

Land as Assemblage: Conceptual Insights into Land Debates and Policy in Papua New Guinea

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INTRODUCTION: RECENT GLOBAL ATTENTION TO LAND

- Land now a focus on international attention, due to focus on ‘land grabs’ in last decade
- A recent influential contributor is Tania Murray Li (‘What is Land’?, ‘Land’s End’)
- Rediscovery of older work: (“To isolate [land] and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors”, Polanyi 1944)
- Today – how does PNG fit into these conceptual debates?
 - What can PNG learn from them?
 - What can PNG contribute to these debates?
- Project Context:
 - Part of a larger project: ‘The Land has Eyes and Teeth’.
 - As introduced by PhD member of the project (Hannah) yesterday, project funded by the Royal Society of New Zealand (Marsden Fund)
 - Aimed at promoting the power of land, socially, culturally and economically, arguing too that ‘land demands respect’ – it has eyes and teeth.



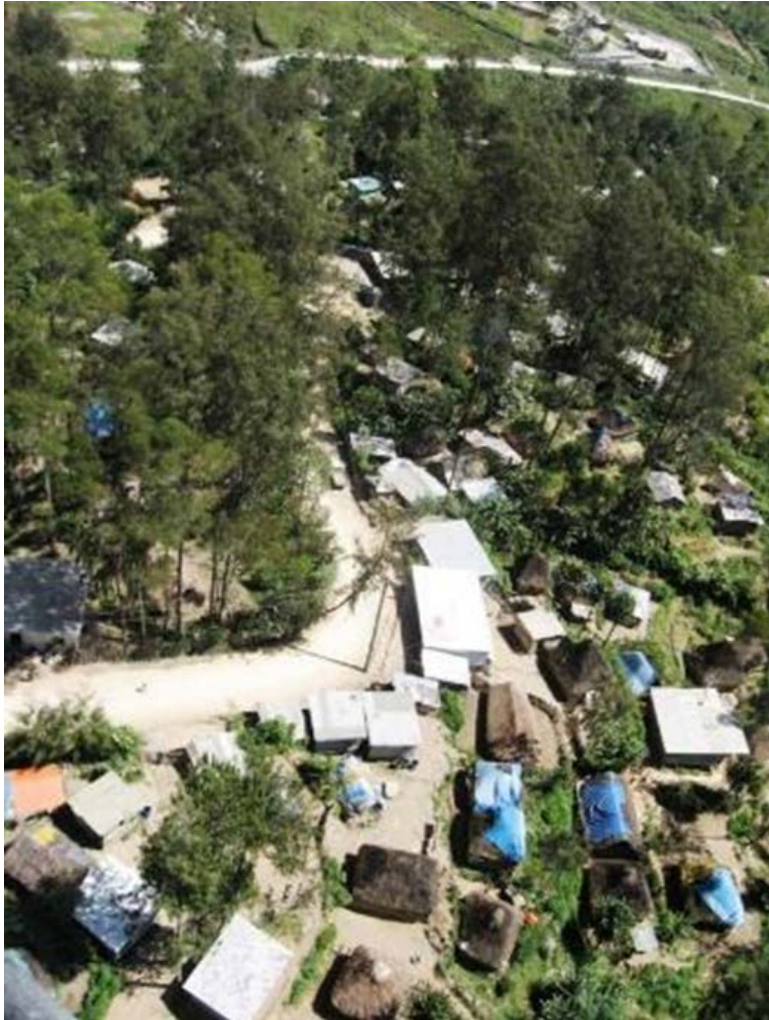
LAND AS 'ASSEMBLAGE'

- A conceptual tool/ analytical lens, recently used in a variety of areas (governance, economic sectors/ activities)
- Assemblage is a way of thinking about the:

'heterogenous elements including material substances, technologies, discourses and practices' (Murray Li 2014:1)

that make up what we usually think of as a 'natural resource'

- Materiality – the particular characteristics of land 'it is not a mat'
- Technologies – social and mechanical 'tools'
- Discursive elements – way we talk and write about land
- Affordances – environmental, cultural, 'O2 factory', economic
- Provisional – each can and will shift



ASSEMBLING LAND IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

- Variety of modes of regulation (kastom, national etc)
- Inserted into different economies – capitalism, informal, subsistence
- Presence and location matter
- Multitude of (changing) practices around land
- Exclusion (Murray Li) by force, kin, the market or regulation reflects power relations
- Accommodates diversity of local realities
- Our project looking at forms of economic activity of customary land

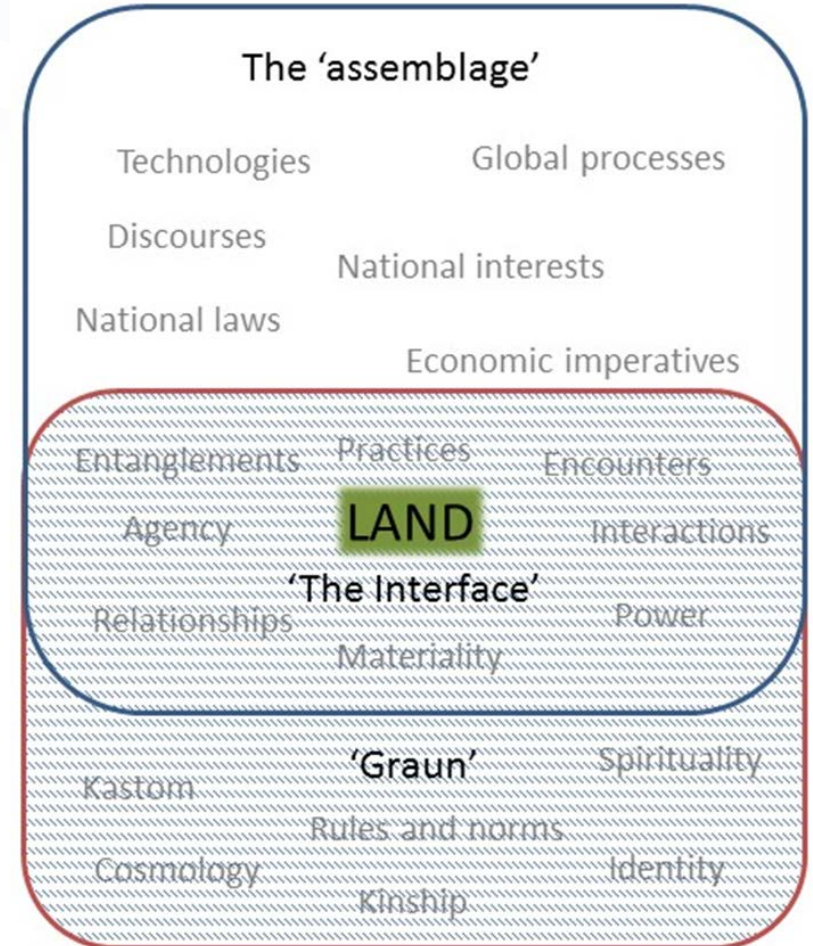


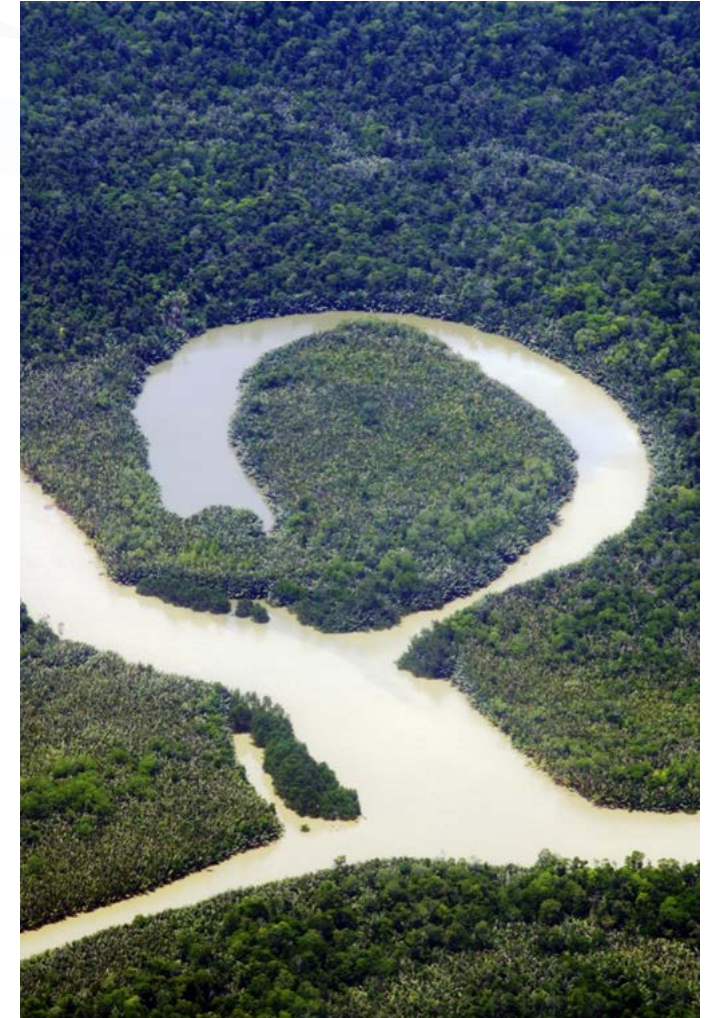
Figure 1: Land as assemblage/ *vanua*

INSIGHTS FROM THE MODEL

- Focus on intersection of kastom and global and national forces
- Forces us to look at the power, where that power derives from, and the relationships and networks, that sit behind recent developments
- Diversity and patterns of evolving and constant practices, some exclusionary
- Our project looks at customary land and debates about land registration/ individual title, driven by economic arguments
- Model helps understand that customary land:
 - Can support a wide range of economic activities in subsistence, informal and formal economics
 - Can be the site of innovation – indeed does encourage it and a means to reduce risk
 - And at the same time, continues to be the source of great cultural strength and identity, and environmental values, for much of Papua New Guinea

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- Key question: how to make land work for the variety of development priorities that the PM outlined yesterday
- Debate about land shouldn't be reduced to a simple dichotomy
- Registration of customary land, informal land markets, LLB etc all may work but need to be cognisant of exclusions
- Multitude of affordances (cultural, subsistence etc) of customary land need to be weighed into the equation
- The context, conditions and forces at the 'interface' will continue to shift so important to have flexibility to accommodate or adapt
- Customary title continues to work for many – it can intersect with the formal economy in many ways, can be the site of innovation, and can provide a base that reduces risk for entrepreneurs





TENKYU TRU