

MONEY, LAND AND AUTONOMY DEVELOPMENT ON THE FRINGES OF MINING

By Charles Roche

The impact of mining is often obvious. Examples of positive benefits and the negative impacts are repeatedly demonstrated. In Western Australia we have seen the rapid bust following the spectacular boom of the mining industry, and in Papua New Guinea (PNG) the expatriation of profits and associated impact from riverine tailings disposal at the Porgera and Ok Tedi mines.

There are also less obvious impacts from what the West calls development, such as increases in domestic violence and HIV Aids often associated with mining in PNG. Perhaps even more disturbing is the fundamental way that development, the assumptions it's based on, and the values that underpin it undermine the relationships and connectivity between communities and land. Where development is accompanied by, or perhaps built on, a loss of agency (capacity for free thought and action) and autonomy from the very communities it purports to assist.

In two companion articles, Professor James Leach, Director of Research for the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Océanie and an ARC Future Fellow at the University of Western Australia, explores the indirect impact of mining-led development on the Reite Village in the Madang Province of PNG. In an engaging narrative that presents the lived reality of the communities to the reader, the articles challenge basic assumptions about customary land, property and development.

This article is part summary, part review and part discussion. It's impossible in a short article to understand the Reite Community or do justice to Leach's three years of participant-based observation there. Rather, the aim is to understand mining-development in PNG; seeking a path than contributes to healthy and just societies supported by ecological well-being.

The Reite village is twenty kilometers from the Basamuk Bay processing plant that is connected to the Kurumbukari nickel mine by a 130 kilometre pipeline. The ore is processed at Basamuk Bay and shipped overseas with the mine waste disposed of via a 150 meter deep pipe into the 1500 meter deep Basamuk Bay canyons.

The values and belief systems of the Reite communities are illustrated by their bark-fibre skirts which have named patterns in the skirts and are owned by, and deeply connected with, particular kin groups and places. The skirt pictured below, carries the design *Tupon sarrung*, which means 'waterfall,' and brings together the movement of the waterfall and the person as one, enhanced by the swish and flow of the dance. Even in this basic description, the interconnectedness between land and people is apparent.

Leach writes of the reproductive power of community, experiencing people who "...*are, in a very real sense land made mobile, containing as they do the power, substance, knowledge and history of specific lands.*" (Leach, 2011, 312) Here, land is not institutionalised through ownership or state sanction but is collectively held and nourished through interconnected life and ritual. The design on your skirt tells others where you are from - a place of shared land and exchange as the basis of cultural life and kinship, a place where the relationship between land and people is complex, multifaceted and interwoven across time.

The change in communities is captured by Leach's description of a '*time of taro and yam*' and a '*time of money*'. Like many communities in PNG, Reite people rely on starchily crops (like taro, banana, sweet potato, sago and yams) as their staple food, and in their case it's taro. But as the skirts are more than clothes, taro is much more than food. Professor Leach describes a centrality of taro, with the subsistence role of taro indistinguishable from taro as form and structure in social life. There are specific ways of growing taro, which is passed down in initiation rights by maternal kinsman, tracing the history of how they came to grow taro. The history of taro and people is connected to land and ancestral entities in a myth of taro called *Samat Matakaring Patuki*.

Now though is the '*time of money*', with communities wanting to capitalise on the opportunities brought by development to make money, to counter the fact that twenty toea has no power — that is twenty toea does not buy much. Indeed, this is seen as the right, moral way, of realising value from the land. Which, without direct development