STRENGTHENING THE STATE
LOGGING AND NEOLIBERAL POLITICS IN EAST NEW BRITAIN, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper I will examine how logging in Papua New Guinea affects the relationship between the state and the local communities on whose lands logging operations take place. The point of departure of my argument is the Ili-Wawas Integrated Project, a combined logging and agricultural project which seeks to bring economic development to the remote Pomio district of East New Britain Province by connecting existing logging roads to the limited national road network around the provincial capital. Developing the national road network and creating standardized or—to use James Scott's concept—legible environments can be seen as an integral part of state-making and strengthening the role of the state. In addition to the environment, the state also needs to make social life legible in forms of maps, censuses and laws. As I will argue in my paper, the Ili-Wawas, and other similar projects, may indeed strengthen the role of the state not only by creating the infrastructure and legibility needed by the state, but also in unintended and accidental ways. The side effects of logging and road building include, among others, fear of crime and land disputes. It is these that create among the locals a perceived need for state institutions, which may be as significant in advancing the role of the state as is the creation of infrastructure and legibility.

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Keywords: Papua New Guinea, development, road building, land dispute, state, neoliberalism, legibility
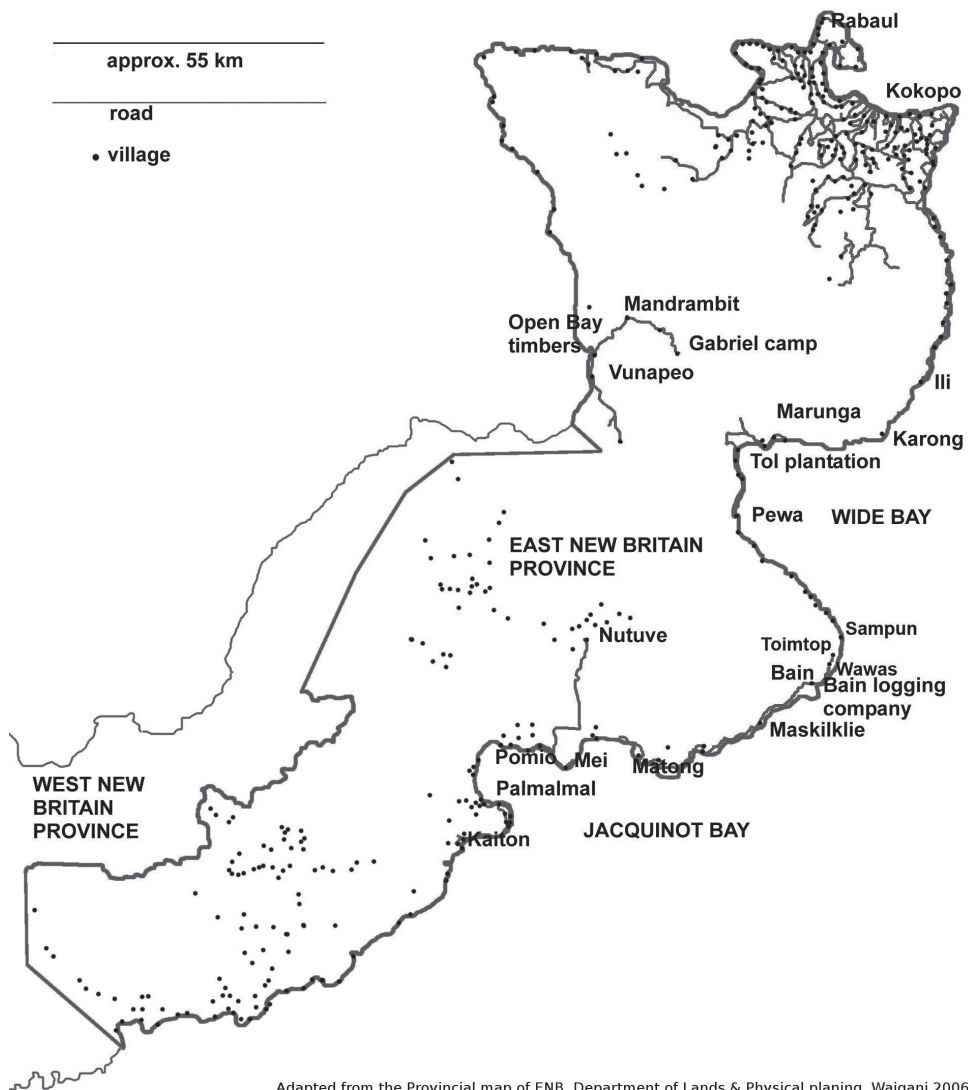
Introduction[1]

How are commercial projects related to logging, such as road-building and the establishment of oil-palm plantations, connected to state-making and strengthening the state in Papua New Guinea? I examine this question in the context of the southern Wide Bay area, a border area inhabited by the relatively small groups of Sulka and Mengen peoples.[2] The Wide Bay area on the eastern coast of New Britain island is located in the Pomio district of East New Britain province. Out of the province's four districts Pomio is by far the largest, but has the smallest and most sparsely distributed population. In addition to this, the Pomio district is fairly isolated in terms of geography. With its still relatively large forest cover and the rugged Nakanai mountains, the district is hard to traverse. The regional centers of Pomio, for example Pomio and Palmalmal villages, are not connected to the national road network around the provincial capital of Rabaul.

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Moreover, while located only some 150 kilometers from the provincial capital, the Wide Bay area can only be reached by boat.

Despite being geographically isolated, the Wide Bay region, like the Pomio district in general, is far from untouched. On the contrary, the first plantations were set up in the region shortly prior to the First World War (Panoff 1969: 3); foreign logging companies came to the area in the 1980's, and large scale operations began in earnest, with the consent of local landowners, in the 1990s.[3] The first logging companies to arrive were Japanese, I was told, but from the 1990s most of the logging in the Wide Bay area has been conducted by Niu Gini Lumber, a subsidiary of the Malaysian logging giant Rimbunan Hijau. The Sulka and the Mengen of the Wide Bay area gain their livelihood mostly from swidden horticulture and are in many ways self-sufficient in terms of food and housing. Monetary income comes from logging compensations and through migrant labor in other parts of country, for example on plantations. Indeed, a striking feature of the village in which I conducted my fieldwork was the relatively small number of young men, because many worked in other provinces. Small-scale cash cropping of cocoa is also central to monetary income and many households cultivate cocoa along with their subsistence crops. However, according to local people and politicians alike, the lack of proper connections to the regional centers diminishes the income gained from cash cropping because a part of the produce rots while waiting for the irregular ship transports to Rabaul.

In order to change this, Pomio's MP and a current cabinet minister, Mr. Paul Tiensten—a Mengen man from the small village of Wawas—has devised a new development initiative, the Pomio Economic Development Strategy (PEDS) 2005–2012. The PEDS seeks to "harness the potential of Pomio by triggering the private sector including ordinary people (…) to become productively engaged and the mobilization and alignment of land, labor and financial resources to support the development of integrated agro-forestry projects" (*Oimop Nius* n.d.: 2). In short, the program seeks to develop the remote and geographically isolated areas of East New Britain by connecting them to the provincial capitals of East and West New Britain and intensifying company presence in the area by establishing oil-palm plantations for instance.

While not connected to the national road network that extends as far as the village of Ili, there are numerous logging roads in Pomio that connect logging sites with the coast, but also smaller villages with each other (see MAP 1). The whole program is based on the Ili-Wawas road connection, which is to be built by logging companies who, in exchange for logging concessions, will connect the existing isolated logging roads with the national network around the capital. Logging is to be followed up by the establishment of oil-palm plantations and smallholder estates, which should ensure the maintenance of the roads. As such, the PEDS seems to be a prime example of a neoliberal development project, in as much as the building and maintenance of state infrastructure is shifted onto private companies. The plan, while widely supported by the inhabitants of Wide Bay, also has its opponents, especially among national and local conservationists, who argue that the views of local communities have not been taken sufficiently into account, that oil-palm plantations will severely damage the environment as well as subsistence agriculture, and that the whole process has been fast-tracked by Mr. Tiensten (*Iko-Forestri Nius* 2006: 1).

Adapted from the Provincial map of ENB, Department of Lands & Physical planing, Waigani 2006

MAP 1. East New Britain Province.

State-making and the creation of legibility

As in many other parts of rural Papua New Guinea, the presence of the state is not all-encompassing in the Pomio district, but at the same time it is not absent either. The state's presence is manifested, for example, in the form of schools, aid-posts and in the persons of individual police officers in larger regional centers. For most rural villages the state is 'there' in offices held by local inhabitants, such as village committees (*komiti*) and councilors (*kaunselor*), who are elected by villagers for five years to act as intermediaries between the state and local communities, and who organize communal work and other practicalities

in their respective communities. Along with these, teachers and local land mediators also represent the state. The latter are appointed by the Local Level Governments (LLG) to mediate disputes over land. Local land mediators are not allowed to make decisions, but they facilitate compromise agreements between the disputing parties. Thus, for most of the time, it is the villagers themselves who represent the state; moreover, the state is constituted in certain forms of relationships between the villagers. At times—for example during elections—the state's presence is increased when politicians come to their home villages to vote and polling stations accompanied by police officers are also established in the more remote villages.

Besides bringing economic development to the remote, and admittedly poor, areas of Pomio district, the Ili-Wawas road project, along with the PEDS in general, can also be seen as an attempt to strengthen the role of the state in the area. James Scott has argued in his book *Seeing Like a State* (1998) that government control relies on what he calls the creation of legibility. The sovereignty of the modern state lies in the control of its territory (Neocleous 2003: 411). However, this control is not only based on the use of violence over which the state claims monopoly, but also on the administration and cognitive control of space. The administrative interest of the state is visible in its need for a standardized and what James Scott calls a "legible" environment, like standardized citizens (populations) and an administrable social life (laws) (Scott 1998: 22). Legibility then is based on the abstraction of reality that is in itself too complex and heterogeneous for the state to manage (Scott 1998: 30).

However, legibility is not only created on the conceptual, but also on the physical level. In a very concrete way this process of abstraction is visible in the "scientific forestry" originating in eighteenth-century Prussia (Scott 1998: 12). At first the abstraction was conducted on a conceptual level by "ignoring" those aspects of the forest that were not economically interesting, but the logical outcome was that actual forest came to be managed in this way (Scott 1998: 13, 15). The resulting product was a monocultural and evenly-aged forest, a "neatly arranged construct (…) of science" (Scott 1998: 15). According to Scott (1998: 14) this process has to be seen as a part of a larger context, namely that of centralized state-making.

Referring to Scott, Dan Jorgensen (2007: 61) notes that the creation of legibility is a "precondition of the implementation of state plans" and that legibility enables "the systematic state intervention in the affairs of its citizens". As noted, along with conceptual abstractions, such as maps, the concrete refashioning of the environment is also an integral part of creating legibility and thus creating the basis for state control. Thus I will examine the Ili-Wawas project not only as a way of furthering development, much hoped for by both local villagers as politicians alike, but also as a means of creating the legible environments needed by the state.

Indeed, road networks are prime examples of legible 'national grids', just as plantations are standardized environments. But do private companies, which in the case of Ili-Wawas are given the actual task of producing road networks and plantations, in fact create these kinds of environments? In what ways do such projects advance the role of the state? In the discussion below I shall focus on different aspects of road-building in East New Britain and examine the ways road connections enhance the role of the state in remote areas. As the mapping of territories as well as land disputes and their resolution are intimately tied

to the development project and are further examples of the creation of legibility, these issues also receive some attention in the following discussion.

Road-building

Roads and road-building are important things to bear in mind when discussing the re-modeling of the environment. The significance of roads is easily forgotten in places where they are taken for granted and where they are an integral and almost natural (or naturalized) part of the landscape. Furthermore, roads are also necessary for any kind of natural resource extraction and they are an essential part of the infrastructure needed both by the state and corporations. Roads reform in a very concrete fashion the environment into a legible grid, which according to Scott (1998: 4) is essential for the functioning of states. Moreover, road-building is a way of connecting certain areas and bringing them more closely under the control of the state. As James Ferguson (1996: 253) has shown, road-building is not just a technical operation, it has substantial political effects. Ferguson uses as an example a seemingly unsuccessful development project operating in Lesotho during the 1980s. The project did not meet its goals, but through technical improvements such as roads and other services the area in question was tied more closely to the state; for example, the road made the area more accessible to military forces, whose presence in the area indeed increased (Ferguson 1996: 253). In East New Britain roads are important in questions concerning the state, landownership and sometimes even ethnicity.

In the Pomio district, roads form a peculiar private infrastructure. As with the state, whose presence is not total but not really absent either, the roads in Pomio do not form an all-encompassing grid; but again like the state, they are not fully absent but rather located here and there, so to speak. Around the provincial capital of Kokopo there is a growing road network that does not, however, reach very far into other parts of East New Britain (see MAP 1). There are roads elsewhere in province as well but they are not connected to the limited network around Kokopo, or to anything else for that matter. Most of the roads in East New Britain are not built by the government but by private logging companies such as the Malaysian Rimbunan Hijau operating in the Baining areas (Fajans 1998: 20) and its subsidiaries like Niu Gini Lumber operating in Pomio. These roads seem to run from nowhere to nowhere though they do connect the coast with logging areas and often pass through small villages. This network is only temporary: after logging operations cease in a given area, road maintenance is abandoned by the company and they are easily damaged by the heavy rains of the wet season. Company-built bridges suffer the same fate and are often washed away when rivers flood. Even though the locals use the roads where convenient, they almost exclusively serve the companies operating in an area. They are a private infrastructure built for a single purpose, namely the transportation of timber, and thus very different from the road networks built by states, although in practice government roads in PNG are not always much better.

The road network around the capital and the generally more developed infrastructure in the Tolai areas (to the north on the Gazelle Peninsula) are legacies of colonialism, because the administrative areas and the majority of plantations were and still are located there. Otherwise the government infrastructure could be conceptualized as simple 'punctuation'

because its presence is limited to certain areas—rather like dots on a map. There are aid-posts, schools and occasional police stations in larger centers but their somewhat haphazard location hardly forms a grid. The geography of Papua New Guinea, with its mountains and archipelagos, makes the building of grid-like infrastructure difficult. During colonial days much of the country was administered by government patrols walking from village to village, rather than remaining in one place (Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991: 13). The villages often had houses where colonial officials could stay during their visits (*haus kiap* in Tok Pisin), but these were empty or in other use most of the time. The first police post in the Mengen areas was set up only shortly before WWII in Pomio; prior to that the areas were administered from a distance of over 150 kilometers by sea from Pomio (Panoff 1969: 3). Much of PNG's infrastructure is still literally punctuation, because due to the lack of roads transportation still relies on airplanes that land on airstrips cleared in the forests.

Bringing in the state

In Ferguson's account of road-building in Lesotho the roads appear as mere by-products of development projects and advance the grip of the state almost imperceptibly. The situation in East Pomio is very different. Road-building has for a long time been an explicitly political question among the inhabitants of rural East New Britain. In some cases, the question of road-building is tied to land issues and even relations between ethnic groups. Jane Fajans (1998: 20), for instance, describes how the Baining, an ethnic group living in the northern parts of East New Britain—closer to the capital Kokopo than the Mengen areas—have for some time been opposing a proposed road link that would connect them to the provincial capital. In East New Britain the largest ethnic group, the Tolai, who live around the provincial capital on the Gazelle Peninsula, have the greatest political and bureaucratic influence in the province, but are short of land. The Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain was colonized during the nineteenth century and much of the land area has been alienated from the Tolais for plantations and the mission—first by the Germans and then by the Australians (Sillitoe 2000: 79). According to Paul Sillitoe (2000: 79), the Tolais have lost nearly 50 percent of the land area that originally belonged to them. Because of the land shortage, according to Fajans (1998: 20), there is constant demographic pressure from Kokopo towards the southern parts of New Britain. The Baining have sold rights to logging companies to work on their land and, as a result, private logging infrastructure also exists in Baining areas. The Baining have viewed these roads positively, precisely because they do not connect to a wider network and therefore the threat of Tolai settlers is significantly lessened (Fajans 1998: 20). During my fieldwork, I was told that there is still opposition to the Ili-Wawas plans among the Baining.

Road-building and the Ili-Wawas project were also central political questions much debated by the inhabitants themselves, and the focus of great attention during the 2007 national elections in which Mr. Tiensten managed to retain his seat with a majority of votes. Many of the Mengen with whom I talked were in favor of the road link, since it was hoped that a road to Kokopo would ease the financial situation, because it would enable agricultural products from the villages as well as cash crops to be transported

to the markets. Despite the largely positive attitudes, however, many people were also afraid that the new road would produce social problems by attracting *raskols*[4] and other suspicious people from the towns. Some villagers were highly critical of company-built roads, because of their limited durability and the government's suspected inability and unwillingness to maintain them when they were abandoned for commercial purposes. Furthermore, since the villagers do not have cars and will not be able to afford them in the near future, roads and their maintenance were seen by some as a useless waste of money. For these reasons a certain village minority explicitly supports the present restricted patchwork-infrastructure and the continued reliance on boats which are used for travel both to nearby villages and to larger regional centers; they are thus perceived by some as an independent form of transportation:

> There are other and cheaper alternatives to get development that don't pose any danger to us. Like the improvement of ports. We could use only sea-transport and short distance roads [to the ports], like we here in [our village].[5] (male, 37)

Most of the people with whom I talked, however, wanted the road connection for its potential economic benefits, while being at the same time highly aware of the possible problems. In fact most people supporting the road connection also hoped for a concurrently stronger government presence in the area. Unlike in Ferguson's (1996: 254) account, where roads instigated tighter government control as a sort of by-product of development, this was an explicit goal amongst the people of Wide Bay:

> They should first build a police station before linking the road [to the town]. This way the police could be here to drive out all the criminals [lit. "bad men"]. We can't do that, because we are too afraid of them. (woman, 47)[6]

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

Logging roads and patchwork infrastructure

When describing how states create standardized and legible environments, James Scott (1998: 8) also notes that large-scale capitalism has the same effects. According to Scott (1998: 12), scientific forestry which "saw" the forests from a purely utilitarian and economic point of view served "the direct needs of the state". This way of "seeing" is even more typical of logging companies which see the environment from an even narrower economic point of view than most states. And indeed, in the case of Ili-Wawas, the task of building infrastructure for the state is handed over to private companies interested mainly in the extraction of timber.

But do companies in fact create the same kind of standardized environment and infrastructure as states? In East Pomio the company infrastructure is as narrow in its uses as the point of view which produced it. The roads are temporary and they form isolated grids in the areas of interest to the companies. In response to Scott, James Ferguson (2005: 379) has argued that neoliberal capitalism in fact does not produce national grids, but enclaves and "patchworks". Indeed, capital does not flow, but it hops from one usable area to another, skipping the unusable in between (Ferguson 2005: 380). Ferguson's description of oil-companies in Africa seems generally applicable also to logging companies in East Pomio. In fact, keeping in mind that PNG's national infrastructure has always been of a punctuating kind, it could be said that contemporary Africa—as described by James Ferguson—is shifting from imperial networks characterized by rail-roads (for example Ferguson 1999: 2) and government control to the punctuating or patchwork-infrastructure characteristic of PNG. Until now the logging companies have created what seem to be enclaves, even though of a much less extreme form than the oil-enclaves in Africa or Iraq protected by razor wire, armed guards or even mercenaries (Ferguson 2005: 381). The logging-road networks spread out around company base camps, leaving other areas off the grid. Some Mengen villagers were very critical about this private infrastructure, describing the roads as mere tracks that will be washed away by rains in six months.

The infrastructure situation in East Pomio and other parts of East New Britain is less clear-cut than the scenario described by Ferguson (2005). The logging-company infrastructure resembles in many ways the enclave-like infrastructure of oil-companies, but with the Ili-Wawas plan there seems to be a trade-off between companies and the state, in so far as the companies get logging concessions for which they still need the approval of traditional landowners, while the state gets desired infrastructure at a fraction of the cost it would have to pay if it were to build the infrastructure alone. But the companies and infrastructure do not advance the control of the state just by making the areas more accessible, rather the infrastructure itself creates a need for the state and its security-providing institutions, as the comment by the Mengen man above illustrates. Furthermore, the poor quality of the company-built roads has raised the hope that the state might provide better services. An older Sulka man points out that the government, not the companies, should build the roads, because the government would be committed to maintaining them:

> The road link... The company, they do not build the bridges very well. They just cut down trees and put them over the river. It is not the government; if it were, it would build it well. The company, they are not able to do it right. (…) The government will build good [roads], because they keep working on them all the time.[7] (man, 69)

As noted, the majority seems to support the PEDS development project, especially given the fact that Mr. Tiensten retained his seat in the parliamentary elections of 2007 with a large majority. However, not all local people see logging as desirable and have sought to conserve their land areas as Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) as I will discuss in the following section.

Mapping

The legibility of the environment and people is not just based on physical modifications of the environment, but crucially rests on conceptual abstractions such as maps. As Scott (1998: 45) has noted, maps "make the local situation legible to an outsider". Maps—highly abstracted and the information they hold reduced to a very great extent—allow quick surveying of the tracts in question (Scott 1998: 44). Interestingly, development programs based on logging in the Wide Bay area not only create legible environments in the form of roads, but also enhance social legibility in the form of mapping, although indirectly. As mentioned above, not all inhabitants of Wide Bay support logging and some landholding clans among the Sulka and Mengen have decided to conserve their lands in the form of a Wildlife Management Area, a locally controlled conservation area. In order to facilitate this project in the village where I conducted fieldwork, one clan had decided to map the area intended for conservation to avoid future disputes and uncertainties. The mapping was performed with the help of a Papua New Guinean NGO using the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) toolkit developed in order to "enable development practitioners, government officials, and local people to work together to plan context-appropriate programs" (World Bank 1996: 191)

According to one NGO worker an objective was also to ascertain whether members of all the clans were in favour of the conservation project and not just the clan who had invited the NGO to facilitate it. The idea was to create a community map showing clan land and village boundaries and then to ensure that all the clans in question agreed on the result. In order to get all the villagers participating, the map was first drafted onto the ground using local materials such as sticks and stones to represent various geographic and social elements such as rivers, gardens and abandoned villages. The point of PRA is that while NGO workers explain and facilitate the process, the actual map is ostensibly produced by the villagers themselves. According to the NGO worker who had been conducting the PRA in the village, participation is at first slow and women in particular often refrain from taking part, but as the mapping progresses, people start to speak out and correct things that they perceive as mistakes. The map is completed when all the villagers agree on it. Afterwards, the map is confirmed by physically walking the boundaries and only then is it transferred to paper and sometimes even confirmed with GPS (Global Positioning System). The finished document should go back to the villagers themselves.

Even this kind of participatory mapping, however, is not entirely unproblematic, because it 'fixes' a certain situation in time—like a still picture of a flowing river, to borrow Scott's (1998: 46) metaphor. As noted by the NGO worker who had coordinated the work, when the ownership of clan lands is thoroughly researched and documented, it also shows who in the community does *not* own land and other resources: "It gives a clear picture of all the people who do not have land, just user rights to it"[8] (Papua New Guinean NGO-worker, female, 50).

There is, therefore, a concomitant danger that property relations can become unduly highlighted and even fetishized, and user rights be forgotten or diminish in importance. As Stuart Kirsch (2006: 203) has noted with regard to the Yonggom mapping of their territories with GPS technology, fixing indigenous land boundaries to universal standards

may dissolve flexible local practices of re-organizing land relations according to demographic shifts and other local dynamics. Power relations inside a given community also link up to maps and mapping because maps require a certain kind of knowledge to be read and understood. They are in a way part of the state's "code" (Scott 1998: 36), often legible only to the educated in local communities. Also related to the fear of fixing indigenous land relations by documenting them is the concern, often expressed by anthropologists, that mapping of indigenous lands is the first step in the commodification and registration of territory, leading ultimately to the alienation of people from their lands.

Interestingly, it was those most opposed to logging who actively wanted to make their situation legible to the state through community mapping. Mapping, whether performed by states, companies or NGOs, is a double-edged sword for the locals. It makes the situation legible for outsiders (Scott 1998: 45), it fixes fluid relations and "fuzzy" boundaries on paper, it separates propertied tracts from others (Abramson 2000: 15), but it also is often the only tool powerful enough to confront companies or even states themselves. Then there is the additional problem of *whose* maps the government actually reads. Those clan members who wanted to conserve their traditional land areas were disappointed to discover that despite their efforts their lands were nevertheless *mapped* as logging areas in the Ili-Wawas project, even though they had deliberately tried to make their situation legible to the state (the sequel to this story is further discussed below).

True, maps can negatively fix flexible relations and commodify traditional lands, but so do timber concessions sold to large multinational companies. And indeed, the transformations inscribed by large scale logging on the environment are more or less fixed as well, since regeneration takes a long time, or is impossible if logging is followed by plantations. Then it is not maps as "technologies of power" (Abramson 2000: 16) that make property out of traditional lands, but rather the deals with the companies; when these deals are made according to fluid traditional boundaries, the end result is also fluid and timber might be harvested in areas that people want to preserve. In East New Britain disputes seem indeed to be a very common consequence of logging and other similar development projects, though it must be noted that such disputes enhance legibility from the centre and even drive local people to support state institutions to a greater extent than before.

Disputes and social legibility

Among the Sulka-Mengen, land is communally owned—or more precisely held—by local matrilineal descent groups, that is, clans and subclans that belong to two moieties. Individual clans—and often also subclans—hold a certain area of land, an ownership that is recognized by the clans and subclans holding neighbouring areas. The moieties, clans and subclans are also strictly exogamous, while post-marital residence is not strictly regulated and a married couple is rather free to choose their place of residence. Due to the strict exogamy and freedom of residence, clans are very dispersed in their membership and few people actually live on their clan lands. In practice, it seems, user rights to land have traditionally and until recently been more important and elaborated than questions about actual ownership. People gain user rights to land through a number of different

relationships, such as affinal or patrilineal ties or residence in a particular village—in other words, through membership in different kinds of groups.

In order for a logging company to be able to legally log an area, it needs to get the permission of the local landowners. In Papua New Guinea practically all land (97–99 per cent of the land area depending on the source) is communally owned by the traditional landowners under the so called customary land title (Filer and Sekhran 1998: 30). In the legislation, the customary land groups are often defined as clans but they are not further specified (Department of Lands and Physical Planning 2005). This means that in many cases, the state (or company) does not 'know' who actually *owns* a given tract of land. Despite this, customary groups are legal entities, who can, for example, sell logging concessions to companies, but are not allowed to alienate land. In order to clarify the situation and facilitate land management by local groups, the Land Group Incorporation Act (LGIA) was passed in 1974. This legislation seeks to "find" groups that "already have a corporate identity under custom" and incorporate them (Fingleton 2007: 28, 27). While, as such, an innovative piece of legislation, the LGIA has been criticised because rather than facilitating land management, it is said to have become a mechanism for distributing compensations, that it reifies custom and that it has been 'captured' by heavy industries such as logging and mining in order to help them in making deals with local groups (Fingleton 2007: 31–34). Clearly, the LGIA is an attempt to make the local situation more legible to the state, even in cases where the local situation is far less clear than the legislation would have it (Jorgensen 2007: 61).

In addition to the incorporation of land groups, there have been several attempts to propose the registration of land titles, first by the colonial government in the 1950s and later again in 1989 by the independent state of Papua New Guinea as a part of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) (Lakau 1997: 536; Bashkow 2006: 284 n.13). The main idea behind the registration of titles was the belief that communal land ownership was inefficient in terms of economic development and that registered titles could be used, for example, as collateral for loans (Bashkow 2006: 284 n.14). Both attempts were unsuccessful, the first one due to opposition from the House of Assembly and the latter due to massive popular resistance and demonstrations that caused the death of two persons (Lakau 1997: 538). Land registration has often been seen as a mechanism to allow the alienation of land from its customary owners, and therefore strongly opposed (see for example article by the lawyer Almah Tararia [2005]). However, in March 2009, bills that allow the use of land as collateral were passed in PNG's parliament (Chand 2009), without opposition as of this writing.

The combination of compensation paid by logging companies that is high according to the standards of the villagers, the landholding system that makes it possible to claim various user rights based on different relationships, and PNG's land legislation that is quite unspecific, regularly produces situations that are fertile grounds for disputes. Indeed, in the village in which I conducted my fieldwork, most of the eleven clans represented were, or had recently been, involved in a dispute over land. Many disputes were minor quarrels over whether a particular person had the right to set up cocoa blocks on land over which he had user rights and so forth. Such disputes are usually short and quickly resolved at the village level. However, some clans were also involved in larger and longer disputes over parts of, or entire clan land areas.

Such disputes were directly connected to logging. In one case two clans were arguing about the ownership of a certain tract, that is, over who had the right to decide on its use and distribute the compensation. Another lengthy dispute had occurred in the village between 2000 and 2002 (briefly mentioned above) when one of the clans decided not to allow logging on its lands and moreover mapped them with the help of an NGO in order to conserve them. Later the area was claimed by another clan, but the dispute was quickly settled at the village level with help of local land mediators—government appointed officials who can help the disputing parties sign agreements but not make decisions in dispute cases. Later still, however, the same parts of the same area were claimed by a third clan who invited Niu Gini Lumber to log it. The clan intending to conserve the area stepped back into the fray and a long drawn out dispute resulted. Both parties were supported by other clans, both sought help from NGOs, and the clan in favour of logging had the further backing of a landowner company. In the end, after a long process, the District Court decided that the clan wanting to conserve the area was the traditional owner. No appeals were made to alter this decision.

The dispute was seen as particularly tiring and disruptive by the people involved. I interviewed participants from both sides as well as a local land mediator, and most agreed that it would be best if disputes were settled at the village level through agreed compromise. A member of the winning clan regretted that the matter had to be brought to court, but noted that the opposing party left him no alternative because it wanted to log traditional lands that his clan wanted to conserve. However, his younger brother—also active in conserving his clan lands and likewise involved in the dispute and court cases— thought that higher-level courts were preferable when resolving village land disputes due to their neutrality; as outsiders, court officials do not have a vested interest in such cases. He contrasted this with village-level arbitration where the local land mediators, as "men of the village" (*man bilong ples*) have their own stakes in the dispute, even if their clans are not directly involved. According to the younger brother, as land mediators they are able to gather the origin stories that are used to investigate ownership and modify their own versions accordingly. This same concern was also voiced by an NGO worker:

> The information you give out about your ancestors, all other people can use this information and twist it around. Some people are becoming clever these days. The custom of before is no more. That's why people don't like to disclose their information for fear of that.[9]
> (Papua New Guinean NGO-worker, female, 50)

Thus it seems that government institutions, such as courts, are gaining in popularity in the settlement of land disputes, a situation which parallels the expressed hope for a greater police presence should the road network extend to Wide Bay. Interestingly, similar tendencies were also to be heard in reference to the incorporation of land groups and even the registration of land titles. A local land mediator whom I interviewed told me that the ownership of most traditional land had been established in the area of the East Pomio Local Level Government, but that no land groups, to his knowledge, had been incorporated. Some Sulka clans were, however, in the process of doing so and people in the village where I conducted fieldwork and in neighbouring villages were seriously contemplating the possibility of incorporation and even registration in order to end disputes once and for all. It was noted that once ownership is recognized by the state, that

is, is "in the hand of law" (*i stap long han bilong lo*), no further disputes would be possible. It seems that the inhabitants of the Wide Bay area seek recognition by the state, be it for their conservation projects, in order to undergo economic development or for protection from crime and company abuses.

Conclusion

As described above, the Ili-Wawas project and the PEDS intend to economically develop the remote Pomio district of East New Britain. According to the plan, logging will provide compensation funds to local landowners while the logging companies will build new (logging) roads and connect existing ones to the national network in the northern part of the province. Oil-palm plantations will ensure that business continues and the roads are taken care of after logging operations stop in the area. Moreover, the new road connection should enable the local population to access the market in the provincial capital and sell their produce there. Besides ensuring economic development, the project is marketed by highlighting the services the government will be able to provide once the remote areas are connected to the grid. James Scott's (1998) concept of legibility has served as a point of departure for analysis of the political effects of the Ili-Wawas program because, on paper, the combined logging and oil-palm project seeks to produce precisely these kinds of legible environments whose creation, Scott (1998: 14) also notes, is often analogous with, and connected to, the project of centralized state-making. This is also the case with the Ili-Wawas project. Even though the roads and plantations are built by private companies, the state of PNG has a vested interest because it can use the private infrastructure as the basis of the national road network which is vital to the state's provision of services and control. However, the infrastructure built by private companies is—at least so far—rather poor in quality, a sort of slash-and-burn infrastructure. The logging roads mainly serve the needs of the companies, and as noted by many people I interviewed, when the logging operations in a given area cease, the unattended and unpaved roads are all but washed away by the heavy rains.

This does not mean that the Ili-Wawas project does not advance the role of the state. I argue that it indeed does, but also in different ways than intended. The people of the local communities in which I conducted fieldwork in general support the road project but they are also very conscious of the problems related to it. It was agreed that if the road connection is built, the government should also increase its presence in the area and protect the locals. Some thought that the roads should be built by the government, because then the government would be committed to keeping the roads intact, unlike the companies working in the area. Furthermore, people wanting to conserve their forests mapped their areas with the help of NGOs and provided the provincial government with this information, thereby willingly trying to make their situation legible to the authorities; they were subsequently very disappointed when the mentioned areas were mapped for logging in the plans for the Ili-Wawas project. So neoliberal projects like the Ili-Wawas do seem to strengthen the role of the state but apparently less by providing infrastructure than by making state institutions seem desirable solutions to project-generated problems.

This is in my opinion a significant shift. Jane Fajans (1998: 20) describes how the Baining, a people living north of the Mengen areas around Ili, were some ten years ago opposed to any attempt to connect their area with the national road network. The Baining were initially happy with the logging roads in their area, but did not want a connection to the capital, because they feared that this would lead to greater immigration of the Tolai people from the north to the Baining lands (Fajans 1998: 20). During my fieldwork I heard that there was still opposition to the Ili-Wawas project in some Baining areas. In contrast, rather than being opposed to the project as such, or fearing that the provincial government controlled by the Tolais will take over their lands,[10] the Mengen seemed explicitly to *want* greater co-operation with the government in order to prevent perceived problems. Rather than being opposed to the state, they saw it as a necessary institution in countering the problems that they thought were too big to handle themselves—such as crime, for example.

An analogous process is happening with questions about land tenure, ownership and disputes that the Mengen agree to be an outcome of development—logging in their case. In order for logging to be legal, the lumber companies need to have the consent of the landowning groups and compensate them accordingly. This means that the local landowning groups need to be specified and defined, a process that Dan Jorgensen (2007: 60) has also described as making the local situation legible to the state. Logging has indeed brought with it a vast number of disputes about land. Local communities and landowning groups dispute whether logging should be allowed on their lands at all; several different groups may claim a single area and so forth. According to a local land mediator I interviewed, the ownership of nearly all clan lands has been specified with the help of mediation and sometimes with the assistance of the courts. At the time of my fieldwork no land groups were yet incorporated or titles registered. The latter in particular has traditionally been strongly resisted by the local landowners of PNG, because it is feared that the registration of land titles will be the first step towards alienating the land from its traditional owners (Tararia 2005 and Lakau 1997 among others). However, people tired of disputes had started to contemplate the incorporation of land groups and registration. Similarly, a young and highly educated man who had represented his clan in a lengthy dispute over the ownership of a large tract of land stated that he favors higher-level courts for dispute settlements rather than local land mediators who are, according to him, too often partisan and influenced by their own interests. In his view, the state is a neutral party which also has the power to enforce its own decisions, as had occurred in his own case. While the majority of the people I talked to were in favor of local mediation and opposed to the registration of land titles, I think it is interesting that some people have fixed their hopes on a governmental role in dispute resolution.

Thomas Strong (2006: 51) has argued in reference to warfare in the Eastern Highlands of PNG that people are finding "means through which to govern themselves", but that these means do not necessarily fit the picture of efficient or fair liberal governance, nor is it clear that the people wish to be so governed. Strong's analysis clearly applies in the case of the Highlands and it is backed by other similar descriptions (for example Strathern and Stewart 2000). But it seems that something else may be happening in the remote parts of New Britain. As with the logging roads, it seems that the problems relating to landownership and disputes—that are an outcome of logging as well—make the state

as an institution more desirable for the locals. Rather than ignoring or being actively against the state, the local communities of Wide Bay seem to want to co-operate with the government. And even if this is not uniformly so, the fact that this willingness is gaining in popularity is highly interesting.

Arun Agrawal (2005: 20) has noted how changes in the technologies of government also affect the subjectivities of the people governed. Taking his examples from Kumaon, North India, Agrawal shows how centralized attempts to protect the forests in Kumaon resulted in protest, whereas more localized forest councils got the inhabitants to participate, and indeed created new kinds of environmental subjectivities. Maybe the unexpectedness, or the sometimes even chaotic, character of neoliberal governance, where central aspects of services are shifted to private companies, do create new subjectivities, new needs for more accountable government as manifested in the hopes of the Wide Bay inhabitants for more stability? In all its unpredictability, with crime and company abuses, logging indeed seems to strengthen the state. The question however remains what kind of state is being strengthened? Will it indeed protect the flexible ways of the local populations or emphasize providing a legal framework where extractive industries can work even more easily?

NOTES

[1] This paper is based on a three-month period of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a predominantly Mengen village in the southern part of Wide Bay between June and August 2007.

[2] The Sulka and Mengen number about 4,000 and 10,000 people respectively, an estimate that I base on the information provided by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Gordon [ed.] 2005). Both peoples, at least in the border area, see each other as culturally closely related. Intermarriages are common and both share a similar social structure based on a number of exogamous clans and two moieties. I was told that Sulka and Mengen clans, while separate in terms of leaders and land holding, correspond to each other. However, linguistically the two groups are not related: Mengen is an Austronesian language, while Sulka is classified as a Papuan isolate with long connections to neighboring languages (Gordon [ed.] 2005; Reesink 2005).

[3] Figure 8 in the recent publication *State of the Forests of Papua New Guinea* (Shearman et. al. 2008: 21) shows the dramatic increase in areas allocated to the logging industry from 1980 to 2005. Interestingly, substantial portions of the forests of southern Wide Bay were designated as production forests in 2005 (Shearman et. al. 2008: 21).

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

[5] *We em bai much cheaper. Na bilong kamapim developman bai i no givim mipela any danger. I gat ol narapela alternatives. (…) Say, laik mipela i improvim ol ports tasol. Na mipela i usim sea transport na sotsot distances long rot tasol, laik mipela hia long* [village name].

[6] *Ol i pastaim wokim sampela haus bilong ol police, bihain ol i wokim rot i link. (…) Em nau, ol police nau em bai sanap bilong (…) rausim ol desla man nogut nau. (…) Mipela i no inap rausim, bikos mipela i save poratim ol tu.*

[7] *Em rotlink… bikos company ya, company i … no wokim gut ol bris… i kisim, katim ol diwai na putim tasol long warai… Na i no govaman… [sa]pos govaman, bai mekim gut… na company em… em i no inap mekim gut. (…) Govaman, em bai wokim gut, bikos em wok bilong en olgeta taim…*

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

[9] *Information yu givim out long ol… ol big man long yu bipoa bipoa… ol tumbuna bilong yu yah, ol lain ken usim desla information na twistim twistim araun. (…) Some people are becoming clever these days. Pasin*

bilong bipoa, i no mo stap. (…) That's why people are... ol i no laikim disclosim information bilong ol, for fear of that.

[10] This fear was voiced by some of the people I spoke to, especially in connection with government conservation of the Nakanai Ranges. Some inhabitants were concerned that if the government conserves the ranges, the Tolais—who are, for demographic reasons, a majority in the provincial government—will take control of the area.

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