The decades since independence have seen substantial changes in Papua New Guinea’s cultures, economies, politics and ecologies. Certainly many of these changes have been influenced or even dictated by external circumstances beyond the country’s control. Much also reflects the efforts of its governments’ attempts to build a capitalist economy and a sense of national identity and purpose. Nevertheless, the incredible complexity and variety of cultures continues. Where does all this leave the communities of Papua New Guinea? What is the nature of its multitude of different communities? Many communities continue to be partly customary in their way of life—even as they live with the effects of a series of national development goals and plans, and move with and against pressures of modernization and globalization. This volume sets out to map some of that complexity, while drawing attention to a renewing self-consciousness within communities about trying to live across and negotiate many worlds—tribal, traditional and modern. Almost everybody to whom we have spoken has said that something has to be done. We are facing major problems, they said, but many of us are coming together and drawing upon our old strengths as we make changes.

Across the world, until recently, belonging to a community was usually seen as unqualifiedly positive. While community is now seen in more circumspect terms, the erosion of community is still predominantly interpreted as being the cause of social problems. However, defining community is not straightforward. Globally, the term is often used interchangeably with ‘neighbourhood’ to refer to the bonds that come with living cheek-by-jowl with others in a shared space. Alternatively, it is used to refer to people bound by a particular identity defined by nation, language-group, ethnicity, clan, race, religion or sexual orientation. Or, again, it refers to groupings of mutual self-interest such as a profession or association. Cutting across all of these, community can also be defined by a particular mode of interaction, such as virtual or online communities. Community often seems to be whatever people
say it is, potentially incorporating every conceivable form of human grouping, even those that might otherwise strike one as contradictory.

Overall, it is clear in a contemporary world that a sense of community is no longer a ‘given’—that is, it is no longer a relationship that a person might be drawn into, or even born into, without being forced at some time to think about its meaning. Given all the variations and transformations, the usual distinction made by writers going back to Tönnies between stable and traditional community (Gemeinschaft) and more fluid and displaced society (Gesellschaft) is too dichotomous to be useful.¹ Such a distinction never worked in Papua New Guinea anyway, but what is becoming more obvious is the necessity of looking at the ways in which forms of community identity are constantly being created and re-created under changing circumstances, both objectively and subjectively. The Tokain group of communities near Madang are self-consciously struggling with this issue in their Gildipasi project to join the old and the new (Chapter 6); the communities in remote Morobe around Wisini Village are exploring their customary history as a way of integrating more strongly and responding to external pressures including mining (Chapter 10); and the Alepa-Inuma communities have used the traditional institution of the church to project themselves into the modern world, and tie together their community across a geographical space that now extends from rural Central Province to urban Port Moresby (Chapter 8).

The definition of community thus needs rethinking. Here we define community very broadly as a group or network of persons who are connected (objectively) to each other by relatively durable social relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties, and who mutually define that relationship (subjectively) as important to their social identity and social practice. The following discussion offers three ways of characterizing community relations:

- *grounded community relations*, in which the salient feature of community life is taken to be people coming together in particular tangible settings based upon face-to-face engagement;
- *way-of-life community relations*, in which the key feature bringing together a community is adherence to particular attitudes and practices; and
- *projected community relations*, in which neither particularistic relations nor adherence to a particular way of life are pre-eminent, but rather the active establishment of a social space in which individuals engage in an open-ended process of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing identities and ethics for living.

What does this mean for Papua New Guinea? As James Weiner suggests, place and landscape have a profound role in anchoring forms of sociality in Papua New Guinea.² In other words, Papua New Guinea is predominantly made up of grounded communities. However, in terms of local community
formation, while older relations of grounded identity and integration continue
they are brought into tension with newer upheavals, including poorly conceived
and badly managed attempts at nation-building, mining development, industrial
fishing and commodity-based agriculture. For example, the community of
Kananam has been struggling with such processes: ‘we are swallowed by that
which is large, foreign to our sea, to our fish, our lives, and our word. We are
faced with destruction, and our old ways cannot hold together in these times
as some of our elders themselves sell their soul and people. But we cannot
lose hope’ (see Chapter 6 below).

More than four-fifths of people live in rural areas, and approximately 95 per
cent of land is under customary title. The population is sparsely spread, and
while lines of intercultural trade and translocal movement of persons have
long been a feature of the country, people have historically been organized
into distinct and relatively integral villages interchanging with one and
other across the separations of distance, environment and language (there
are over 700 languages indigenous to Papua New Guinea). Because of this,
forms of community in Papua New Guinea have been, and continue to be,
fundamentally shaped by forms of social relationship such as reciprocity
associated with village life and relationships to place.

What we are suggesting is that, notwithstanding the deep history of such
communities, their resilience cannot be taken for granted—quite the
opposite. They are under threat, both from within and from outside. In the
context of intensifying globalization and a continuing attempt to forge a national
community, the process of local community formation is made incredibly
complex. Communities are stretched between state attempts to build a capitalist
economy and a sense of national identity and their own attempts to live with
and through changes. Historically, nations have been formed as contradictory
communities of strangers, projected communities that subjectively present
themselves either as grounded communities (for example, the older ‘continuous’
nations of Europe) or as way-of-life communities (the settler nations in the New
World). For Papua New Guinea, where grounded communities still continue
to predominate at the local level, the transfer of the subjectivities of grounded
loyalty and identity over to the national level is fraught.

While this volume concentrates on simply describing a dozen communities
and their diversity in confronting common issues, our underlying argument
is that the localized grounded communities of Papua New Guinea need to
take on a level of self-conscious and politically reflexive projection in order
to carry forward the strengths of their people and place into a difficult and
changing world. This is a world that no longer allows grounded communities
to change incrementally and organically through the vagaries of fate, memory
or contingency. A number of writers describe the late 1960s and 1970s as a
time in Papua New Guinea when concepts and practices of modernism and
traditionalism—called ‘new ways’ and ‘old ways’ by locals—intensified
their claim on the indigenous culture. While we use a less dichotomous
understanding of intersecting ontological formations that the traditional/ modern opposition, modernizing pressures certainly came into contention with customary tribal and religious traditional relations across the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial experience. And as different local cultural practices were treated to varying levels of outlawing, protection or encouragement by both colonial authorities and external influences, what was also being put in place was an essentializing view of culture and thereby of community practices—good and bad; progressive and backward-looking. Other factors such as construction of roads and airstrips, mines and missions, provided what many view as the ‘social watershed’ which inaugurated ‘new times, new ways of thinking and living, new forms of social organization and settlement’. This is the context in which reflexive projection becomes necessary for communities that do not want to be swept away with the dominant currents of change without making choices about the form which that development will take. Even then, as the community of Vanapa has found, development projects are difficult to take into one’s own hands without external support (see Chapter 9 below), or else, as was the case with the Divinai community in Milne Bay, depend upon the vagaries of the global market (see Chapter 3).

A Framework for Understanding Different Forms of Community Relations

In proposing this framework, the terms grounded community, way-of-life community, and projected community are not used as normatively charged descriptions. They refer to the way in which social relations are framed and enacted without making any implicit judgement about whether they are good or bad. The purpose here is to offer a way of thinking about how communities are constituted across different ways of living and relating to others; to see how communities are constituted through the intersection of different forms of social integration from the face-to-face to the institutionally-extended or disembodied, forms that overlay and overlap with one another.

Before elaborating on these categories—of grounded, way-of-life and projected community relations—a couple of notes of caution ought to be sounded about how these different accounts of community relate to each other. Firstly, we are distinguishing between forms of community relations, not forms of communities. The distinctions between the community relations as grounded, as a way-of-life, or as projected, are in other words intended either as analytical distinctions or short-hand designations.

Secondly, it is not being claimed that the bundle of relations in a given community exist in practice as one or other of those pure variations. Rather, the terms are intended as offering a way into an analytical framework across which the dominant, co-existent and/or subordinate manifestations of different community relations (and therefore different communities) can be mapped. Though one dimension of community relations can certainly dominate in a given community, the temptation to pigeonhole this or that community into a single way of constituting community should be resisted.
Such an approach can lead to a reductive approach in which the complexity of a particular community is reduced to just one of it dimensions. For example, Wisini village in the mountains of Morobe Province is a strongly grounded community, but to the extent that its people have taken on the Pariet Project of self-consciously exploring its customary foundations, it has also become over the past decade an increasingly politically-projected community (see Chapter 10 below).

Thirdly, people living in the same place as each other do not automatically constitute a grounded community (or, to make the point more precisely, a community characterized by the dominance of grounded community relations). To take an example, it might be expected that communities in which people live together in villages are archetypal embodied communities—and often they are. However, of itself, the simple fact of coming into regular face-to-face contact with others indicates little about how those embodied relations are structured. The experience of being heavily concentrated together in an urban settlement in Lae or Port Moresby, where people from different places find common shelter, and the experience of walking together across customary ground where place and genealogy define the relationship of those walking, are both instances of embodied interaction. However, they can be worlds apart in terms of how the social relations are structured, integrated and enacted. In short, surface descriptions about how people interact with one another do not always reveal much about how such interactions and relations are integrated. The experience of Vanagi Settlement in Port Moresby, for example (Chapter 2 below), suggests that even without the strengths of grounded community relations, a strong sense of projected community can be forged, even in places that have been described as refuges for raskols.

**Grounded Community**

Attachment to particular places and particular people are the salient features of what we are calling ‘grounded community relations’. In other words, relations of mutual presence and placement are central to structuring the connections between people. Except for periods of stress or political intensification — usually in response to unwanted interventions from the outside — questions about active social projection are subordinate to a taken-for-granted sense of commonality and continuity. In such a setting, questions about the nature of one’s way-of-life are assumed to take care of themselves so long as a given social and physical environment is in place with appropriate infrastructure such as dwellings and amenities. Thus, adherence to particular ways-of-life arises from the face-to-face bonds between people in a shared locale rather than from a self-conscious emphasis on the way-of-life itself. People do not have to read from community-development tomes, self-help books or religious tracts to confirm how to act with one another. Norms of behaviour emerge from people in meaningful relations as the habitus of their being. Even when the religious observances of such communities break out of
the confines of mythical time, the sense of community is strongly conditioned by local settings and is carried on through rituals and ways of living that are rooted in categories of embodiment and presence. Customary tribal communities and rural traditional communities are examples in which grounded community relations tend to be dominant.

Grounded community relations tend to be bounded, both socially and ecologically, though this is not to suggest that communities so characterized are necessarily more environmentally or socially sustainable. The strengths of grounded community relations are also its weaknesses. Just as natural eco-systems can be seriously disrupted by population changes or the introduction of outside organisms, accounts of communal integrity that arise in such settings tend to point to the disruptive effects of external forces. At one extreme this can lead to xenophobia and suspicion of outsiders. At the other extreme it creates the risk of communities being undermined by the influx of strangers, or by the tangible resources that sustain the community being taken away, allowed to fall into a state of disrepair, or restructured through processes over which the local community has no control. Something of Tönnies’ notion of *gemeinschaft* survives in many mainstream and romantic ideas of community, in which local communities are threatened by centralization and loss of local control to government or corporate bureaucracy. This conception of community finds expression in some environmental philosophy, where community is seen as allowing ‘human-scale’ development. Here community is a place where a more ‘authentic life’ is said to be able to flourish away from the world of the mass market, the media, telecommunications, and the state—a condition of community that in a globalizing world is increasingly impossible to sustain, even in the remotest areas of Papua New Guinea.

*Way-of-Life Community*

In contrast with grounded community relations where the emphasis is on the particularities of people and place as the salient features of community, there are accounts and practices of community which give primacy to particular ways of living. In practice, this tends to take one of three forms: *Normatively-framed* community relations tend to arise wherever there are relationships of trust and mutual obligation between people who agree to abide by certain ways of life. They are formed around a specified normative boundary; certain norms of right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. This is the form taken by many traditional religious communities. Community here is essentially a regulative space, a means of binding people into particular ways of living. Nikolas Rose, though not an advocate of such conceptions of normatively-based community relations, provides a neat characterization of this form of way-of-life community as ‘a moral field binding persons into durable relations. It is a space of emotional relationships, through which individual identities are constructed through their bonds to micro-cultures of values and meanings’.8 In Papua
New Guinea, churches have acted to layer normatively-framed community relations over the older grounded communities of clans, tribes and villages. This has given those churches extraordinary purchase on community life, even if those prior forms of grounded relations continue on.

*Interest-based* community relations form around an interest or aesthetic inclination, where life-style or activity, however superficial, is evoked as the basis of the relationship. In Papua New Guinea this includes sporting and leisure-based communities which come together for regular moments of engagement, and expatriate or diaspora communities who share commonalities of life-style or interest.

*Proximate* community relations come together where neighbourhood or commonality of association forms a community of convenience. This is not the same as a grounded community, even though both are based in spatial proximity. As distinct from conceptions of grounded community, the cultural embeddedness of persons in this or that place does not define the coherence of community, nor does the continual involvement of its members with each other.

Since the salience of way-of-life community relations lies in their normative, interest-based or proximate coherence, such communities can be de-linked from particular groups of people and particular locales. In other words, they can be deterritorialized. Face-to-face embodied relations may be subjectively important to such communities, but they might equally be constituted through virtual or technologically-mediated relations where people agree to abide by certain conventions and bonds. In this regard, it is a *potentially* more open and mobile form of community. This is its strength but also its weakness, in that it tends to generate culturally thinner communities than those where grounded relations are dominant. On the other hand, way-of-life relations tend to allow for more adaptability to change, as we see in Vanagi Settlement (Chapter 2).

*Projected Community*

Unlike the two other conceptions of community relations, this notion is not defined by attachment to a particular place or to a particular group of people. Neither is it primarily defined by adherence to a shared set of norms, tradition, or mutual interest. The salient feature of projected community relations is that a community is self-consciously treated as a created entity. It is because of this primacy accorded to the created, creative, active and projected dimension of community that the word ‘projected’ is used. This is perhaps the most difficult idea of community to grasp, partly because it is a much more nebulous idea of community. For the advocates of projected community, such relations are less about the particularities of place and bonds with particular others, or adherence to a particular normative frame, and more about an ongoing process of self-formation and transformation. They are a means by which people create and recreate their lives with others.
Communities characterized by the dominance of projected relations can be conservative or radical, modern or postmodern, and the forms of projection differ. At one end of the spectrum this process can be deeply political and grass-roots based (with the term ‘grass-roots’ or grsruts having a very positive meaning in Tok Pisin). Projected communities, at least in their more self-reflexive political form, can take the form of ongoing associations of people who seek politically-expressed integration; communities of practice based on professional projects, associative communities which seek to enhance and support individual creativity, autonomy and mutuality. At the other end of the spectrum, projected communities can also be trivial or transitory, manipulative or misleading. Unless projected relations are tied back into grounded ties or way-of-life commonalities, such communities tend be superficial and unstable, constantly dissolving and re-generating, despite the best of intentions otherwise. The fragile existence of the Mila Mala festival in the Trobriand Islands (see Chapter 11 below) is an instance of this danger. Nevertheless, with a stronger reflexive understanding of the nature of community, there are real possibilities for strengthening community relations.

Developing Projected Communities in Papua New Guinea

To summarize, most people in Papua New Guinea still live in grounded communities, and these kinds of communities are under serious threat in Papua New Guinea, as they are across the world. This suggests both vulnerabilities and distinct possibilities. Our vision of an alternative has four underlying considerations.

Firstly, unless grounded communities, the dominant form of community in Melanesia, reflexively come to project how they want to live—that is, unless grounded communities come to reflect upon and politically project what kinds of social development is appropriate through extended local and public dialogue—they will either slowly disintegrate, at least as grounded communities, or come to depend upon parochial boundaries or isolation to maintain the putative integrity of their community.

Secondly, dialogue and reflection is extraordinarily difficult to maintain in isolation; it is best conducted through ‘both-ways learning’—that is, by drawing upon both local and external expertise, and both customary and modern knowledges, including comparative exploration of continuing and other ways of doing things from other communities in Papua New Guinea, Melanesia and beyond. This is, of course, paradoxical. That is, in order to project other paths, including the possibility of reproducing and revivifying life-ways understood as tribal or traditional, communities need to take on levels of reflexivity associated with processes of modern knowing.

Thirdly, active projection of other paths to development can occur organically and serendipitously within communities, but it tends not to be sustainable without some form of political institutionalization and support.
Fourthly, in the context of contemporary Papua New Guinea, that institutionalization needs to provide an adequate inter-face for negotiating a number of competing issues—most pressingly between tribal, traditional and modern formations of sociality, including governance, economic production, resource allocation and learning. Neither customary leadership nor the modern state as they are currently configured can currently provide such an interface. The usual form of institutionalization tends to set up counterproductive and unintended consequences to the extent that it demands overly simplifying and directly replicable procedures. ‘Seeing like a state’—looking for simple singular solutions—to use James Scott’s phrase, is bound to fail. In other words, any moves towards institutionalization need to be able to handle local complexities.

Institutionalizing development at the community level in Papua New Guinea—that is, the setting up of relatively enduring public bodies of practice—has tended to be either relatively ad hoc and rolled out project-by-project or formalized and, at least in intention, channelled through Local Level Government. The former has been hit and miss; the latter has been mired by politics and lack of capacity. Hence we are recommending other paths that complement both reforms in the process of delivering foreign aid and reforms in governance. The central focus here is on communities deciding for themselves, and being offered support to institutionalize their own ways of learning. One possibility is what can be called ‘community learning and development centres’. Such centres, whether they be centred on a rough patapata under a mango tree—a space for talking—or a dedicated community building with extensive resources, need to be located within communities and run by communities. At the same time, they should be recognized and given both state and non-governmental support from the outside. Such centres should be local in their decision-making processes and dialogical in their politics, but more than that they need to become sites for negotiation (and partnership where appropriate) with ‘outsiders’. They should become sites through which people in communities negotiate with institutions such as the state, aid agencies, churches, and other national and international organizations over possibilities for supporting the resourcing of local development projects and programs. Such centres, as part of an Integrated Community Development approach, provide an alternative to the corporate or welfare state model. It requires self-determination from local communities, but within a supporting framework from the state as it represents the larger community of the nation.

There are no easy answers, or answers that can be conclusively given from a theoretical or geographical distance, to the question of how communities might prepare themselves and find ways of moving sustainably into the future. In an important sense then, instituting a sense of community entails much more than just setting up a physical resource centre with some learning materials and facilitators, or taking on a development project. For the community itself, it means in effect becoming a projected community of individuals that together and across various divides—gender, generation,
family and clan, places of origin—agree to act upon a shared and continually reinvigorated/contested vision of future challenges and possibilities. For the outsiders it means listening and talking, and also translating and interpreting with care about what the dialogue means. It means working together.

Endnotes


6 The theoretical framework for the present project comes from Paul James, *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In*, Sage Publications, London, 2006. The discussion of different forms of community is adapted from work done by Chris Scanlon and developed in Martin Mulligan, Paul James, Kim Humphery, Chris Scanlon, Pia Smith, and Nicky Welch, *Creating Community: Celebrations, Arts and Wellbeing Within and Across Local Communities*, VicHealth and the Globalism Research Centre, Melbourne, 2007, ch. 2.


‘Institutions’ as we define them are publicly-enacted, relatively-enduring bodies of practice, procedures and norms, ranging from formalized legal entities such as states, corporations or registered NGOs to more informal but legally-buttressed and abiding sets of practices and regimes such as ‘the capitalist market’ or ‘the family’. The key phrases here are ‘publicly enacted’ and ‘relatively enduring’. The phrase ‘publicly enacted’ in this sense implies active projection, legal sanction, and often as not, some kind of opposition. An institution is constituted in relation to a res publica, a public domain beyond the individual. It requires some form of authorization whether it is myth and custom in the case of tribally formed societies, God, Nature, or the Sovereign in the case of societies formed in the dominance of traditionalism, or more abstract processes of sanctioning and legitimation such those offered by the modern state in the case of societies formed in the dominance of modernism. The phrase ‘relatively enduring’ does not preclude changes, or even basic transformations, in the form of an institution, but it does point to a central defining dimension that is continuous despite the changes.

James A. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed, Yale University Press, Yale, 1998. Scott argues that centrally managed social plans derail when they impose schematic visions that do violence to complex interdependencies that are not, and cannot be, fully understood. The success of designs for social organization depends primarily on the recognition that local, practical knowledge is as important as formal, epistemic knowledge.