

# 'It's Raining Money': Anthropology, Film and Resource Extraction in Papua New Guinea

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**ABSTRACT:** This article looks at the impact of money 'raining' on the indigenous hosts of a non-renewable resource extraction project in Papua New Guinea and the use of film media to record and disseminate the views of those caught up in it. 'Resource development', the gloss under which industries operate, is an ambiguous term as the cash (royalties) and services (roads, health centres, schools) accompanying resource extraction are only maintained during the life of a project. The anthropological use of film in extractive industry contexts is, I argue, an ideal methodological tool for documenting indigenous concerns, views and ambitions for a postindustry environment. Based on an ethnographic film made with the Fasu, hosts to a multinational oil extraction project in the fringe highlands, this article aims to highlight how film documentation can not only reveal the broader implications of a cash economy, but also be used by anthropologists to influence participatory research and bottom-up development.

**KEYWORDS:** extractive industry, development, ethnographic film, indigenous knowledge, data dissemination, Fasu (Papua New Guinea)

## **Anthropology, Film and Resource Extraction**

Extractive industry is one of the more prominent manifestations of international development that has expanded in Papua New Guinea over the last thirty years to include mining projects at Lihir, Porgera and Ok Tedi, and oil/gas extraction at the Kutubu-Gobe-Moran fields. Whilst significant to economic development on a national scale, at the village level the rural and isolated locations in which resource extraction projects operate underlie restrictions to an integrated, sustainable economic base beyond extractive industry in these regions. Social change and the development experience lie very much within the realm (and time-frame) of extractive industry, namely in the infrastructure, services and royalties provided by operators.

The literature concerned with indigenous communities affected by extractive industry illuminate local articulations of global intrusions, highlighting culturally specific responses to industry as informed by the cosmological and ideological frameworks of host communities. As such the development experience is unique to each region (see especially Sillitoe 1999; Jacka 2001; Ernst 2004; Jorgensen 2004; Banks 2005; Gilberthorpe 2007). But is there a common theme uniting these experiences and, if so, what is the best tool available to document them? Based on research carried out by a number of anthropologists working either as consultants or independently, the common thread linking local experience in these areas seems to be a generic desire for development or, at the very least, a desire for those elements of development that ease everyday subsistence—tools, vehicles,

roads, canned food and so forth (see contributions to edited volumes by Banks and Ballard 1997; Toft 1997; and Filer 1999, for explorations of this issue).

The main threat to hosts of industry lies in the lack of understanding, on behalf of operators and governments, of long-term social and economic impacts. As generalizations of generic economic processes (commodity transactions), landowning (inheritance, bordered territory), and family and kinship (nuclear, support unit) are assumed by multinational corporations (MNCs), local ways of doing and seeing go largely unrealized. A prominent problem across Papua New Guinea's resource extraction sector is the clash between corporate ideals of hereditary landownership and economic transactions, and indigenous ideals of sociopolitical exchange and gift transactions (see Sillitoe 1998: 84–86). Introduced cash royalty payments are incorporated in sociopolitical exchange arenas and used to purchase status-defining Western items associated with the companies operating in the region (see Jorgensen 1990; Polier 1996; Gilberthorpe 2007). With minimal efforts to consolidate the economic clash (by way of training and education), the question remains: is the objective of achieving development in areas where indigenous economic systems prevail feasible?

Indigenous knowledge (IK) research (see Sillitoe's definition of IK provided in the Introduction to this special issue) aims to ensure this objective is achievable by informing MNCs about the socio-ecological relations operating in regions affected by development agendas. The driving force behind this research is the endeavour to reduce the potential for poverty and ill health in regions where alien economic systems and technology are imposed and then retracted. In short, the aim is to move away from corporate-dominated, top-down development to a more bottom-up form that acknowledges and integrates indigenous knowledge, views, ambitions and ways of doing and seeing that can realistically aid economic and social development in these regions.

To accommodate the growing disciplinary focus on development agendas, anthropologists need to find tools that will facilitate their research and reach an audience beyond academia. The Anthropology in Development (AID) Group at Durham is currently experimenting with film media to articulate this need and encourage local participation; incorporate local views, processes and opinions; and encourage communication between indigenous populations and policy-makers (see also Sillitoe et al. 2002). In Papua New Guinea the current imbalance of knowledge that exists between local populations and MNCs, the former knowing far more about the latter than vice versa (Ernst 1993; Knauff 1993; Kirsch 2002), threatens the possibility, and probability, of the long-term economic and social development that the hosts desire. What is needed is an improvement in communication between locals and operators aided by appropriate mediatory bodies. So far this has not been achieved. Ernst's 1993 social mapping report for the Kutubu Oil Project, for example, emphasized that the onus was on the operators to devise relations and long-term sustainability plans and not on the local populations. But in the decade following this report little has been done to overcome the imbalance of knowledge, effectively integrate mediatory bodies or consider a policy reform with an outlook to the future where development benefits whole communities rather than just a sector of them (Gilberthorpe 2007).

Elsewhere I have discussed how the Fasu of Papua New Guinea's fringe highlands articulate their encounter with industry, drawing on deep-seated knowledge to make sense of and utilize royalties from the project operators (Gilberthorpe 2007). However, as is the problem with written academic literature in contrast to visual media (MacDougall 1997), the data detract from the indigenous voices and their perceptions of the future. For the purposes of this article I focus on two elements of IK research that articulate the relationship between anthropology, film and resource extraction—the

dynamic character of sociality and the indigenous view of the future (see Sillitoe, this issue). I also focus on the individual in culture which raises important theoretical questions about the barrier between indigenous and nonindigenous enclaves.

More than any other visual medium, film allows for aspects of the individual to shine through. Facial expressions, gestures, mannerisms, afflictions and tones, as well as the context in which interviews are conducted, reveal a great deal about how people live, feel and think. As such, film gives to the indigenous voice the expression missing in purely ethnographic writing. It is envisaged that by presenting local people's needs, wants and ambitions in an accessible, user-friendly format, students and nonacademics alike may garner a better understanding of and respect for indigenous populations.

### 'It's Raining Money'

During a six-week research trip to Papua New Guinea at the end of 2004 and beginning of 2005, I shot a documentary film, *From the Horse's Mouth: Perceptions of Development From Papua New Guinea* (Gilberthorpe 2005), to capture the different opinions of people involved in two of the country's resource development projects. Whilst the film focuses on two industries—the Kutubu Oil Project in Kutubu, Southern Highlands Province, and Ok Tedi Copper Mine in the Star Mountains, Western Province—for the purposes of this article I focus on the development experience of the Fasu, who have hosted the Kutubu Oil Project and its operators, Oil Search Limited (OSL), since 1992. Having spent fourteen months as a doctorate student in the Kutubu region (2000/01), I was familiar with the local context, and had befriended a number of locals and company employees.

My objective in producing the film was to document the *perceptions of development* of both company employees (expatriates and nation-

als) and the local population by capturing contributors' opinions on sustainable development, the impact of industry and the future. The frank statements made by the individuals interviewed revealed more about their lives, feelings, ambitions and observations than any ethnography or photograph could hope to present. One statement made in reference to the Kutubu Oil Project by Jack Taylor, the OSL Health, Safety and Environment Special Projects Coordinator, summed up both the positive and negative consequences of extractive industry in the region. Jack stated: '[the Fasu] have gone from being hunter-gatherer, semi-agriculturalists .... to having access to money in an unreal context. Something like this happens and these guys were lucky ... to have it, and it's raining money' (Gilberthorpe 2005). Indeed, for the Fasu it *is* 'raining money', as they receive significant royalty payments. However, as with all extractive industry the project is temporary; development itself is short term and the money (and services) currently 'raining' on the Fasu will eventually dry up. The main concern at Kutubu is whether steps are being taken to prepare for 'the dry season', when the company has finished work and leaves, taking away infrastructure, royalties and basic services. After decades of dependency on cash and services vis-à-vis minimal outlets for education and training, this affluent region faces a return to a subsistence lifestyle (Gilberthorpe 2007).

### The Region

The Kutubu Oil Project in Southern Highlands Province is a small operation with limited infrastructure and an environmental impact that has to date caused minimal ecological damage and been commended by the World Wildlife Fund (see McCoy 1992)<sup>1</sup>. As is typical of oil production facilities in other global locations (see, for example, Ferguson 2005), the Kutubu Oil Project is cordoned off from the local pop-

ulation, secured within a barbed-wire enclosure and policed on a twenty-four-hour basis.

The Fasu are a rural, isolated people shut off from a national economy and identity, a consequence of Papua New Guinea's inland geography, which is characterized by precipitous, rugged mountain ranges, dense rainforest and sparsely populated river valleys. They follow a predominantly hunter-horticultural way of life and maintain traditional belief and value systems (see also Weiner 1988). All Fasu (population: 1,100) are identified as landowners of the project-impact area and all receive significant benefits. If the proposal to develop the current oil venture into a gas project ([http://www.oilsearch.com.au/html/png\\_gas.cfm](http://www.oilsearch.com.au/html/png_gas.cfm)) is approved, the Fasu's relationship with industry will extend from the remaining predicted twelve years to at least a further fifty.

Royalties are a percentage of oil extracted on a daily basis and are paid bi-annually to male-only landowner groups, or 'clans',<sup>2</sup> known as Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs) (Weiner 1998; Marru 2002; Sagir 2004; Gilberthorpe 2007). The amount disseminated depends on global oil prices, production at well-heads and the number of ILGs claiming royalties. Between 1993 and 2005 the Fasu received in excess of 40 million kina<sup>3</sup> from royalties, compensation and land rentals (Sagir 2004; Gilberthorpe 2007).

Cash has been largely absorbed into traditional sociopolitical exchange, nominally circulated through bridewealth and compensation alongside traditional wealth of pigs and, to a lesser extent, shells. Bridewealth can be particularly high in the Fasu region, reaching 30,000 kina in 2005 in comparison to 3,000 kina in neighbouring areas. Royalty money is also used to purchase status items (such as four-wheel drive vehicles and air travel) and shop-bought goods that will reduce labour expenditure and can be used in gift transactions (particularly to in-laws and parents). The influx of cash into the sociopolitical arena has had a particular impact on male/female interaction and cooperation. The need to hunt has declined since tinned meat

and fish were introduced, whilst sago processing remains a central subsistence activity for women, causing an obvious imbalance in subsistence activity.

For the Fasu, the influx of cash has implications for the wider network of sociality based on exchange. Groups were once fluid and flexible, depended on migrants for support and maintained relations with other groups through marriage, trade and the exchange of wealth items (Gilberthorpe 2007). The landowner mentality has engendered landowning groups (ILGs) to form along patrilineal lines with small kin groups forming exclusive corporate units and refusing migrant integration. As ILG concerns shift to developing relations, through marriage, with individuals from larger towns, and to ensuring royalties are passed down to the next generation, groups become ever more isolated from each other within what was once an extensive sociopolitical arena (Gilberthorpe 2007).

During the development phase of the oil fields a number of promises were made to the local population, including Foi groups living around Lake Kutubu, by way of school-houses, roads, clinics and wage labour (McCoy 1992; Knauft 1993, Regis 2000). Although these services were originally provided, their maintenance has declined to varying extents over the last decade. Conflicts between the original operators, Chevron Niugini<sup>4</sup>, and the provincial government, who was responsible for paying teachers' and clinic staff's salaries and maintaining roads, have meant that out of the two schools built by Chevron in the Fasu region, the one in the north, at Sisipia, is now boarded up and the one in the centre, at Waro, is only partially active. Clinics are periodically staffed and minimally stocked and, since the imposition of payment for appointments and medicines in 2000, attendance has declined. All roads extending beyond the operational centre used for local access and not actual operations are poorly maintained; and wage labour, whilst available in the development phase of the project, has

also declined as local labour has been replaced by more experienced nationals.

It has been argued elsewhere that steps were not taken to prepare the region for economic development and no long-term considerations were made of its social impact (Knauff 1993, see also McCoy 1992). Whilst steps were taken to engage anthropologists as consultants, to produce social maps, calculate landownership and provide information on the possible impact of the project on local groups (Ernst 1993; 1995; Simpson et al. 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; Gilberthorpe 2004), the exercise seems to have been more of a formality than anything and offered little foresight into postproject conditions. Government interest in Kutubu lies in its petroleum wealth, and there will be little ongoing interest in the region when the resource dries up. The corporate emphasis is currently on extraction and not development, which ultimately distracts from the postindustry situation.

## The Indigenous Voice

The ethnographic film *From the Horse's Mouth* is not typical of its genre as it focuses more on the person (MacDougall 1997), distracting from the aesthetic quality seen in many ethnographic films (Morphy 2006). Rather than being produced as an aesthetic representation of a culture, *From the Horse's Mouth* was produced as a mode of communication, to educate audiences on global encounters and the problems of globalization.

So what are the *perceptions of development* in this region? The views of those interviewed for the documentary are highly individualized, and there is no clear dichotomy formulated between the company and the locals ('us' and 'them'). In fact, the opinions of participants vary to a great extent dependent on the individual background of each interviewee. Employees of OSL who were interviewed include the white, Australian, Field Operations Manager, Glenn Darnley-Stuart; the aforementioned Jack Tay-

lor, grandson of renowned Highlands government officer Jim Taylor and Solipena Sepeka of Kenemaro village in Bena, Eastern Highlands Province; and a local woman, Sarah Ekali, who comes from the Gobe region which is affected by the broader Kutubu-Gobe-Moran Project. All of them have a different view of the imposition, impact and future of industry, from the trained, corporate-speak of Darnley-Stuart, to the personal experience of Ekali, to the sympathetic yet objective view of Taylor.<sup>5</sup>

In the village, views are similarly individualized. A Fasu man, Kapi Nato, considered in the contemporary climate as an important business man, talks with some sorrow about a postproject Kutubu: 'when the company goes, the road and infrastructure will break down. I don't think the government will maintain them', whilst his wife, originally from Erave, talks about the Fasu as 'them', culturally distinguishing herself from both them and their plight. Unusually, in terms of Fasu kinship solidarity (see Gilberthorpe 2007), Kapi's son, William, who has been educated in the provincial capital, Mendi, and spends only occasional school holidays in the Fasu village, also talks about the Fasu as 'them': 'when the oil company goes I think the people will suffer. Most of them [Fasu], they don't deposit their money wisely. So I think when the company goes, some of them will get hard times'.

The documentary also reveals the impact of capitalist intrusion in the village, where Christmas decorations behind the Kapi family,<sup>6</sup> the pool table outside the village shop, the roads leading out from other villages and the various vehicles that litter the area all suggest degrees of 'development'.<sup>7</sup> The film tells us a great deal about the total situation and questions a supposed corporate/culture conflict. At Kutubu the distinction between 'us' and 'them' is not necessarily between the company and locals, but also within the company and within the villages. In relation to the introduction of cash royalties, for example, Ekali states: 'money is the root of all problems here. Before we were one clan, one tribe, but now we have all split to

get the royalties'. As such, the agents of industry and those who will feel its long-term effects are not entirely clear.

The general view held by locals of a postindustry Kutubu is: 'when the company goes we will go back to the way we were before'. As one Fasu female puts it, 'people came back when the road [company] came and introduced permanent houses and food stores, which they adopted, but the beliefs are the same as before, so when the company goes, the new lifestyle will stop and we'll go back to the old ways' (Gilberthorpe 2005), a view echoed by both Taylor and Ekali.

## The Anthropology of Film

Poverty and ill health threaten the lives of those abandoned by industry, and IK research through the medium of film can help avoid such an outcome by drawing attention to perceptions of industry's impact. There are a number of advantages in using film media as an ethnographic tool as the discipline extends beyond its academic boundaries (Morphy and Banks 1997: 2). Images in *From the Horse's Mouth* steer away from the disciplinary predilection for 'recording culture', focusing instead on a vision of the world through the eyes of those experiencing it rather than solely through the eyes of the anthropologist. Importantly, whilst the focus of *From the Horse's Mouth* in terms of IK research is on participation and empowerment for indigenous people, it is not exclusive, juxtaposing indigenous voices with those of company employees. It unites the agents of industry with the indigenous population, presenting them on the same level with no suggestion of superiority or inferiority. By showing the opinions of those of different genders, ages and/or occupations the film illustrates the need to accommodate diverse perspectives and agendas in development-based research.

As a methodological tool, film allows a representation of people in their totality, captur-

ing opinions based on experiences at that time. The clear message in the film is that development is desired by the majority of those involved at the time. People do not want to return to a pre-industrial lifestyle without the perks industry brings.<sup>8</sup> Another message that is clear from the film is that there is no single conduit of development in the isolated, rural locations where industries operate, and that 'achieving sustainable development requires all parties (government, landowners and developers) to openly and honestly discuss/address the issues without hidden political agendas' (Darnley-Stuart, interview, December 28<sup>th</sup> 2004, Kutubu). As Darnley-Stuart states in the film, 'I would hope that these communities start to develop interests that are broader than the oil and gas industry .... I believe we [OSL] have a role to play in that, to try and shape that, but I also believe the government has a role, and I believe the communities have a role in shaping that'.

As an experiment into effective ways of data dissemination in development contexts we are developing *From the Horse's Mouth* into an interactive DVD and book (Gilberthorpe et al. 2007) for use in higher education institutions and by MNCs and government departments (particularly education and aid ministries, departments of health, and departments of petroleum and energy in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere). The objective is to contribute to experiments with film to compliment written anthropology and to more effectively communicate the possible impact of rurally operating industries; to encourage participation and bottom-up development; and to avoid transitions from a 'rainy season' and a lifestyle dominated by royalties to a 'dry season' and a return to subsistence livelihoods.

From a theoretical point of view we aim to present film media as a productive anthropological medium of enquiry in development contexts. From a methodological point of view we hope that through this medium, companies and government bodies will be better equipped to manage the distribution of remittances in con-

sideration of the needs of local populations in Papua New Guinea. Another comment made by Jack Taylor during filming of *From the Horse's Mouth* sums up the urgency of this: 'I can see a time where you could walk outside here and we'll be standing back in the jungle again'. Indeed, for the Fasu, until their needs and concerns are heard, this is the future they unwillingly face.

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## Notes

1. The WWF have been permanent residents at Kutubu since the project's inception and form part of the Community Affairs Department supported by the Joint Venture Partners. Whilst the WWF do carry out environmental awareness programmes and conduct sustainable devel-

opment training (particularly in craft production), they work largely with the Foi populations around Lake Kutubu and rarely have contact with the Fasu, particularly those more isolated from the central production site (see Regis 2000).

2. The term 'clan' does not effectively describe the group structures in this region and I therefore apply the term with care, using it in its more contemporary use as a gloss for what are characteristically small, family-based, fluid groups (see Gilberthorpe 2007).
3. Whilst it is nigh on impossible to know (or attain actual statistics for) the amount each ILG receives in royalty payments, it is fair to say that the Fasu are a wealthy language group. Kina is the national currency of Papua New Guinea. 1 kina equalled \$0.34 in 2006.
4. Chevron Niugini Limited is the Papua New Guinea subsidiary of Chevron Oil Company (later ChevronTexaco). Their equity in the oil fields was purchased by OSL in October 2003. Oil Search now operate and control a 71.95 per cent stakehold in the Kutubu oil fields.
5. It is stressed that the views of OSL employees interviewed for this film are personal and are not necessarily those of OSL.
6. The interviews with this family were conducted on Christmas Day 2004.
7. In the second part of the film, interviews with locals from the Ok Tedi region reveal a great deal about the impact of a Western lifestyle. During various interviews the viewer hears a lawnmower in the background, sees brightly coloured washing hanging on the line, and sees artwork hanging on walls and computers in the background.
8. Some elders do vocalize some of the negative impacts of development, particularly the lack of respect that younger people have for elders, and a lack of respect of cultural knowledge, customs and laws.

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