Paradoxes of the cosmopolitan in Papua[1]

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During September of last year a US anthropologist colleague[2] forwarded to me a short article from 'The National (30/8/05)' one of Papua New Guinea's daily newspapers. The article was titled 'Landowners torch TGM facilities'; TGM being Tolukuma Gold Mine, a mine located in the Auga Valley of the Papuan Highlands. The article reported that the villagers acted this way because they were unhappy about the royalty payments they had been receiving. The TGM had tried to fly members of the mobile police unit to the mine site but had been prevented by heavy fogs. The article went on to further report how '[l]ast month, disgruntled landowners shut down the hydro plant at the Auga River to disrupt work at the mine site. They were unhappy over compensation they got from the use of their river used for the plant. The villagers living along that river tampered with the power lines that supplied electricity to the mine to express their disappointment over compensation payment for the use of the river'.

The Tolukuma Gold Mine is located among Fuyuge speaking people, who live in the Wharton ranges about 100km northwest of Port Moresby, the national capital. There are no vehicular roads from the coast into Fuyuge lands and giant helicopters conduct all transportation into and out of the mine. The mine started operations there during 1995. It is currently operated by the South Africa-based mining company DRDGold and is one of its most profitable mines. At present, exploration is being conducted at sites neighbouring the mine, with possible expansion in the future.

We might wish to view the actions of these Papuan villagers

against the mine as a form of 'discrepant cosmopolitanism', a term used by James Clifford in his Afterword to the volume 'Cosmopolitics'. As he notes, this notion '[a]llows us to hold on to the idea that whereas something like economic and political equality are crucial political goals, something like cultural similarity is not' (Clifford 1998: 365). And as the above case appears to illustrate, 'the goal is not complete separation from the global systems that descended on indigenous peoples during the past few centuries. The struggle is rather for a real degree of control over areas such as land and culture, **more power in managing the ongoing interaction**' (Clifford 1998: 366, emphasis added).

To repeat: More power in managing the ongoing interaction. But what does this mean in the example I have briefly given above - especially the idea of the 'ongoing interaction'? What sort of interaction is taking place? A superficial reading of the incidents at TGM suggests that they are nothing more than destruction motivated by frustration. Although true to some extent, further contextualization is needed to make better sense of this brief media example and the sources of the frustration involved.

In this paper I will consider two Papuan ways of asserting power in managing such on-going interactions. The first is where Papuans view themselves as at the centre of the world and are potentially open to diverse outside influences. The second is where Papuans view the world as influencing their cultures and where cultures should be potentially closed to these diverse outside influences. The first is a sort of grassroots cosmopolitanism; the second a literate and metropolitan cosmopolitanism. Together, I suggest, they highlight the paradoxes of the cosmopolitan in Papua that I seek to elucidate in what follows.

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Let us return to the mining contexts mentioned above. In general, mining projects in PNG are localised by the government through the delineation of project development license areas. These areas correspond to the graticular units of fixed dimension on official maps and it is with reference to these maps that the mining sites are drawn. The delineated area includes the immediate sites of the project and often other adjacent sites as well. After the mining project area has been delineated then as a matter of course all persons specified as owning land are considered project landowners. As a result of these land demarcations any site of major resource development is likely to become the focus of competition by persons who can claim some proprietary interest in it (Weiner 2004: 5).

There is now a growing literature from PNG on compensation, landowners and what has been labelled 'entification' - 'the process of the making of "entities", or things from what have been either implicit or contingent categories' (Ernst 2004: 126); where persons, for example, come to designate themselves as landowning clans. However, notions such as landownership and even clans are not, in many cases, relevant local categories. This is why analysts have proposed the notion of entification to capture the emergence of explicit entities that come to be formed due to the influence of resource development projects and their procedures of operations. It is to such entities, as in the case of named landowning clans, that payments then flow.

The timing of these payments are dictated by the mining concern and associated government departments. This is generally worked out at one time and the disbursements are controlled over time. And yet the effects on the people and their land and environment continue and intensify. So although the compensation agreement appears to take into account these long-term effects, what it does not take into account is the day-to-day, on-going relationship - the ongoing interaction - with the mine and the

local expectation that a relation entails a recurrent, reciprocal flow. Thus the mining operations continue to take from the local people and although the compensation agreement has built in this 'time-factor', what is actually experienced and perceived is an on-going relationship that is not being properly acknowledged. In the relations between a mine such as Tolukuma and that of the local people there is a difference in the way the temporality of relations are appreciated and how they are understood to be conducted appropriately.

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A not dissimilar example to that at Tolukuma mentioned above is reported for the Porgera mine in the New Guinea Highlands (Jacka 2005). The Porgera mine is located in Porgera Valley and on land of the Ipili people. The Ipili people are connected in a ritual network with Huli people to the south and Enga people to the north. 'The ritual network was linked together by a giant python... and the various ritual sites were places where the snake's body rose to the surface of the ground' (Jacka 2005: 649). From the Huli perspective the gold at Porgera is from this snake. While from the Porgera perspective it derives from a spirit snake located solely on their lands. As the anthropologist who worked among them explains:

> [T]he power for the Porgera mine is generated from [a gas project] located among the Huli, and in 2002, the Huli shut down the Porgera mine for several months by destroying 14 electrical pylons that transmit electricity to the mine... Their rationale for destroying the pylons was that they were not receiving enough proceeds from the mine, even though they had long-term ritual and social links with the Ipili. As several Huli men expressed to me in 2000, the Huli were at the center of the ritual network because the head of the snake was in their area. It was their ritual activities - their pigs and vegetable products - which kept

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the snake alive so that its skin, urine and faeces could
become the valuable resources of gold, gas, and oil (Jacka
2005: 648).

As indicated above, the Ipili view the origins of the gold as
deriving from spiritual powers on their land alone. But what the
Huli men were telling the anthropologist is that the conversion
of the snake's skin, urine and faeces into valuable entities was
enabled by their capacity to keep the snake alive. It was their
transformation of pigs and vegetables at the mouth of the python
that facilitated the conversions resulting in gas, oil and gold.
These alterations further transformed the Ipili landowners into
wealthy persons. And yet, there was insufficient wealth flowing
in the Huli direction. Huli efforts, they perceived, really
enabled the gas, gold and oil but an analogous and substitutable
form for their efforts - money - was not coming back
sufficiently. By destroying the pylons and shutting down the
operations the Huli sought to effect on others (stopping the
flow of valuable commodities) what was being caused to them
(insufficient flow of money). The anticipations of the Huli in
terms of the conversions they had effected were not being
returned appropriately in terms of the timing or the amounts.

It would be wrong, then, to see these actions as simple
opposition to the mine (although there are those in the areas
that have this view). Rather, what is being opposed is a
convention of relationship that is not preceding accordingly. It
could be said that the mine is operating with one view of
relationship, premised on bounded entities like individuals, and
how such individuals conduct their relations over time. The
villagers, by contrast have a different view of relationships
and a different view of how such relations are conducted over
time. The problem here, as above, was the ongoing interaction
and how this should be managed.

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However, it would be incorrect, though, to see these PNG peoples as incapable of living side by side with outsiders - such as non-Melanesians. In fact, the Fuyuge, for instance, has a significant history of living with outsiders, of facilitating outsiders' entry to their lands and social lives: missionaries, colonialists, capitalist. In this regard we might even speak of them as 'popular cosmopolitans', following Kahn (2003: 409), where he suggests, 'that a certain cosmopolitanism governs the practices of localized individuals and institutions, everyday interactions between individuals and groups, popular cultural activities, forms of economic relations and institutions of village government'.

It is this capacity to incorporate and live side by side with outsiders that suggests a form of cosmopolitanism. But in the Melanesian cases, at least, it is also predicated on local cosmological visions. These visions are ones where people imagine themselves as occupying the centre of the world - and either implicitly or explicitly understand themselves as 'centre people'. In being at the center, their world is potentially fully open and as fully capable of appropriation as the world system that impinges upon it: 'within this world, transformation rather than reproduction (which is viewed negatively, as an undesirable restoration of the status quo ante) is the norm' (Biersack 1991: 231-232). Among PNG peoples it could be said that '[i]f their boundaries were boundaries of containment, the white man [for instance] would have come as an exogenous agent. But their boundaries are the sites of expansion and incorporation and any agent who "comes" succumbs to the logic of the processes organized at these sites'.

Classic instances of this capacity for incorporation are the first contact scenarios described and re-described for the New Guinea Highlands (Strathern 1992). The Australians that first contacted the inhabitants of New Guinea imagined that the

natives would be awed by the scale of their flight technology that followed them into the mountainous terrain and by the steel tools and other modern things they brought with them. But to the locals these were mere curiosities. It was not the distinctions or differences between the highlanders and the Australians that was to have the most important impact, but the collapse of that distinction (Strathern 1992: 245). At first the highlanders thought the whitemen were people-eating spirits and many ran away in fear, but others were curious and stayed. The Australians needed pigs from the locals to feed their numerous carriers, but the men would not part with them in exchange for the things the whitemen brought. However, when one of the Australians noticed the gold-lip pearl shell worn by the people, he arranged that some be brought back in the next plane. Subsequently, when the case holding the shells was opened the highlanders realised the Australians were men like themselves: they were 'confronted with an image of themselves' (Strathern 1992: 250) and it was this disclosure that made relationships possible (Strathern 1992: 249). '[T]hey were recognizable as humans because [they disclosed] the capacity to transact' (Strathern 1992: 251). In this regard it was also evidence of themselves and their world as the centre: things that come from distant places provides 'evidence of people's local capacities to draw them in' and the Australians presented the highlanders with evidence of their own - highlander - power (Strathern 1992: 251). If we return to Clifford's words, at this moment the highlanders were capable of powerfully managing the ongoing interaction, a set of relations that would subsequently alter, but not the conventions or expectations about relationships.

However, in the case of mining, the operators control the future and specifically the way people are organised on the land - the need for them to form themselves into named, bounded units. It is to these units alone that money as royalties or compensation flows. This way of organising themselves in relation to the land is contrary to conventional relations between people and land

among Melanesians (see Filer 1990: 11-12). In such an environment the boundaries do not allow conversions or transformations to be performed with the mine - and thus peoples' sense of effectiveness is curtailed. Rather, if anything, the boundaries imposed by the mining concern and the way it controls the timing of monetary transactions prevents the possibilities of any such conversions; that is, reciprocal flows that assume diverse forms (see Jacka 2005: 647).

This way of bounding persons with respect to the land is, in certain respects, not so different from the way the idea of culture has come to be understood and critiqued. In their much cited paper, 'Beyond culture' Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue against the association of peoples and cultures with defined territorial space or land. As they put it: 'An anthropology whose objects are no longer conceived as automatically and naturally anchored in space will need to pay particular attention to the way spaces and places are made, imagined, contested and enforced' (1992: 17-18). The mining companies anchor people in clearly demarcated spaces or land and this is contrary to the way most PNG people constitute themselves with the land and other persons. The PNG actions that I described above amount to a kind of critique that bears similarities to the critique of Gupta and Ferguson. But not all Papua New Guineans share this critical view about boundaries and especially the association of boundaries and culture.

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Another article from 'The National' (26/9/02) was drawn to my attention - during 2002 - that illustrates this different outlook. It was pointed out to me by my friend and fieldwork associate Alphonse Hega. He is a Fuyuge who I have known since the mid 1980s. The media piece he suggested I consult is by one of the most cosmopolitan Papua New Guineans,

the current Governor General Sir Paulias Matane. Until shortly after he became Governor General, Matane wrote a weekly column in 'The National' called 'The Time Traveller'. The title of the particular column that Alphonse had in mind was 'Destruction of Papua New Guinea Culture'. Why, through our letter correspondences did Alphonse suggest I consult this piece whose views he said he shared?

During fieldwork in 1999 Alphonse had expressed to me views about what he called his culture and how it was important to keep out influences - such as dances or placenames - that originated from other cultures. I had addressed the issues he raised with me in an article I later wrote and sent him a copy to see if he felt that I represented his views accurately (Hirsch 2001). In his response he said that I did and highlighted Matane's column as one whose views he greatly shared.

This specific column of Matane's derived from a symposium the author had participated in at the University of Sydney (during July 2002). The symposium was to reflect on the cultural de-colonisation of Papua New Guinea before and after political independence. The symposium included a very cosmopolitan group with speakers from PNG, Australia and other countries. The title of Matane's symposium talk was 'The Rape and Destruction of PNG Cultures and Traditions by Foreign Influences'. What he adapted for presentation in his column focused on the way colonial foreign influences altered the way PNG viewed themselves, took up foreign languages and ideas and lost traditional ways. As he notes, and this is the point Alphonse emphasised to me in his letter about the column: 'Today, some do not... even know their cultures and traditions. They have become strangers in their own homes.'

Here Matane is referring explicitly to the effects, for example, of mission influences or western style education, and their

general effects on PNG cultures. Alphonse in his discussions with me was referring to his own culture and the effect of other PNG cultures and/or western influences upon it. The fact that Alphonse reads 'The National' (when he can obtain it, which is often not easy in his village) and the column such as Matane indicates that he has more explicitly cosmopolitan views than most of his fellow villagers. His perceptions are informed by different horizons, shaped by his education and political interests. Alphonse, like Matane, is aware and concerned with the existence of distinct cultures, cultures whose integrity, they argue, exists by sustaining their boundaries from other cultures. More specifically, Alphonse is aware that in contemporary PNG, discourses and images of culture circulate widely in media forms such as 'The National' newspaper. But not all cultures become visible and circulate let alone in a effective and positive manner. Alphonse is concerned to get his culture portrayed and to have it portrayed in a way that shows it as effective. But to do so, a culture must appear like a recognizable culture - it must be distinct from other competing examples. This is what is displayed in much media advertising, where Papua New Guineas are portrayed, often in 'traditional' dress, and which are perceived by other Papua New Guineas to exemplify a unique culture, whether this is actually the case or not (see Errington and Gewertz 1996: 116).

In such a competitive, cosmopolitan world, an emphasis on avoiding inter-cultural transformations - maintaining cultural integrity - is highly valued by such PNG cosmopolitans. This is in contrast to the instances I described earlier in the paper where explicit conversions are specifically valued, whether within cultures or between them; whether adopting western disco to a PNG style of dance or taking placenames from different areas and emplacing them in ones own place.

In his column Matane highlights these outside influences:

> We learned foreign poems like Baa, Baa Black Sheep, The Three Bears Goldilocks, London Bridge is falling, etc. We were being removed from our animals, tales, and cultural and traditional ways of living. As the years went by, foreign music, books and even food invaded our homes. We became materialistic in our thoughts, words and deeds. The next generations followed suit.

He is reacting to an explicit cosmopolitan culture - western at its core - that he perceives as destroying PNG cultures. Alphonse concurs with his analysis, especially as this applies to his own Fuyuge culture and the outside influences he ascertains and is critical of - PNG style disco being the latest form. At the same time, though, Alphonse knows that the cosmopolitan culture that Matane condemns, but also centrally participates in, is the very culture that he also must engage with if he is able to render his culture visible - through commercially sponsored photo competitions, such as that sponsored by Coca-Cola and the like.[3] And this is among the numerous competing versions that circulate in PNG, from those displayed in Biscuit ads to Coca-Cola calendars.[4]

The influences from other PNG cultures or of western-dominated cosmopolitan culture is one Alphonse seeks to avoid. But this is contrary to how most of his fellow villagers perceive the world and how they understand it is to be effective and powerful in the world. Like them, Alphonse is seeking to attain more power in the on-going interaction with outside influences. The paradox is that the more that people like the Fuyuge assert their own form of cosmopolitanism - as 'centre people' - to render themselves visible and powerful, the more this seems to subvert the kind of cosmopolitanism advocated in parallel ways by Alphonse and Matane. However, the more such men draw on this explicit cosmopolitanism to render themselves or their cultures visible, the more they seem to contribute to the very predicament - of potentially infiltrating PNG cultures with

outside influences - that they seek to transcend.

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Endnotes

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Usi, and my other recent hosts in Yuvenise.

2. Dr Stuart Kirsch, University of Michigan.

3. He has a limited range of possible ways in which he can
display his 'culture'; he can only make use of what is at his
disposal.

4. One of Alphonse's entries to the 1998 national Coca-Cola
calendar competition was selected and used in the nationally
distributed calendar (see Hirsch 2004 for these images).