Stasch 2013). The Masrau plantation was a central part of the Ili-Wawas project, initiated by the then MP of Pomio, Mr. Paul Tiensten, to overcome the frontier conditions of Pomio. The idea behind the Ili-Wawas was that private logging and plantation companies would provide services and infrastructure that the national state was unwilling or unable to provide. On the other hand, the frontier conditions of Pomio seemed to offer the possibility of accumulation. As I showed in Chapter 6, the demise of cash cropping had re-opened the labor frontier (Gregory 1982), while the newly discovered potential to lease large land areas for agriculture for up to 99 years (Filer 2011) re-opened the land frontier—both of which were crucial to plantation agriculture (Dennis 198-). By discussing the long history of plantation agriculture on New Britain Island, I show in Chapter 6 how plantations have been a part of state formation and state territorialization since the very beginning of colonization in PNG. Like elsewhere, plantations were not only sites of agricultural exploitation, but also of control and pacification (Dennis 198-; Dove 2012: 30). This was explicit, given that the plantation in Masrau was organized along the lines of a government ward.

What was remarkable about the state-like organization of the plantation, however, was the fact that experienced plantation workers had initiated the ward structure. Basing on recent work in the anthropology of the state (Fisher and Timmer 2013; Jansen 2014; Lund 2011; Oppermann 2015; Timmer 2010; Trouillot 2001), I note how the plantation was a site, where state-like order or "state effects" were produced, even though it was not a state institution. Moreover, as the workers had been active in the creation of this order, both top-down and bottom-up projects of state formation converged on the plantation. I argue that because private companies often produce only limited kinds of governance, generally merely supporting accumulation (e.g. Ferguson 2005), the workers on the plantation enacted state-like order to make claims of what the governance *should* be like. This kind of order was advanced mainly by supervisors and workers who had risen in the company hierarchy and, following Antonio Gramsci (1971), I assign them the roles of intellectuals, as they had an organizational function. Moreover, despite their rural backgrounds, they were "organic intellectuals" produced by plantation capital, not unlike the LOC directors discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 who acted as important brokers between the foreign logging companies and the local population. Both experienced plantation workers and the directors came from rural backgrounds and often saw, or presented, themselves as working for their communities (and many did so), but because of their crucial role in facilitating the work of the companies, I have described them as organic intellectuals of their respective industries.

Indeed, like the "parastatal" plantation, LOCs have long been a part of corporatized governance in PNG (Lattas 2011) and, as on the Masrau oil palm plantation, numerous projects and interests intertwined in their constitution. The history of logging in Wide Bay, discussed in Chapter 4, demonstrates that the "the state" was not a homogeneous entity, but a structure of different institutions through which various actors, like Mengen men engaged in logging, sought to amplify their agency. For example, some Mengen LOC directors—aided by Malaysian logging companies—by-passed certain state institutions which, at the time, were trying to curtail alliances between LOC directors and foreign loggers (see Filer 2000). In Chapter 5 I discussed how the LOC companies and Mengen clans were constructed, restructured and reproduced through performative talk (in addition to the various material practices discussed in other chapters). Indeed, while clan groups were, for the Mengen, taken-for-granted or routinized, their composition and nature was nonetheless subject to change (see also Martin 2013: 83, 97; Merlan and Rumsey 1991: 18, 40, 56). The dispute case showed how the Sulka and Mengen sought to utilize the state in different ways: project proponents sought to personify the state by appealing to their position in the state structure, while others—particularly the conservationists—argued that "the state" is primarily a system or structured order based on law. By doing so, the conservationists too engaged in state formation "from below". As I discussed in Chapter 8, the conservationists sought to strengthen their version of what the state was and what it was supposed to do. Because the conservationists sought to provide alternatives to the hegemonic idea of economic development as natural resource extraction, and because of their "educative and organizational" role, I described them as "peasant intellectuals"—both in comparison and contrast to the LOC directors and experienced plantation workers.

By referring to peasant studies literature (e.g. Bernstein 1979) and Gramscian theories (Crehan 2002; Feierman 1990) not usually associated with PNG, I have consciously sought to highlight how rural people like the Wide Bay Mengen act in conditions that are similar, though not the same, as faced by other rural peasants. (For notable exceptions on the use of Gramsci and the peasant-studies framework in PNG see Foster (1995); Grossman (1984); Meggit (1971) & Schwimmer (1987).)

10.2 The political ecology of value

In the course of this study I have attempted to contribute both to Melanesian ethnography and to environmental anthropology. In accordance with what I think is one of the most basic tenets of anthropology, I have attempted to move between the particular and the general as well as between very intimate aspects of human social life and larger structures, paying close attention and seeking to do justice to the uniqueness of the socio-cultural life of the Wide Bay Mengen. At the same time I have attempted to show that Wide Bay, and PNG more broadly, are not, and have never been, "isolated" or so unique that comparison to other regions is not feasible. No Melanesianist or anthropologist would argue such a thing, of course, but popular and non-anthropological academic discourse still often presents PNG as cut off from the wider world. Within the parameters of this study I have discussed the fallacy of this image, demonstrating that the rural Wide Bay Mengen are enmeshed in global structures and face the same difficult

questions regarding the use of natural resources in the midst of a worsening global environmental crisis as people elsewhere. Not that it has taken European expansion and the global commodity economy to connect New Guinea and its inhabitants to other places—the region was thoroughly networked long before that (e.g. Moore 2003).

By discussing how the Wide Bay Mengen simultaneously produce their livelihood, their society and their lived environment, as well as engaging in a globalized natural resource economy, I have attempt to contribute to environmental anthropology and political ecology. When starting my MA thesis, I became interested in local food production and how people who communally hold the land cultivate it, and largely organize their own social life and their relations with the environment. As Papua New Guineans have a long history of sophisticated agricultural techniques and have largely not been dispossessed of their land, I also chose to study environmental relations there. It soon became apparent these questions should be studied in light of the large-scale natural resource projects in the country. Because of my thematic interests, the body of theory known as political ecology became a key source of insights for my work. From its early days, political ecology has sought to understand environmental issues in relation to often unequal power relations and global political-economic structures, thereby providing constructive criticism of earlier environmental anthropology, which studies environmental issues as local phenomena and in the context of seemingly bounded populations. Political ecology, sometimes criticized as being political economy of natural resource use, has since then developed towards a more nuanced understanding of local environmental relations while retaining its founding tenets (cf. Biersack and Greenberg 2006; Jacka 2015; West 2006; 2012).

In discussing how the Wide Bay Mengen reproduce their society and the lived environment as well as engaging in natural resource extraction and state formation, I have found the anthropological literature on production and value particularly useful. This body of theory, which David Graeber (2013: 223) calls the "Chicago value theory", understands production as the production of material means of subsistence, the production of new needs, the production of human beings themselves and the production of different relations of social co-operation (Turner 2008: 44). As people produce material goods, they enter into social relations with each other and thus create and recreate themselves and each other "when acting with the world" (Graeber 2001: 57; 2013: 223; also Fajans 1997: 272; Munn 1992: 6, 15). This acting with the world happens "in and through" the environment. Thus human productive activities are always emplaced, because they happen in places as well as creating them (Moore 2015: 11, 13). Production—understood in this way—also produces meaning and values (Fajans 1997: 11; Munn 1992: 6), which are broadly conceptualized as the importance attributed to people's activities (Graeber 2001: 55). How value is constituted and represented depends on the social context and the system of social production, but it always consists of the forms of representation by which it is defined, circulated, exchanged and appropriated (Turner 2008: 47, 53). Thus semiotic representation in mediating and shaping material activity has a central role in this body of theory (Turner 2008: 43).

This understanding of production and value provides a holistic way to think about

human social life that is attentive to its material conditions, human motivations for actions, politics and cultural meanings, without over-privileging any of these aspects or holding one—such as material conditions—to be the determining factor. It is a form of value theory that fits well with the aims of contemporary political ecology because the focus on production and value bridges the gaps between a focus on material conditions—the "ecology" in political ecology—and serious regard for how people make their place in the world and conceptualize their environment. Value, in this line of theory, is also fundamentally a political question, because politics is understood as incorporating both the struggles to appropriate value and, perhaps even more importantly, to define what value is (Graeber 2001: 88). As I have noted above, the actions of the Wide Bay Mengen in questions of livelihood production, natural resource extraction and state formation were often the result of their pursuing Mengen forms of value of relatedness. In response to this, I have focused on the semiotic media through which the Mengen enacted their relationships: particularly the food plants people cultivated in their gardens, the gardens themselves and various other places people created in the course of their activities. These media were not inert, but living organisms or components of the environment and hence said a great deal about Mengen ecological practices.

Likewise, Mengen debates and disputes over these questions were very often disagreements over whether a given action—like the distribution of royalties or conserving the forest—constituted socially productive activity and was thus constitutive of value. As Nancy Munn (1992: 3) notes, value is created in relation to the perception of how it is *not* created. In her account on value creation on the island of Gawa, Munn (1992: 12) focuses on positive and negative value transformations and how some acts hold "negative value potentials" inasmuch as they inhibit the creation of value. In this thesis I have shown that the Mengen too regard some acts, for example not sharing, to prevent the creation and maintenance of valued social relations. However, in many cases the "negative value potentials" of certain acts depend on the perspective of others and may be evaluated very differently by different people (see also Martin 2013: 127, 138). In addition to this, I have used the notion of "productive contradiction" to show that pursuing one of the two main values in Mengen society—clan autonomy or inter-clan relations—could hold "negative potentials" in relation to the other. For example, distributing logging royalties only to clan members might emphasize the coherency of the clan and its authority over the land it owned, but at the same time alienate affines and people from other clans living on the land.

Value—how it is pursued, defined, mediated and appropriated—also lies at the heart of large-scale natural resource projects. A key principle of political ecology is that "natural resources" do not simply exist but, rather, are socially and culturally defined (Bridge 2011: 820; McCarthy 2013: 184; Moore 2015: 145). In order to address this insight I made use of the notion of frontier, defined by John McCarthy (2013: 183–84) as a place undergoing rapid transformation, where population densities are low, rate of in-migration often high, organs of the state are weak and the law thus an abstract concept. As I noted in the introduction, the "frontier" as a spatialized political, economic and ecological dynamic effectively described the Pomio district. For extractive companies, the district seemed like a large area of "unused" forest, land and labor but an important aspect of the frontier is not only that different actors compete

over resources, but they also compete over different *definitions* of resources and the value of different practices (McCarthy 2013: 184). This echoes the notion that the greatest political struggles are not only about the appropriation of value, but about its definition (Graeber 2001: 88). Finally, just as natural resources are constructed and deconstructed on the frontier, so the actors themselves are elicited, changed and unmade, because histories and relations are transformed on the frontier or even erased and replaced with new versions (Bell 2015: 131).

I noted above how the focus on social production and value produces an important theoretical discussion that bridges gaps between ecological practices and semiotic mediation. In addition to that, it provides a way to think about the globalized resource economy and the political ecology of natural resources in the same terms as specifically Mengen forms of value production, land use and so forth. All too often questions of meaning and value are restricted to "the local", while a different set of theories and discussions is used to analyze globalized forms of practice. The Marxian theories built around social production and value stress the importance of studying a given system of value production on its own terms, but at the same time using concepts that allow comparisons with other systems. Moreover, production, understood as a self-transforming process, draws our attention to questions of change. In order to answer these while taking continuities into account and also situating the themes I study in wider temporal and spatial frameworks, I have focused on history. In the introduction, as well as in the first chapter of each part, I have discussed the intertwined history of logging, plantation agriculture, social movements in Pomio and state formation in PNG in relation to the Mengen of Wide Bay. Because of my focus on state formation and resource extraction, the end of the 19th century delimits the historical account, as it was then that the Wide Bay Mengen became more involved with states and the commodity economy. As I stressed at the start of the thesis, however, this does not mean that Mengen history or Mengen involvement in regional networks begins at that point. Recounting history always involves a choice: in my account I have deliberately sought to emphasize long-term continuities behind seemingly new phenomena, such as contemporary logging, oil palm plantations and conservation.

Throughout my thesis I have discussed how the lived environment of Wide Bay has been the object of different evaluations in different points of time, some successful, some not. With the coming of logging, the Mengen started to regard their forests as resources and potential repositories of commodities, but as I have shown, this revaluation did not erase their other social meanings. However, the practices of logging, as described above, elicited and reshaped the actors involved: in order to make claims on the land and embed logging in socially reproductive practices, the Mengen reshaped their clan groups, created new companies and engaged with the state bureaucracy and foreign loggers. I have noted how these contacts also changed both the companies and the state. The revaluation of the environment—or its components such as trees—as a natural resource opened up new frontiers of value (Peluso and Lund 2011), but also created new forms of authority over it, or related to it. In the previous chapters I described how some Mengen men became functionaries of the new logging companies, while others were able to influence the workings of plantations or became authorities over the recently created conservation area. While some LOC directors were able to sideline their relatives with

regards decision-making over the forests, large-scale dispossession of the Wide Bay Mengen by foreign companies or their own leaders has not happened as I write these conclusions. This does not mean that the possibilities do not exist. Both in West Pomio and elsewhere in New Britain struggles over large-scale leases of land are continuing. And as Tania Li (2014) has shown, commodity relations and dispossession need not take place through dramatic transformation, but can creep in gradually.

10.3 Epilogue

In the summer of 2015 a friend from one of the Wide Bay Mengen villages phoned me and said that the road link between Pomio and Kokopo had been established. The project to link the Ili with Wawas was still underway—possibly because Baining communities south of Ili were resisting the connection. At the same time a company from West New Britain Province had cleared a road from the Open Bay plantation to Kokopo, the provincial capital of East New Britain. Tzen Niugini, the company running the new oil palm plantation in Wide Bay had earlier established a road link to Open Bay. For all intents and purposes, Pomio was now connected by road to Kimbe and Kokopo, the provincial capitals of West and East New Britain. Soon after, another friend, who worked as a parish priest in Australia, told me that he had traveled from Kokopo to his home village in Wide Bay by hitching rides on company trucks. This seemed to me like a significant change, and time will tell how it will affect Pomio District.

More news from Pomio kept coming in. In December of 2016, Paul Pavol, a Mengen man from Mu village near Jacquinot Bay, received the Alexander Soros Foundation Award in New York for his campaigning against Rimbunan Hijau, which was logging leased land areas for oil palm development (Tlozek 2016). The project in West Pomio was a sister project of Ili-Wawas and large land areas had been leased to Rimbunan Hijau. Locals opposing the project claimed that the lease agreements had been obtained by fraud and they had resisted them from the beginning. In 2012, just when I was leaving Wide Bay, Andrew Lattas (2012) reported that police had arrested local men opposing the projects. When I left PNG in March 2014, I heard on the radio that Paul Tiensten, then the MP of Pomio, was convicted of corruption for nine years in prison (Radio New Zealand 2014). As I write this, in late December 2016, a Papua New Guinean friend and activist has mentioned on Facebook that locals still opposing the same project had been harassed by heavily armed police. People from the concerned villages joined the discussion and confirmed the allegations. The struggle by the Mengen of West Pomio against logging and de-facto alienation of land has received support from Greenpeace and international attention from NGOs and academics alike. However, as I write this, the situation is ongoing and the news about wrongdoings coming from Pomio is similar to that of four years ago. In the neighboring Gazelle District, in August of 2016, Baining groups won a "landmark case" against an oil palm company over a 33,000 ha land lease. The National Land Court in Kokopo judged that the lease had not been obtained with meaningful consent from the landowners and declared it null and void (Nicholas 2016).

For the Wide Bay Mengen, the situation was slightly different: while some Sulka

and Wide Bay Mengen men had agreed to new logging by Tzen Niugini, to my knowledge no land leases had been signed. The large land areas obtained by Tzen Niugini for oil palm development were located on Sulka, Tomoip and Baining lands on the northern parts of Wide Bay. Still, with the controversial projects going on in the south, in West Pomio and in the north, the Wide Bay Mengen areas are surrounded by large-scale oil palm projects.

This study has focused on Wide Bay Mengen modes of relating with the environment, each other and people from elsewhere and the text has been produced for an academic audience in order to fulfill the requirements of a doctoral degree. Everything which I have written has been made possible by the inhabitants of the Wide Bay communities in which I stayed, who opened their lives for me. Many of them took an interest in my work on its own terms, knowing that academic writing would be of little direct use to them. More importantly, the Mengen regarded my study as "work"—something I am deeply grateful for, for reasons which a reader who has made it this far will understand. While my Mengen friends will probably read this thesis, I feel embarrassed that it has been written mainly for others; but, despite these misgivings, I hope they will find what I have written of interest and will correct me where I have erred.

As an academic study, my thesis does not, and has not been intended to, offer policy suggestions. It is not my place to say how the people of PNG, New Britain, Pomio and Wide Bay should organize their lives and engage with their environment, their land and their resources. On the contrary, I sincerely believe they themselves are experts regarding their own needs and aspirations. Yet, as I also write about topical questions—logging, conservation and the expansion of industrial agriculture—I want to conclude with my impressions on the matter. I have studied these issues for many years, and I think I have an informed perspective on them, while not claiming to possess unique and particular insights. Moreover, I want to take up these issues in order to explicate what I think I have contributed with my thesis more broadly.

In my understanding and interpretation, the Wide Bay Mengen have been successful in retaining their system of values, one which has given meaning to their life, work and their lived environment over long and extensive contact with commodity relations, foreign companies and colonial administrations, as well as the independent state of PNG— of which they are a part on more equal terms than under previous administrations. Not only this, the Wide Bay Mengen have been successful in adapting to and incorporating these changes into their lives without losing hold of what they value. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, a key reason for this is that they have not been dispossessed of their lands, but continue to hold them communally. The system of communal ownership under the customary land title is certainly not perfect, as Paige West (2016) observes, but it has provided local communities with a great deal of security and leverage. As I have noted, the Wide Bay Mengen do not live outside a commodity economy: they need money for social and physical reproduction, for tools, for school fees, medicine and so forth. Moreover, they deserve the same services which people in wealthy countries take for granted and which others globally strive for, like health care, a functioning infrastructure, education and so forth. Moreover, they deserve these advantages without

being required to give up the land which they cultivate and to which they continue to become rooted through their work.

I have thought long and hard about how to conclude this thesis in terms of what I have learned from the Wide Bay Mengen. Yet, after many years of studying these questions, I have come to a very simple conclusion: the Wide Bay Mengen are best served by retaining their land and making decisions about it themselves—based on compromise-seeking negotiations, a skill the Wide Bay Mengen have developed in the course of time.

11. Appendix

11.1 Garden succession, diversity & plots

This section illustrates different facets of a single household garden. The garden had been cleared prior to my arrival to Wide Bay in May 2011, when the owner of the garden was constructing the fence. The owners of the garden began planting in the geginning of June 2011, the late stages of the *sap* season. In the beginning of January 2012 I surveyed the garden and counted the number of plants in each plot with the help of a research assistant, who surveyed most of the plots. The kinship diagram on the side (Figure 9) shows how the relationships between the owners of
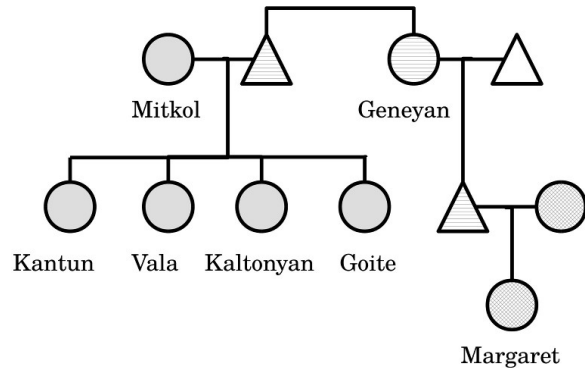

Figure 9: Division of garden plots

the garden, the married couple, and the women who held plots in it. The garden was cleared and divided into plots by Conrad. His wife, Mitkol in turn distributed the plots. The garden was a houselhold garden established for everyday food production, rather than for a ritual. Half of the plots (2., 4., 5., 6., 7., & 8.) are helf by Mitkol and her two unmarried daughters Goite and Kaltonyan, of whom Kaltonyan was working at the oil palm plantation and not present in the village. Her plants were tended by Mitkol and Goite. Mitkol's and Conrad's married daughters, Kantun and Vala, received a plot each. Mitkol assigned two plots to her sister-in-law, Geneyan and her son's daughter Margaret. This is a typical distribution of plots for a garden intended for everyday food production in asmuch as the plots are distributed within the immediate family and close relatives. Goneyan's and Conrad's families were neighbors in the village. A garden cleared for producing food to be distributed in a ceremony would be larger and more women would be asked to plant plots and thus to help with the ceremony.

The table shows the different species and the number of individual plantes planted in all the garden plots. It shows how each plot is dominated by one crop, taro, the main food crop of the season, and supplemented with sweet potato and banana. Each woman cultivated in her plots the distinct subvarieties of taro, banana and sweet potato that she owned. Each taro produces only one tuber, whereas banana plants produce one or more bundles and a sweet potato vine produces several tubers. In the table, the numbers for sweet potato represent the number of vines growing out of a single mound. In addition to these food plants, the women have planted several other supplementary foods, such as *aibica* (TP), a protein rich spinach-like plant eaten as a relish with the main staple foods, *paragum* (TP), a taro species, *ap* (M), a relative of yam, sugar cane, papaya, cassawa and yam. Along with food plants, the women planted also plants with decorative and ceremonial uses, such as cordyline. The ginger plant in Plot 1 was the first plant to be planted into the garden as a part of gardening spells.

Figure 10 shows the division of plots in the garden and the spatial alignment of the

plants in Plot 1. Plants with large leaves, such as banana, or that grow otherwise large, such as tobacco and *aibica*, are planted on the edges of the plot as well as dispersed along the center axis so that they do not produce too much shade for the taros to grow. Bananas are planted near tree trunks so that the trunks can be used as "ladders" in order to make the banana bundles easier to reach. When the bundles are maturing, they are covered with leaves or cloth in order to protect them from birds and fruit bats. Sweet potatos, which are crawlers, are planted so that they are not too close to each other. Photograph 31 shows the garden newly planted with the plots division still visible.

1. Kantun	2. Mitkol	3. Vala	4. Goite
aibica: 16 banana: 10 cordyline: 2 ginger: 1 *paragum*: 2 sweet potato: 11 taro: 165 tobacco: 3	banana: 4 cassava: 2 sweet potato: 16 taro: 23 *toungpak*: 2	*aibica*: 4 *ap*: 1 cassawa: 3 *prae*: 3 sweet potato: 19 taro: 170-200 *toungpak*: 1	*aibica*: 7 banana: 5 cassawa: 4 papaya: 4 sweet potato: 24 taro: 99 *toungpak*: 2
5. Kaltonyan	6. Goite	7. Mitkol	8.
aibica: 3 banana: 8 cordyline: 3 sugar cane: 1 sweet potato: 10 taro: 90 tobacco: 3 *toungpak*: 2	*aibica*: 8 banana: 8 cassawa: 3 papaya: 2 sweet potato: 23 taro: 171 *toungpak*: 1	*aibica*: 7 banana: 4 cordyline: 5 papaya: 3 *paragum*: 1 pumpkin: 1 sweet potato: 16 taro: 151	*aibica*: 9 banana: 9 cassawa: 2 greater yam: 27 *paragum*: 4 sugar cane: 2 sweet potato: 19 taro: 108
9.	10. Margaret	11. Geneyan	
aibica: 3 *ap*: 2 sugar cane: 1 sweet potato: 8 taro: 118	*aibica*: 1 papaya: 1 *paragum*: 1 taro: 49	overgrown	

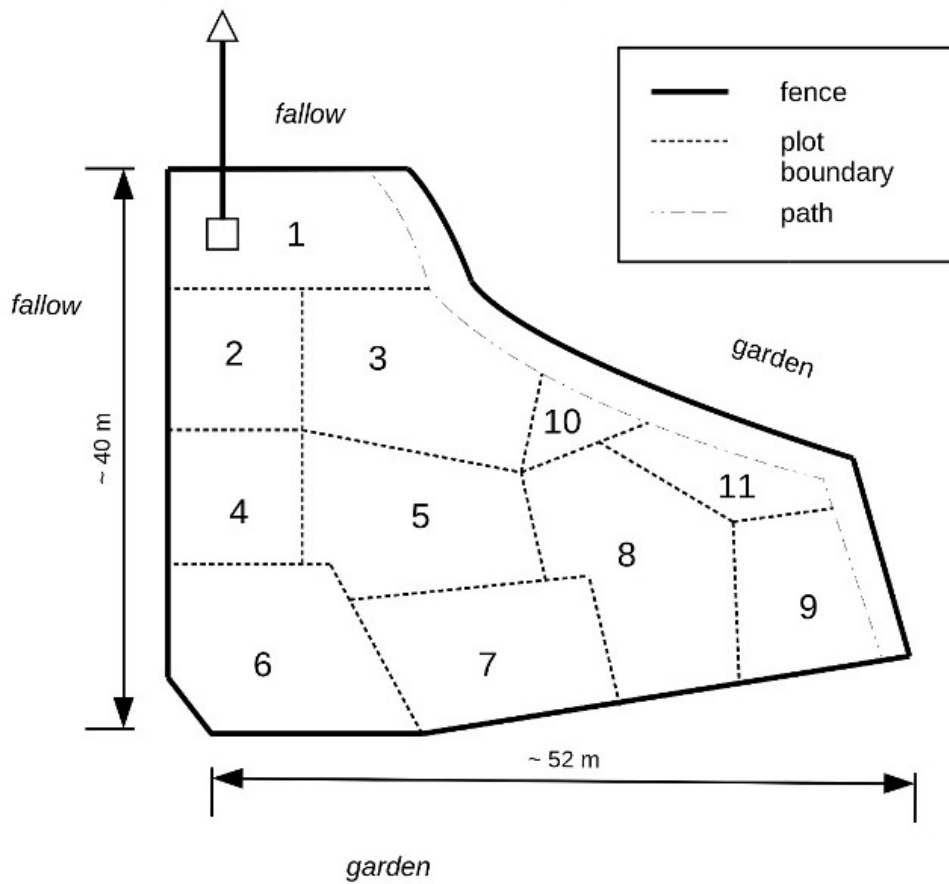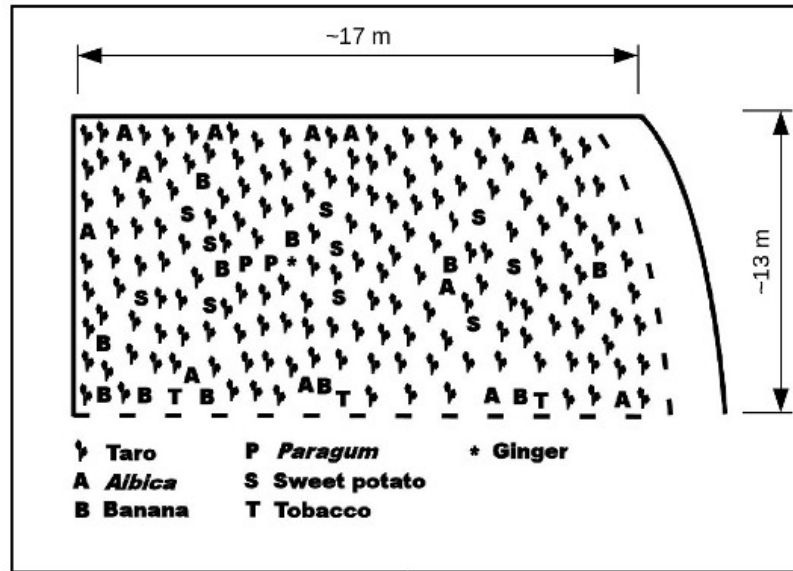Table 2: Number of species and plants in the garden according to plot

Figure 10: Layout of garden with Plot 1. highlighted

Photo 35: The garden at the planting stage. Note the "mother" and "father" of the garden working at the front

11.2 Fractal imagery in Mengen ceremonial food distributions

As I noted in Chapter 2, Wide Bay Mengen gardens are homologous with persons on multiple scales. First, anatomical imagery is used to name parts of the garden, such as the "head" of the garden (M: *ngurkun*) or the "leg" of the garden (M: *ngurkain*) for the high- and low-lying parts respectively. More concretely, a given garden as a whole is associated with the man who cleared it or the woman who decided on the distribution of plots, while each plot is associated with the woman who cultivates it. In a fractal-like pattern both the parts as well as the whole stand for or signify persons. This fractal-like imagery is even more pronounced in ceremonial food prestations.

In initiation or mortuary ceremonies, the close kin of the initiate or the deceased give gifts of pigs and food to persons, to people who represent relations that have been formative to the person being celebrated. Each gift consists of a head of food (M: *rhona*) and a pig. Each heap of food is associated with the person to whom it is given. The heap of food consists of contributions of twenty tubers that women who
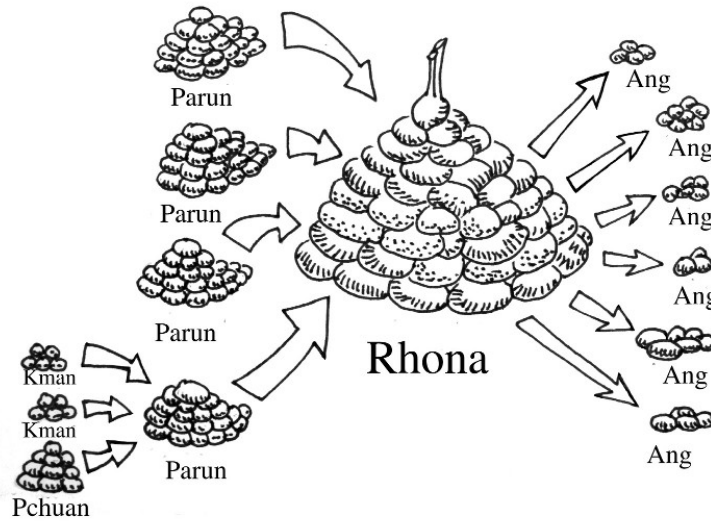

Figure 11: Fractal imagery in Mengen food distributions

hold plots in the garden of the organizer of the ceremony are obliged to give. This set of twenty (M: *parun*) is associated with the woman who contributed it. The Mengen counting system bases on five (M: *kman*: hand) and the number twenty is homologous with a person, inasmuch as a persons limbs has twenty extremities (5x2 fingers and 5x2 toes). This is made explicit in setting up the heaps: for example, if a head consists of 100 tubers, people note that "five persons are complete", because it consists of contributions by five women and because 5x20=100. During the ceremony, the receiver of the gift distributes the food in the heap to their kin, visitors and participants. If the receiver decides to slaughter and cook the pig, the meat is distributed along the food. The heap is again broken down into individual portions (M: *ang*). Finally, the totality of gifts given, for example six pigs and six heaps of food, is associated with the initiate or deceased being celebrated.

Photo 36: Ceremonial gift: note large tins of meat and bags of rice on top of the heaps of food

Photo 37: Women break heaps of food down into individual portions

11.3 Garden land survey

Between February and April 2014 I conducted a garden land survey in Toimtop village. In the survey, I wanted to measure the size of gardens in use, and collect information on when the gardens had been cleared, for what food plants, how many people held plots them and how many clan groups they represented. The results of the survey are summarized in the table below. The column "Main plants, seson and timing" summarizes what the principal crop is, at which stage the garden was during the time of the survey and what the local planting season was. The next column, "Users", shows how many women held plots on the cultivated area. "Child" and "absent" means that plots were cultivated in the name of children or absent women, such as oil palm workers, by their relatives. The column "No. of clans" in turn shows how many clan groups the users of the garden represented. The last column, "Men", shows how many men had their gardens within the fenced area, namely how many households had come togethere to clear the area and combine their gardens within it.

I conducted the survey by asking each household to point out what gardens they were clearing, cultivating and harvesting from at the time of the survey. As the difference between a mature garden and a fallow is gradual, rather than absolute, some people listed gardens from which they harvested supplementary foods, even though the garden was already fallowing, while others listed only mature gardens from which they harvested the principal food plants, taro and yam. I left it up to the members of the household themselves to define what constitutes a "garden" as opposed to a fallow or an abandoned garden. After receiving the list of the gardens, I measured them—with the owners' permission—with a hand-held GPS device. After measuring the gardens, I collected further information from the owners, namely when the garden was cleared and cultivated, how the owners acquired the user rights to the area and to whom they distributed had distiributed plots. Young men from the Youth Group of Toimtop helped me to carry out the survey by showing me the locations of the gardens, accompanying me to them and helping me with the measuring of the areas.

The survey covers most, but probably not all, gardens in use of Toimtop community. In the images below I have overlaid the countours of the gardens I measured on aerial images from ca. 2010. (The aerial images are from a publicly available basemap Bing Aerial.) The images show that during the survey most of the gardens cultivated by the people of Toimtop were relatively close to the village. Two gardens in the survey (no. 031 & 032) were gardens established by people from Baein and Wawas, but a household from Toimtop was part in both. The aerial images, taken about four years before the survey, show newly cleared gardens at the time and when overlaid with the garden countours from 2014 one can examine where new gardens were cleared. As the life-span of a garden, starting from clearance and ending to harvest, is about a year, the location of gardens shifts substantially over time. For example, during my fieldwork in 2011–2012, most of the gardens were located further away from the village as in 2014. The aerial images do not show substantial changes in altitude between the gardens.

No	Area	Main plants, season and timing	Users	No. of clans	Men
001	0.22 ha	Yam (*kreng*), taro (*sap*). Planting in Feb 2014.	5 + 1 child	4	1
002	033 ha	Yam (*kreng*), taro. Was intended as taro garden for earlier season, but was belated and planted with yam. Planting Oct-Jan 2013-2014.	8	3	1
003	0.51 ha	Fenced, not planted.	-	-	-
004	0.13 ha	Yam (*kreng-pokal*), peanut (for sale). Planting started in Dec 2013, Feb 2014.	1	1	1
005	0.18 ha	Yam, taro, sweet potato (*sap*). Planting in July 2013.	-	-	1
006	0.56 ha	Fenced, not planted.	-	-	2
007	0.45 ha	Yam. Planting in Feb 2014.	8 + 1 child	4	1
008	0.23 ha	Yam-taro (*tlop?*). Planting in Feb 2014.	6	3	1
009	0.65 ha	Taro, sweet potato (*sap*); planting in July 2013.	9	6	2
010	1.48 ha	Yam-*pitpit*. Planted in 2013, fallowing in Feb 2014, harvest of *pitpit* in Feb 2014.	> 14	> 10	4
011	0.12 ha	Yam, taro, sweet potato (*kreng*). Planting Jun-Jul 2013.	5	2	1
012	0.59 ha	Yam. Burning of garden in Feb 2014, planting in Mar 2014.	8 + 4 absent	7	3
013	0.39 ha	Yam (late). Burning of garden in Feb 2014, planting Mar 2014.	10 + 1 absent	6	2
014	0.85 ha	Fencing in Feb 2014.	-	-	2
015	0.70 ha	Taro, sweet potato (*sap*). Planting in Mar 2014.	20	8	1
016	1.73 ha	Taro (*tlop*). Planted in Jan-Feb 2013.	28	9	9
017	0.70 ha	Taro, sweet potato (*sap*). Planted in Apr-May 2013.	14	7	3
018	0.36 ha	Taro (*pri*). Planted in Jul-Aug 2013.	6	3	1
019	0.23 ha	Yam (*kreng*). Planted in Jun-Aug 2012.	6	3	1
020	0.44 ha	Cleared in Jan 2014.	-	-	-
021	0.18 ha	Taro (*sap*). Planting in Apr-May 2013. Taro sickness due to heavy rain in Jun-Aug and raided by pigs in Dec 2013.	4	3	2
022	0.35 ha	Yam. Planted in Nov 2012-Jan 2013.	8	4	2
023	0.17 ha	Cleared, but not planted.	-	-	1
024	1.10 ha	Yam (*kreng-tlop*). Planted in Nov 2012.	17	7	2
025	0.13 ha	Yam, taro (*tlop*). Planted in Jan 2014.	3	3	1

026	0.14 ha	Yam, taro (*kreng*). Cleared between Aug-Oct (*kreng*). Planted in Jan 2014. (Note: Jan is usually assigned to the season of tlop.)	5	3	1
027	0.3 ha	-	-	-	1
028	0.16 ha	Taro (*tlop-sap*). Cleared betweeen Nov-Dec 2012. Planted between Feb-May 2013.	5	3	1
029	0.16 ha	Taro (*sap*). Planting in Mar 2014.	-	-	1
030	0.03 ha	Yam, taro (*kreng*). Cleared in Oct 2012, planted in Nov 2012.	6	3	1
031	2.0 ha	Yam, taro (*kreng-pokal*). Cleared in Jul 2013, planted in Oct 2013 (Wawas village). (Note: intended planting during *kreng*, but mostly during *pokal*.)	31	8	10
032	0.88 ha	Taro. Cleared in Apr 2013, planted in May-Jun 2013. (near Baein village)	8	2	1
033	0.39 ha	Cleared in Feb-Mar 2014 for taro.	-	-	2
034	0.15 ha	Taro (*sap*). Cleared in May 2013, planted in Jun-Jul 2013.	6	3	1
035	0.04 ha	Taro (*sap*). Cleared in Jan-Feb 2013, planted in Jun2013.	1	1	1

Table 3: Garden survey
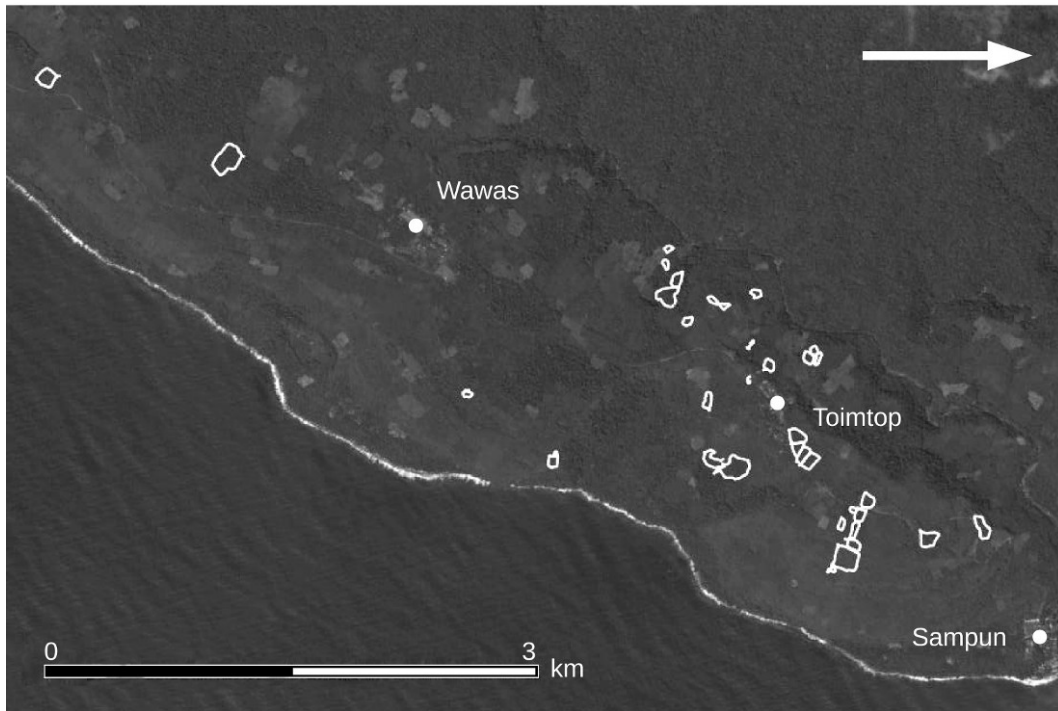
Map 5: Gardens of the survey overlaid on an aerial photograph
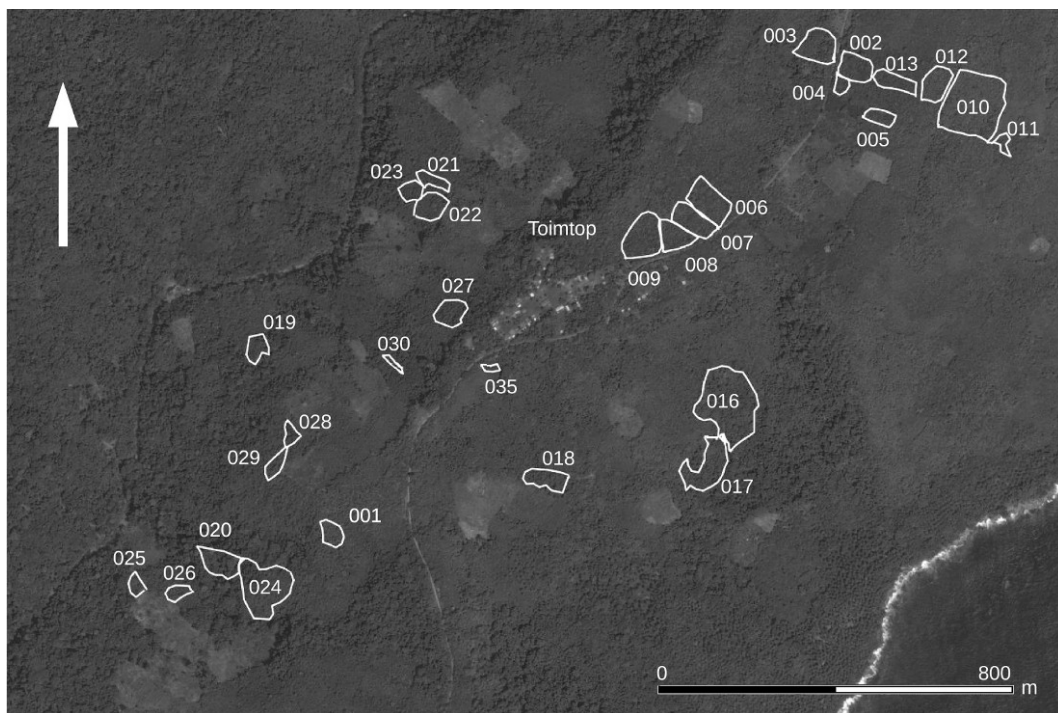
Map 6: Gardens of the survey around Toimtop village

11.4 A clan history

This is a heavily edited version of a clan history recounted to me by a male clan elder. The story encompasses the start of the clan and the man omitted the rest of history, because it would mostly be a listing of subsequent generations and their movements. I have changed all the names of places and persons in the text and removed certain details from the beginning that would make the origin story recognizable. As noted in the chapters, clan histories can be very sensitive and politicized issues today, because through them people make claims and justify their claims to land. Different people have very different takes on how their clan histories should be recounted or withheld: some recount their histories openly to outsiders like me, others tell them to make them more widely knwon (and thus normalize their version of landholding), others maintain that clan histories are only to be known by clan members, others fear that people with whom they are in land disputes might modify their own stories according to their histories as to present a more credible case for lang claims and so on.

This clan history is then not a "real Mengen clan history". I have deliberately detached it from its actual context, namely people and places, in order to avoid any possible political implications related to land issues. I have edited it to be so unrecognizable that it cannot be pinned down to any one clan, but general enough to exemplify certain features of Mengen clan histories, namely *topogenies* and genealogies. The story was originally recounted to me in Tok Pisin and it shows how Mengen present their clan histories to outsiders.

> So us Kumpai, our place of origin is at the river of Mukan. Have you seen the Mukan River? The first ancestress came out of the river, at its delta ["leg"]. The name of this ancestress was Kumpai, that is how she was called. As she came out of the river, at its leg, she climeb on one side of the river bank. Kumpai settled there. Kumpai, she began the clan called Kumpai. So when she settled that place, there were no others before her. There were no men or other people living there. No. That was just empty land [lit. "land nothing"] and when she rose out of the river, and settled on the one side of the river, she became the mother of the land of that area.

> I'll tell you about the children now.

> An ancestor of the Takun clan, he lived in their ancestral villages up there in the forest and he came down to the beach to find game. He came and he found Kumpai. He didn't know who she was, so he asked her. And she told: "This is my village, I am from here and I live here." And the man asked her whether she was married and she replied, no I am not married, I am single. So the man proposed and the first marriage of Kumpai clan is with the ancestor of Takun clan. His name was Tumel. He married our first ancestress. When he married her, the two lived in Tamur, at the shore along Mukan. The man settled with his wife there. In time, they had two children. The first one was a man and the second one a woman. The first one was Suda and the second, the woman, her name was Samun. They

stayed together in Tamur, near Mukan. They stayed and stayed and the children grew adult.

Alright, the male child, Suda, he married a woman from Klam clan. She came from their ancestral land, which is at Taman. Their origin place is at Tamipun. So Suda married this woman now. Her name was Lengloai, the woman of Klam whom Suda married. And Suda's sister, Samun, she married Lengloai's brother. His name was Vagul. Yes. When Suda married Lengloai, were not anymore living in Tamur near the river Mukan. They moved and settled at the leg of the river at Vampun. The cemetery is now there. At that place, the little village of Suda was called Mekain. The other name for Mekain is Tamur. When Vagul married Samun, they too settled with Suda at Mekain.

Lengloai had seen Suda at a feast in Taman. She liked him and wanted to marry him. So Suda married her and brought her along. When the two stayed in Mekain, Vagul occasionally came to visit his sister and stayed there for a few weeks or months. He saw Samun, liked her and married her. And he stayed in Mekain as well. That's how they came here, in the past we migrated through marriage. So the two left their ancestral lands and came to live here following the marriages. Suda settled Mekain, because when he lived in Tamur, he moved around looking for game. That was empty land, nobody settled there. When he saw the places, he said: "I have to come and live here. So that this area will be mine." So after he was married, he went and established the village there.

Tok Pisin:

So long mipela ol Kumpai, em askamap bilong mipela, em long desla warai long Mukan. Warai long Mukan yu lukim? Na nambawan tumbuna em i bin kamap long desla warai, long leg bilong warai, em wanpela tumbuna meri. So nem bilong desla tumbuna meri, ol i kolim desla tumbuna meri yet, olsem Kumpai. Ok, taim em i kam arsait long warai, long leg bilong warai, em i kam arsait na em i bruk long narapela sait bilong warai. Kumpai i sindaun long en So taim em i sindaun long desla hap, i nogat sampela lain i sindaun pastaim long en. I nogat sampela man o sampela lain i sindaun long desla hap. Nogat. Em graun nating tasol na taim em i kam arsait long leg bilong warai, em i kamap mama graun bilong desla hap nau.

Bai mi stori long ol pikinini nau.

Em wanpela bikman bilong Takun klen, em i bin bilong ol ples tumbuna bilong en antap long bus na em i raun i kam long nambis long painim avus. Na em i kam, na em i painim Kumpai. Na em i no klia long en na em i askim em na... Na em i tok, nogat em i ples bilong mi long hia na mi kamap long hia na mi stap long hia. Na man i askim em olsem em marit o nogat na em tokim em olsem, mi no marit, mi single. Ok, man i tingim long maritim tasol, nambawan man bilong marit long Kumpai em wanpela

bikman Takun. Em nau. Nem bilong desla bikman em Tumel. Em i bin maritim desla nambawan tumbuna bilong mipela. Taim em i maritim em, tupela i settle yet long Tamur, long saitwarai long Mukan. Man em i sindaun wantaim meri long desla hap. Taim em i sindaun wantaim em, tupela i gat tupela pikinini. Nambawan pikinini em man na nambatu em meri. So nem bilong nambawan pikinini em, man: Suda. Nambatu pikinini em meri, nem bilong en Sadun. Ol wantaim i stap long Tamur klostu long warai Mukan. Ol i stap i go i go, tupela pikinini i bikpela.

Orait, desla pikinini man, Suda, em i marit wanpela meri Klam. Em i kam long asgraun bilong ol, i stap long Taman. Asgraun bilong ol long Tamipun. So Suda i maritim desla meri nau. Ol i kolim em, Lengloai. Nem bilong meri Klam Suda i maritim. Sista bilong Suda, Sadun, em i maritim brata bilong Lengloai. Nem bilong en, Vagul. Em. Taim Suda i maritim Lengloai, ol i no mo sindaun long Tamur klostu long warai Mukan. Ol i muv i kam na sindaun long leg bilong warai long Vampun. Nau ples matmat i stap long en. Em nau. Long desla hap, desla liklik ples Suda i kolim olsem Mekain. Mekain. Narapela nem bilong Mekain em long Tmul. Liklik ples bilong Suda wantaim Lengloai. Taim Sadun, Vagul i maritim, tupela tu i kam sindaun wantaim Suda long Mekain. Em.

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