

Gender and Inequality in a Postcolonial Context of Large-Scale Capitalist Projects in the Markham Valley, Papua New Guinea

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Abstract: This article historicises gender relations among Wampar speakers in New Guinea (PNG). It analyses three interconnected female biographies to show how historical background interacts with current large-scale capitalist projects to exacerbate social inequalities. One biography exemplifies linkages between Christianisation, education and political representation; the second focuses on inheritance, access to land, and dogmas about patriliney; the third describes a woman's unfavourable position within a sibling set and her access to benefits from land leases. Support by their social network, sibling relations, birth order and, today, marital alliances, are key factors in women's success in the running of businesses, negotiating land disputes, and obtaining representation in political fora set up to deal with social problems. I demonstrate how older differentiations are reproduced as novel inequalities in political representation and in access to land and wealth. These result in new forms of exclusion that differentiate men and women, but which also differentiate life-chances among women.

Key Words: Gender, social inequality, mining, capitalism, Papua New Guinea

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INTRODUCTION

Interest in the changing material conditions of a people's ways of life, and the development of social inequalities—in gender, wealth, and ethnic stratification—has grown over the last twenty years (Sernau 2013, Tilly 2001). Today, these topics are back at the centre of anthropological discussions (e.g. Tucker et al. 2015, West 2016) and the contemporary ethnography of Papua New Guinea (PNG), which has a small but growing middle class (Cox 2014, Cox & Macintyre 2014, King 1998), in addition to an established national elite (Gewertz & Errington 2016). Current large-scale capital investment by multinational corporations and the banks that finance them accelerate existing dynamics of social change and stratification, creating continuities as well as conflicts with earlier forms of inequality (e.g. Golub 2014). Prominent among the continuities is gender inequity (Luker & Dinnen eds. 2010, Macintyre 1998, 2003, 2011).

PNG, which is the richest country in Melanesia (Macintyre and Spark 2017), still has a poor record in gender equity, social conflict and gendered violence. According to the resource curse literature (e.g. Banks 2008), this is not surprising, given the connection between income from extractive industries, social conflict (Banks 2008; Bannon & Collier 2003) and growing inequalities. Despite slower than expected economic growth, the link between dependence on resource income and conflict is apparently in place in PNG, as urbanisation increases, an urban and peri-urban middle class slowly evolves (King 1998), and cash and Westernised consumption habits spread through the social fabric.

The mining sector has provided an increasing number of job opportunities for skilled and tertiary educated workers. Cash income and the demands of the growing number of consumers have stimulated the retail, real estate, education, and security sectors. Gender mainstreaming, persisting inequalities and political participation in relation to PNG's mining sector have already been discussed by several colleagues (Hemer 2017; Lahiri-Dutt 2011; Macintyre 1998, 2011; Macintyre and Spark 2017). The cases I present are not from within the immediate vicinity of Morobe's most significant mining areas of Hidden Valley (actual) or Wafi-Golpu (awaiting government approval), where people receive/will receive compensation or royalties. Instead, they come from the wider impact zone of these ventures, which attract subcontractors and stimulate diverse ventures. The people of the area under discussion not only live with the expectation of mining benefits, but also have already been affected to varying degrees by other large-scale capital-intensive projects, specifically oil palm production and biomass energy¹ generation. Overall, the industrialisation of the region, and the suburbanisation of a rural area founded on banana as a staple, with betel and—later—cacao as cash crops, have produced many social changes.

PNG's middle class women are responding to new agendas of gender equity and participation set by international views regarding the rights of women. They strive for inclusion in the socio-economic sector and the political arena (Hemer 2017). At the same time, dogmas about 'customary' landownership and entitlements contradict these ideas (McDonnell, Allen and Filer 2017). These contradictions lead to tensions: between urban and rural populations and between men and women. Differences between women living in villages and those working in towns, who buy new fashion magazines (Spark 2014) and dispose of their incomes as they see fit, are sometimes greater than those between men and women involved primarily in the subsistence economy.

This paper examines pre-existing differences and emerging inequalities among Wampar speakers in the village of Gabsongkeg in the Markham Valley. 'Wampar' refers to a language

group of fifteen thousand occupying a very extensive area of the middle Markham Valley, in Morobe Province. Their lands flank PNG's busiest highway, close to the city of Lae. The considerations I present here derive from an ongoing comparative ethnographic project on international capital and local inequality among the Wampar.² Our research aims to identify the micro-level interactions that constitute local, district and regional networks of sociality in three Wampar villages. By tracing the processes of differentiation as they relate to these interactions, we aim to understand the development of inequalities that tend to become inter-generationally reproduced in a social field in which they were once unknown.

HISTORICALLY ROOTED DIFFERENCES

Some gender inequalities seem to be a basic feature of most forms of social existence and are therefore hard to tackle politically and analytically (Dorius and Firebaugh 2010: 1941).

Among the Wampar gender inequality intersects with disparities such as birth order, sexuality, age, ability, education and social positions. I will follow the most important of these combinations among Wampar through time, the increased value of land, the role of Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs), and the role that education can play to present the background of today's negotiations of gender relations under the influence of global capital.

The area was pacified, and its inhabitants Christianised, by Lutheran missionaries from Bavaria from 1910 on. Pacification did not just mean 'peace' –as Josephides (1985a: 82ff.) emphasises: it successively involved a complete reorganisation of all aspects of social life, as people settled in villages, attended Christian churches and schools, moved closer to roads, participated in elections and came to depend on a market system shaped by events beyond their ken. The timing of regional pacification left the Wampar in possession of a very large portion of the Markham Valley, and their early Christianisation placed them in a favourable position relative to other groups, which only later gained access to education, health care and employment. In PNG, as in other Pacific countries, white men dominated and mediated interactions between locals and the social and political forces that had encompassed them. Later, women's limited access to the new sources of power augmented male dominance (Macintyre 2017: 2). Neuendettelsau Lutherans had, by 1912, established a substantial mission station next to the village of Gabsongkeg, on land donated for the purpose by the *sagaseg* Orognaron (Fischer 1975: 50, 1996: 123). Since the earliest missionary ethnographers the main landholding group among the Wampar has been described as the *sagaseg*, which is a large encompassing group of which membership was inherited from one's father. *Sagaseg* is translated as 'clan' today. Orognaron's early involvement with the mission

still has effects on contemporary land disputes. From 1911 on the Yabem ‘bible school’ at the mission station in Ampo (Lae) offered primary education at the beginning only for boys. Later, the primary school in Gabmadzung, located in walking distance from the village, opened for Wampar girls and boys from the village and other settlements nearby. Because the missionaries set up a station, children in Gabsongkeg had, at an early stage, better access to primary education than in other Wampar villages. However, the school was at first mainly frequented by boys, and gender inequality of access to education for women, especially at secondary and tertiary level within the colonial system in pre-independence PNG, applied also to the majority of Gabsongkeg women (cf Macintyre 2017: 2).

Proximity to Lae and the Highlands Highway, the productivity and extent of their lands, and their association with the Lutherans provided the basis for Wampar prosperity. This period had a variety of effects on women’s income and autonomy, depending on their marital relations and their position within their family of origin. Wampar inheritance, residence patterns and aspects of courtship and marriage have changed drastically in recent decades and today are much more diverse than previously. Wampar women have for a long time been active, often even autonomous, in their partner choice. This has led, among other effects, to an increasing number of marriages with ‘foreigners’ (sometimes from areas with more pronounced ‘bilateral’ or ‘matrilineal’ orientations). Before marriage, Wampar women establish gardens, often on land allocated to them by their paternal grandmothers or aunts, and/or from their mothers. A woman can establish a position of economic independence and/or political influence—as Geyam’s biography will show—if her non-Wampar husband has moved in, is supportive of his wife’s ambitions and if her brothers are willing to let them use land of the *sagaseg*.

The post-war growth of infrastructure that allowed the extension and intensification of rural-urban networks and inter-regional trade in PNG, and the ability of Wampar to produce premium quality betel nut (‘Markham meat’), made the Wampar comparatively wealthy, especially after the Highlands Highway was completed and upgraded to facilitate freight traffic (Beer 2017). Wampar women had a central and active role in the betel trade: they planted palms in their gardens and around houses, harvested—with the help of skilled children—the nuts and carried them to market and home.

The many small and large markets in the Markham Valley are clearly gendered spaces, as elsewhere in PNG, (Minnegal & Dwyer 2017: 107). At the height of betel production many Wampar women were quite independent in the generation and disposal of income. They travelled, for example, in small groups to markets in other regions, even to Port Moresby, or

they sold betel to wholesalers. In the Wampar area the betel economy offered women opportunities for a stable income, which they could use to set up their own businesses (Macintyre 1998: 216).

After the crash of the betel economy more Wampar began to expand their cacao plantations and/or involvement with chicken production for the thriving Niugini Tablebirds business (especially in Gabsongkeg). In Dzifasing and Tararan cattle raising generated additional income. All this consolidated the advantageous political and economic situation of Wampar speakers as compared to their neighbours, not only in affluence, but also in access to spouses from elsewhere. Chicken production and cacao farming, though, are male domains by comparison with the betel trade. Women help harvest cacao, but most of the less arduous labour is done by men. The end of the betel economy also sharpened the contrast made by most Wampar between *wok moni* (wage labour) and *wok garden* (gardening). Although women still market other garden products they are in competition with vendors from the highlands and migrants from different parts of PNG. Betel guaranteed a much higher and more reliable cash income. Today, Wampar women also sell cooked—mostly fried—foods at the market, and women of the village of Ngasawapum sell decorative flowers along the highway. Some also became involved in pyramid selling ventures, of ‘medicines’ (vitamins) or Tupperware, or in women’s banking initiatives/‘fast money’ schemes that were not all successful (Cox 2014). Some, though, have regular income from paid work, e.g. as secretaries, accountants, nurses, or at Lae’s supermarkets, hotels and hairdressers.

The underlying cause of these developments, which directly affect Wampar families and gender relations, is the increasing commercial value of land, understood to be ‘owned’ by patrilineal clans. By 2000, the demand for land in Gabsongkeg had dramatically increased because of its location close to the Highlands Highway, actual and proposed mining sites and the growing city of Lae and Nadzab Airport (which is built on Wampar land). Over recent years rumours that Morobe Mining’s headquarters would be built near Nadzab, that a new bridge would be constructed over the Markham near Dzifasing and that the Highlands Highway would be widened to four lanes by 2016 has fuelled interest in Wampar land still further. More recently, land used by Wampar and non-Wampar migrants has been included in an Urban Development Plan 2016–2025, which is currently being evaluated by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) at the request of the PNG government. The development plan includes upgrading Nadzab to an international airport. The PNG state’s current requirement that Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs) be established within a population as the basis for interaction with large-scale projects, and the leasing or selling of land, has

reshaped sociality in Melanesia in various ways (Minnegal, Lefort and Dwyer 2015, McDonnell, Allen and Filer 2017). The state's interest in providing a legal framework conducive to development has not only commoditised land, but also led to the formation of new collective actors, defined as 'customary landowners', to secure legal rights over land; it has also stimulated new processes of inclusion and exclusion framed in terms of kinship, gender and ethnicity (cf. Mowbray 2014).

Differential access to fertile land, as the most valuable means of production for Wampar families, has always been an aspect of local political processes, but it now provides the basis for new gender inequalities. Access to land doesn't necessarily guarantee upward mobility, but the inaccessibility of a family's land makes the establishment of any business, income from leases, or the production of cash crops very difficult, or even impossible. The following case studies show how education, economic resources and access to land embedded in the historical context of colonisation, Christianisation and the expansion of capitalism have impacted gender relations.

FACTORS THAT SHAPED GENDER INEQUALITY

The case studies will exemplify the negotiation of gender in a coastal, early contact zone. Groundbreaking early studies of asymmetric and hierarchical gender relations conducted in the Highlands (e.g. Josephides 1985a, 1985b; Lederman 1986; Strathern 1984) have exerted a general influence on the ethnography of gender in pre-colonial and colonial PNG. More recent research, such as Holly Wardlow's (2014) astute analysis of Huli gender relations and female agency under more recent conditions, has added new dimensions to this picture. However, women's biographies and experiences were diverse within pre-colonial and colonial PNG and they have not been entirely unified with colonialism and missionisation (Choi & Jolly 2014). Against this background it is not very helpful for an understanding of today's gendered agency to establish a unified 'gender concept' that involves a juxtaposition of 'Western' and 'Melanesian constructs' (Dickson-Waiko 2001), or to evaluate it as either an improvement ('development') of gender relations or as a perpetuation of or reversion to 'primitive practices' (as when, for example, gendered violence and sorcery are discussed; Hemer 2018).

The Highlands Highway with its specific 'highway life' (Jacka 2015) cuts through Wampar territory and the Gabsongkeg area, creating differences between lives in the village and on the highway's edge, with its gendered spaces such as markets, its risks and opportunities. Notwithstanding such diversity, the case studies I present are interconnected in

being parts of one network. The three women and their parents grew up in a shared social space: they know each other and can trace connections via kinship links.

Land

As already noted, the Wampar—at the moment of colonial intrusion—occupied a massive area of the fertile flats of the Markham Valley, at very low population densities, a fact that continues to influence their situation today. Since Christianisation the significance of the *sagaseg* had declined in favour of smaller social units over the subsequent decades. This change was explicable in terms of the transformation of land use, marriage and kinship patterns, and the settlement practices that resulted from colonisation, Christianisation, and the engagement with market forces. With the advent of large-scale capital-intensive projects though, the patrilineal *sagaseg* is once more crucial to social life, mostly because of a legal context that demands the formation of state-recognised, benefits-receiving corporations (ILGs), but does not regulate how money is shared and distributed.

If the Wampar have generally come to understand patrilineal clans to be the ‘traditional’ landowners (which conforms to the views of some male politicians and businessmen) women are excluded from positions of influence in a context of exogamous marriage, since they do not pass on membership to their children. So, and despite all women’s-rights initiatives and their formal inclusion in ILGs under the ‘Land Registration (Amendment) Act’, which means Wampar women are listed as members of ILGs (through their links with their father’s *sagaseg*), they are in most cases excluded from negotiations and decisions about land use. In-married non-Wampar relatives are also excluded in most cases. Martha Macintyre (2011) also discussed the limited access women had to ‘stakeholder’ meetings around large-scale mining, which holds in general for Gabsongkeg too, when it comes to foreign investments in the settlement area (e.g. building of power posts, discussions of the development plan and extension of the highway). However, in the Wampar area a few women have been and still are more politically active and influential than is popularly believed to be usual in PNG and cannot be easily excluded from meetings and negotiations.

In general, relations to land are influenced by the institutions of PNG’s ‘weak state’, especially its legal regime, which is overburdened with lengthy and expensive court-battles about land. The general result is uncertainty, which does not, nevertheless, prevent well-resourced international companies from achieving their goals. This legal morass also offers individuals with greater familiarity with government procedures the chance to take advantage of their kin. In the absence of a clear legal regime of dispute resolution, recognition, and

enforcement of decisions, certain people can play both sides in the zone between ‘custom’ and ‘law’. Local understandings are swamped or rendered unreliable by conflicting information and the indeterminacy of official rulings. National and international governments, as well as non-government organisations, advocate gender equality, but powerful forces tend to legitimate the exclusion of women by extending ‘customary law’ to land rights and then to the benefits that accrue from leasing or selling land, as Martha Macintyre described twenty years ago (1998: 218). As Wampar *sagaseg* enter the state’s chaotic legal arena, some well-placed families or (predominantly male) individuals have benefitted from the many court cases that confuse and/or disenfranchise less privileged members.

In the days before ILGs, women could achieve politically and economically powerful positions with respect to *sagaseg* land. As described above, the administrative structures of ILGs (as currently implemented, if not as originally envisaged [Weiner 2013]), exclude women from many decisions and sometimes from the benefits, and some men argue it is their ‘customary right’ to exclude them. Depending on the amount of land a *sagaseg* can claim, the number of brothers and sisters, and their socio-economic situations, many different outcomes are possible: from effective landlessness, because of an unfortunate starting position and/or imprudent land-sales, through usufructory rights to garden land, to one that provides a constant cash income from rent or leases. Few situations, though, favour women’s secure income, education and decision making.

Discussions, negotiations and informal and institutionalised meetings concerning land conflicts are usually not open to women: nor—when they are—are women accorded a significant voice, state laws notwithstanding. There are two interlinked processes of exclusion at work among the Wampar: one disenfranchises women by making them cash-poor dependents, for they are less likely to receive a share of any income that land generates, and when they do, they are more likely to receive less; the other excludes them from the institutionalisation of ILGs, LOAs and other associations, so women have little say about the local legal architecture of these entities, and this thereby ‘inflates’ and validates existing male power.

Several Wampar women seek to neutralise the ‘patriclan’ emphasis by claiming that it conflicts with anti-discrimination laws. According to some female voices, the inheritance of land rights should be today bilateral, because leasing and selling of land is a ‘modern’ and not a customary transaction to which so called ‘customary rules’ should apply.

Many Wampar women—like Enny who is portrayed in the first case study—are well educated, due to their early involvement with the Lutheran mission and its emphasis on schooling. These Wampar women are currently in a position to defend their rights in court. In 2016, after 43 years, Orognaron – headed by Geyam – received their ILG certificates from the Lands Departments and are defending it.

The possibility of sending children to school (which requires cash for school fees, as well as the provision of encouragement and a supply of role models) is an important point of articulation between inequalities and generations. Thus, a closer look at education is important to understand the reproduction of inequalities. Having a good education does not guarantee a desirable job, a good cash income or political influence: but without any formal education, even very good land resources make it highly unlikely that any of these can be achieved.

During the peak years of the betel trade girls and boys were needed to climb trees and both received good pocket money for doing so. Parents did not push children very hard to stay in school, as education was not seen as the main guarantee of a good future given access to land. The situation has always been slightly different for the children of non-Wampar fathers, whose access to land could be revoked. Girls have always been an important source of labour in the household and garden, but after the betel economy collapsed, their manual labour was needed in cocoa gardens and on plantations. In general, Wampar expect women to marry out, whereas men stay and use their position and knowledge for good of the whole family. Therefore, boys have always been more strongly encouraged than girls to stay in school and/or proceed with higher education.

Differences in access to formal education between families were already apparent in the first post-pacification generations: only a few Wampar men (no women) became evangelists and pastors, or became teachers and policemen, while most completed only a few grades at the bible school. Chance factors were important, as proximity to Gabmadzung and early contacts with the missionaries there were decisive in recruitment to these first elites. This had an impact on the next generations: whether parents evaluated formal education as important depended much on their own. Educated parents were more likely to encourage their children (girls and boys) to do well at school and college, which laid the foundations for a certain kind of local elite. But non-formal learning, a readiness to acquire business skills and access to land could also provide some economic wealth and the chance to become politically influential, as well as to provide better chances of a good education for the next generation.

More broadly, the church and its congregation has supported women's groups (such as the *Geyamsao*) and provided a framework for women to organise themselves, and coordinate joint interests and activities, such as meetings with women's groups from other parts of PNG. Some women formed sub-groups, like savings associations, and some organised awareness campaigns on issues concerning health (HIV/Aids, Malaria) and/or social problems. Enny said without the initiative and support of the congregation her political career would not have been possible. Wanti (see case study two) had church support and played a prominent role in the congregation before she became a powerful 'customary landowner', recognised as such by most men. Her prominent role was noted by an Australian patrol officer: 'One woman stood out for her willingness to talk with men. This was the President of the GABSONKEK Women's Club, WANTI/JAFA who was the only woman to attend a meeting at night with influential men of the village. It was noticeable that she was respected and listened to without condescension.' (Dangerfield 1970/71). The long process of Christianisation has had manifold impacts on gender relations in Gabsongkeg, as in other parts of PNG (Jolly & Macintyre 1989, Hermkens 2008, Choi & Jolly 2014).

Wampar women have in the past had the chance—if a smaller one than boys—to get into positions of power as the first two case studies will show. But in addition, women's success depends on their husbands' support of their plans and projects, and therefore on their partner choices.

Economic independence and marital support

Nowadays, being employed and working for wages (*wok moni*) is difficult to bring into line with gardening (*wok gaden*). *Wok moni* presents for women the problem of deciding whether to commute daily or to live in town while recognising that they must look after their gardens at the same time, so that they do not lose use rights to land. Some women solve these problems by entrusting their garden to female relatives, or through patronage-like relations to non-Wampar migrants who are (temporarily) allowed to settle on land of a specific *sagaseg*, and use parts for their subsistence or marketing, and protect the land of their clients from 'illegal' settlers and theft.

Combined with the emerging gendered access to land and its significance, gender relations seem to be changing and some women (those who fail to get an education and become dependent on husbands and older brothers) are disadvantaged, while for others new opportunities open up. Within a given generation, marital and sibling relations are the decisive site where gender is negotiated. Over the last fifty years, changes in cross-sex sibling

relations and marriage patterns ensuing from an increase in interethnic marriages (Beer & Schroedter 2014) have opened many different possibilities in which women (and couples) can position themselves in new ways.

COLONIAL MIDDLE(WO)MEN AND POST-COLONIAL INEQUALITIES

This section focuses on the social position of three Wampar women (and their descendants): Enny Moaitz, the first female premier of Morobe Province, Geyam Warago, the acknowledged spokesperson of an influential ILG, and Ase Natan,³ a woman who has relatively little access to land, health care and education for herself and her children. Although I follow each of the women separately through their life course, they are part of the same wider network, connected by kinship, shared experiences and legal disputes. The women know each other, and their life-stories span tumultuous times of rapid social change that has affected all three.

Enny

Enny Moaitz's father, Ferea-Benjamin, was born around 1900, in Wamped, before the missionaries arrived in the Markham Valley. After their arrival, he worked looking after cattle at the mission station in Gabmadzung. His wife Ebagan, was born around 1905 and worked as a helper for the first missionary, in Gabmadzung, where Ferea-Benjamin met her (Fischer 2002: 53; cf Douglas 2003: 13). Ferea-Benjamin was one of missionary Stürzenhofecker's language informants, and was educated by the missionaries (Fischer 1994: 11). After WWII, he became a pastor himself and was posted to the Watut village of Forofar, in 1958/59 (Fischer 1975: 2).

The lineage of Ferea-Benjamin became influential not only because he was Gabsongkeg's first pastor, but also through his membership of the *sagaseg* Dzeagantson, which had extensive lands that were made available to the Lutherans (Fischer 2002: 96, 97). Ferea-Benjamin's influential position within the church and community is reflected in the education that his daughter Enny achieved in comparison to other Wampar women (and many men) in her cohort. Such an education was one of the conditions for her later political attainments, which included becoming the first female premier of Morobe Province.

However, the specific form and extent of Enny's education cannot be detailed without reference to values and connections that her parents committed to in the course of their own place in the colonial order. She finished elementary school in Lae's first Lutheran mission station, just outside the city; went later to the Yabem Bula Girls School (just south of Lae)

and afterwards to Balob Teachers College (Lae), where she was one of its first female students. After graduation, she worked as a teacher at the Primary School in Gabsongkeg / Gabmadzung, then in Amba (Butibam, today a part of Lae) and later as head mistress of St. Pauls School in Lae.

In 1970, she married a Wampar man, who was of *sagaseg* Moswarang and whose father had also been an evangelist, to a Watut group. Enny's involvement with community issues and the development of her political commitments were shaped by her role in *Geyamsao*, the Lutheran women's organisation, and the Girl Guides. As Macintyre and Spark (2017: 5, see also Scheyvens 2003) write, Christian education and the church-based organisations established in the context of colonial administration and national circles of influence (e.g. Young Women's Christian Association and the Girl Guides) opened up new options for women to define and pursue their collective interests. Enny and her sisters were leading figures in the *Geyamsao* and actively recruited for the organisation in their travels through Morobe Province. After she stopped working as a teacher, in 1978, Enny was '*het meri*' of *Geyamsao* and soon founded the Wantsef Women's Association of Wampar Women. Enny herself emphasised that working with the *Geyamsao* and Wantsef Women's Association, and the experience she gained from being an active member of the Girl Guides, prepared her for her political career.⁴ She recalled how certain older women of Gabsongkeg, like Wanti (who plays a central role in the second case study), who interacted self-confidently with district and provincial bureaucracies as a recognised 'landowner', also demonstrated the possibilities for women in post-independence PNG.

The Lutheran congregation of Gabsongkeg nominated Enny for provincial election and encouraged her to run for the office of Premier. She ran unsuccessfully in 1984, but in 1987 she was elected Premier, becoming one of the three women to have ever been elected as head of a provincial government in PNG (Macintyre and Spark 2017: 3). In 1992, Enny was a candidate for the national election: she didn't succeed, but she later campaigned for male relatives who did. Enny's husband was also important to her success: he was her 'backbone' she said. He helped her write speeches, as well as taking care of their sons, born in 1976 and 1982; she also had support from female relatives and neighbours. Without him, she couldn't have had a political office and raised her family at the same time.

Recently, Enny gave a speech during the opening of a Wampar market, which was reproduced in the Post Courier (one of the most widely read newspapers in PNG). The speech dealt directly with the problem of gender relations, land rights, use, and ownership and several aspects of the changes currently taking place: Patron-client relations that subvert

commitments to kin and neighbours emerge; illegal settlements, theft of garden produce and pressure on land are all increasing. Enny is concerned about the effects of government initiatives that produced ‘customary landowners’ (the state’s category) organised in ILGs, which are then enshrined, for example, in government endorsed ‘development agreements’. In doing so, the PNG government imposes its own version of ‘customary law’, rendering irrelevant the local traditions under which land was formerly held (McDonnell, Allen and Filer 2017). These moves have wider consequences for gender relations, as the Wampar patriline, and men’s control of land, trumps other relationships and considerations. Formerly, Wampar women were never completely excluded from secure access to land, as a resource and as an important source of socially validated identity.

Land remains central to ways of life in PNG, although relations to land are changing constantly under the influence of uniform systems of state laws. Whether as ‘smallholders’ or ‘customary landowners’, most Wampar still depend on land-based livelihoods for food, cash crops, timber and many other life necessities. Today, though, villagers also hope for a cash-income from compensation, rent, leases, or royalties or from land used by international corporations. As a result, and after its comparatively conspicuous absence, the state is now very much present, as it is required to be by international economic interests. Even in the remotest areas of PNG, the state seeks to regulate land transactions, by imposing new concepts of its relations to those who occupy it, with a view to securing investment. But relations to land and gender inequalities are closely linked, so the state cannot help but play a role in reconfiguring women’s place, as is illustrated by the next case study of two generations of women who fought with men to represent a Wampar *sagaseg* and its lands.

Geyam

Geyam, the spokesperson of a modern ‘clan’ (*sagaseg*), was born in 1951, the daughter of the legendary Wanti and her rather shy husband of *sagaseg* Montar. Other villagers often ridiculed him as a ‘man without talk’: supportive of his wife, but without a strong position himself. Before the early 70s, land negotiations were not a very important issue, although much Wampar land was under lease (research stations etc.). However, Wanti recognised before many the value of Wampar land in the new, post-war era and fought to get an official survey and legal documentation of Wampar ownership of the land on which it was projected that Nadzab airport would be built. In 1973, once she had obtained the documents, she and three male relatives leased the land to the government. When she became old Wanti decided that her better-educated and more serious daughter, Geyam, should become the spokesperson

for the ‘customary landowner’ of Nadzab airport and other properties. She wrote an ‘official’ letter to the Lands Department of the Huon District Administration in which she declared Geyam to be her successor. The office accepted the proposal and handed Geyam the yearly cheques for the lease of the Nadzab land.

Geyam attended school and nursing school in Lae without, however, finishing her training. Later in life she expressed regret at not taking the exams. Still, her education was superior to that of her brothers, one of whom was barely able read and write. She was the first woman in Gabsongkeg to own and drive a car. She familiarised herself quickly with land matters, made relevant contacts in town, and listened to her mother’s stories about the history and the boundaries of her land. She also took care to preserve the documents that mattered. Geyam worked with the documents and contacts her mother had provided her and registered an ILG. In 2016, The National reported that after 43 years the Orognaron clan (formerly Dzeagantson) had finally obtained an ILG certificate

Today Orognaron ILG is the only one with a female head: it currently has title to large areas of Gabsongkeg land. Whether the state-sponsored ideology of ‘patrilineal clans’ will decisively weaken the position of Orognaron is an open question, but it is certainly complicating matters. As of 2017-18, Geyam is involved at least in two long-lasting legal battles over land rights and connected matters, which cost much money and time. One of them involves a criminal charge, the bail conditions of which prevent her from negotiating with authorities in Port Moresby concerning payments for other Orognaron leases. The same case has meant that income from Nadzab airport has been frozen since 2016. Geyam has been approached by investors interested in other parcels of land, who are prepared to guarantee the ILG a very good yearly income. Her only living brother has serious health issues and is not contesting her leading role in the land business. However, the current tensions around all land transactions and the attempts to argue that customary landownership can only be patrilineal contribute to an unclear situation that has resulted in a standstill. Most of the court hearings have been postponed for many months at a time and it is clearly difficult for the overwhelmed courts in Lae to cope better with this ‘lawfare’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). Geyam’s non-Wampar husband has supported fully his wife’s position, and has helped her with the paper work. Her brothers enjoyed the comparative affluence that Wanti and then Geyam gave them.

Ase

Ase, who is central to the last case, study was born in 1975; thus, she belongs to a generation that grew up after PNG’s independence, enjoying the easy if modest income ensured by betel

nut production, as consumerist desires and access to education grew in unison. Natan, her father, of *sagaseg* Orogwangin, was born as the only son of a former leader of Gabsongkeg, who was appointed by the colonial administration in 1927. Natan had ample land in Gabsongkeg and lived in comparative affluence. He and his wife died relatively young, at 55 and 46 respectively. Ase and her sister were only four and seven years old when their parents died; nine children were raised by their oldest sister, Payap, who was twenty years their senior.

Ase left school after grade six, like many Wampar girls, planning to work in the gardens and generate income in the betel trade. At twenty-one, and unmarried, she had her first child, who was also raised by her sister Payap and her husband. A little later, Ase got a traineeship at a big supermarket in Lae where she met Nati, her future husband, who worked for the Lae city council. After their marriage, Nati gave up his job and moved to Gabsongkeg. In 2009, after betel production was ended by a devastating blight, he found a new job at Pacific Foam in Lae.

Ase's *sagaseg* had access to considerable areas of land and therefore there was no question of her and her non-Wampar husband residing anywhere but Gabsongkeg and making gardens on her father's land. In 2004, she told me that there had never been any family conflicts over land as there was more than enough for everybody in her kindred. But with the breakdown of the betel economy around 2008, possessing land was no longer enough.

In 2004, Ase's *sagaseg*, Orogwangin—as represented by a few adult men—registered an 'association to produce cocoa and vanilla', and then leased 300 blocks of its land for twenty-five years to non-Wampar, for residential and business purposes. Ase's brother manages the blocks, makes contracts, decides who can lease land and collects the income. Most of the income from the blocks is used by Ase's brother for his nuclear family and for his own needs (which, conspicuously involve drink, gambling and travelling). As in other parts of PNG the distribution of benefits in the Markham is becoming more exclusive, based on hereditary kin connection, age, and gender (Bainton 2009, Gilberthorpe 2013, Minnegall, Lefort and Dwyer 2015).

Although her brother claims that the income from the blocks is equally divided among his siblings, part of it was invested in unsuccessful legal battles with Geyam and her ILG. His sisters, including Payap, who raised him, say they have received only a little money and only from time to time—money they must spend on basic clothing and school fees. Interviews and observations indicate that the sisters consume mostly garden products while their brother often buys luxury goods like chicken, rice, canned fish, beef, coke, and beer. Moreover, they

possess the latest technological gadgets available in Lae (computers, mobile phones) and he did not hesitate to pay for a three-week journey to attend a sporting event in another province.

CONCLUSION: GENDER INEQUITY IN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND LAND NEGOTIATIONS

I have discussed how access to land, labour and cash articulates with gender and social group identity to affect the lives of individuals and their socio-political positions. In the face of substantial change, if the basic relations that generate transgenerationally reproduced inequalities remain in place, new differences become intergenerationally significant to social inequalities only if they inflect social relations in the appropriate way. I have analysed the biographies of three Wampar women and their kin, embedded in a pre- and post-colonial regional history, to show how their social positions relate to earlier conditions in a contemporary, peri-urban setting undergoing the impacts of large-scale capitalist projects like mining and oil-palm plantations. The biographies, in fact, reveal aspect of the female experience of historical transitions. I showed how certain inequalities persist, while others change, to create new differences in the life-chances that affect everybody. The first two case studies considered in this paper involve the interaction between very local contingencies and systematic pre-colonial differentiations. These acted to position Enny and Geyam in advantageous ways vis-a-vis most men as well as other women. The third case, dealing with gender relations between siblings, by contrast, seems to involve more entrenched aspects of capitalist social relations acting in concert with those earlier patterns of differentiation.

The case studies also show that the different conditions for individual situatedness in social networks are not independent: education, for example, at a particular time, not only made it possible to have a higher income—it opened doors which, ten years later, are suddenly much harder to open. The case studies help demonstrate specifically *how* these interactions between, for example, the power of church leaders, education and income from land play out in a post-colonial state like PNG.

Colonial differentiations of access to education and rights to land are reproduced as novel inequalities in political representation, relations to land and access to wealth. New forms of exclusion that differentiate men and women have come into being, forms that also differentiate women and their life-chances.

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NOTES

¹ In Dzifasing village PNG Biomass (owned by Oil Search Limited) has been planting eucalyptus on 15--25.000 hectares of mostly grassland to produce ‘alternative’ biomass energy and enhance the power supply of Lae.

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- ² Doris Bacalzo, Willem Church, Tobias Schwörer and the author have been working in a research project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF). The arguments presented here are based on fieldwork the author has conducted between 1997 and last 2017. Most of what I present here relates to Gabsongkeg: significant details vary from village to village in Wampar territory.
- ³ All names are given pseudonyms, except those of public figures, those making public statements at meetings, court cases or the media, and place names. This approach provides the possibility for colleagues to follow up on case studies while providing as much protection and privacy for our interlocutors as possible.
- ⁴ Enny travelled on four occasions to the Girl Guides' World Conferences in Europe and the Middle East. The journey to Teheran in 1978—as the revolution that deposed the Shah gained momentum—impressed her greatly.