

Appropriation of space and water in informal urban settlements of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

This article examines inter-group relations in Port Moresby's informal urban settlement (slum) Two Mile, through perspective of appropriation of space and water. Since the 1960s, steady rural-to-urban migration to Papua New Guinea's capital has resulted in the emergence of urban slums that have become home to numerous small communities or social networks. They are marginal urban spaces of intense social interactions, which redefine traditional identities and construct urban social networks. Relations between the communities are manifested in the settlements' (illegal) water supply. Water pipes are clearly visible, laid on the surface, and form an extensive network. The appropriation of water connections is a common practice in Port Moresby's urban settlements with even political campaigns sometimes revolving around legalising existing or establishing new water connections. In the Two Mile settlement, the network of water distribution and the appropriation of space between the different groups represent spatial concepts of home and a system of urban socio-cultural identity. The appropriation and construction of water connections thus symbolises the delineation, organisation and appropriation of urban space in the settlement.

KEYWORDS: Port Moresby, appropriation, space, water, informal urban settlements

The most important form of local knowledge in which the multi-sited ethnographer is interested is that which parallels the ethnographer's own interest, i.e. in mapping itself.

George E. Marcus, 1995

Introduction – cognitive mapping and appropriation of space among residents of urban settlements in Port Moresby

Among the residents of Port Moresby's informal urban settlements, essential understanding and organisation of their life in the city is connected to physical and symbolic appropriation of urban space and cognitive mapping, i.e. the ways people perceive, conceive and

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experience urban space (cf. Lefebvre 1974; Schut, Hettige and Nas 2008). Many urban anthropological studies (Mitchell 1956; Cohen 1969; Strathern 1975; Goddard 2005) suggested that rural-urban migrants tend to put high importance on their ethnic or cultural background and their distinctiveness and establish new urban social networks when faced with inter-ethnic interactions in cities (cf. Hannerz 1980: 119–62). Colombijn and Erdentug pointed out that not do only ethnic relationships become more complicated in cities, but ‘that the spatial consequences of inter-ethnic relations also tend to be more important in such habitat’ (2002: 10).

The urban spaces of Papua New Guinea are sites of vibrant migrations and intense interactions of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Inter-ethnic interactions and identifications based upon spatial concepts such as ‘roots’, place of origin, home and one’s own place of contemporary residence, are basic social processes in the construction of urban networks or ethnic communities (*wantok* systems¹) as well as personal and collective identities.

Spatial attachments to the place of origin (*ples bilong mi*, meaning my place or my home) are being (re)constructed in Port Moresby according to the residential organisation of communities and the possibilities of appropriation of urban space. Due to the potential danger posed by the urban environment, ‘relatively secure niches have been created where people are surrounded by kin and co-ethnics’ (Levine & Levine 1979: 52). *Ples bilong mi* is a socially constructed and complexly symbolised place where an individual is safe, surrounded by members of one’s community (*wantoks*). Outside of this safe place, one interacts with others, non-members of one’s group. Such interactions can sometimes be characterised by conflicts or violence, but they are usually accompanied by use of ascription and self-ascription in terms of ethnic or local categories (cf. Strathern 1975: 289). In this highly contested and potentially dangerous urban space, people are often exceptionally concerned with establishing places they own.

Rural-urban migration has been taking place in Port Moresby since the 1960s and has gained strong momentum in the previous two decades. The majority of the city’s population was born in rural areas and migrated to the city. Migrants predominantly tend to move to informal settlements, where their *wantoks* also live.

In this article, I ethnographically focus on the life of a community of Okapians, who live in an urban settlement called Two Mile,² and explore the issue of the appropriation of urban space. I argue that it is because of the high pervasiveness of inter-ethnic urban encounters that people from different backgrounds tend to physically and symbolically appropriate places in these informal slums or shantytowns in order to establish new urban communities that are often translocal, dispersed across the city and connected into networks. Okapians in Two Mile are part of such wider translocal³ urban network or urban

¹ Wantok system is a term in Tok Pisin (deriving from English – *one talk*), commonly used in Melanesia and also in anthropological literature usually describing urban social networks.

² I conducted ethnographic research among Okapians primarily in Two Mile settlement in 2002.

³ Translocality describes ‘multiple, intimate relationships and senses of belonging engaged by members of communities based in more than one place’ (Vertovec 2001: 23).

ethnic group (cf. Levine & Levine 1979) with locations in different urban settlements throughout Port Moresby.

Port Moresby has already received much anthropological research attention. The topics of urbanisation, rural-urban migration, and different adaptation strategies in the cities of Papua New Guinea were very prominent in the 1970s (e.g. Whiteman 1973; Strathern 1972, 1975; Oram 1976; Jackson 1976, 1977; May 1977; Salisbury & Salisbury 1977; Faircloth 1978; Levine & Levine 1979), and have recently been regaining importance (Ward 2000; Goddard 2001, 2005; Muke 2001; Muke & Gonno 2002a; 2002b). During my research in 2002, I was also fascinated with the issue of how urban communities are conceived and how new, urban identities are constructed due to migration experiences and interactions in the city. Urban settlements are very vibrant places, with people always visiting, sleeping with their wantoks, borrowing money, or simply playing cards. Most of the social activities take place in these mono-ethnic settlements (Levine & Levine 1979: 48; Goddard 2005: 13), but they are not limited only to members of a single settlement.

Small communities of wantoks – co-ethnics or compatriots – live in close vicinity to people they perceive as different and do not know or trust. New migrants visit or settle with wantoks, most often in one of these informal settlements. Hence, they are densely populated and usually extremely linguistically and ethnically diverse. Along with certain public spaces, they represent specific ‘clusters of interactions’ (cf. Gupta & Ferguson 1992) in the urban space. They are characterised by cognitive mapping, appropriation of small physically and symbolically bounded places and appropriation of water supplies, all of which enable the formation of safe “own places” and communities.

Historical causality: Colonial encounters, migrations and urbanisation of Papua New Guinea

Contemporary cities in Papua New Guinea are largely a result of a steady urbanisation and rural-urban migration that started with the colonisation of Papua New Guinea, and especially after the formation of the independent nation-state in 1975. Papua New Guinean cities appeared rather late, after the establishment of colonial rule at the end of the 19th century, which divided the territory of contemporary Papua New Guinea between Germany and the British Empire. Up until the World War I, Germany ruled the territory of Kaiser-Wilhelmsland (north-eastern part of the island of New Guinea) and the Bismarck Archipelago (comprised of the islands east of New Guinea). The southern part, called Papua, was part of the British Empire and eventually ruled by Australia. During colonial rule, the first cities were established as ports or small colonial centres. In addition, the German administration established extensive plantations and practised a policy of exploitation of local people for plantation work. Before 1914, around one hundred thousand people were forced to work in plantations, of whom one quarter died (cf. Zimmermann 1912: 380–1; Epstein 1978). Because of the great demand for workers in coffee, copra, and rubber plantations, the administration established official plans for short-term labour migrations. The British and later the Australian administration took advantage of such migration schemes in order to provide labourers for plantations, but also for construction and similar kinds of work in

the emerging cities. From 1949 onward, the Australian administration started to employ people from the densely inhabited and only recently pacified New Guinean Highlands. They established the Highland Labour Scheme and fostered circular migration by employing workers on two-year contracts, after which they had to return to their villages for at least six months (May & Skeldon 1977: 5).

Generally, the local population was structurally and spatially excluded from the colonial towns. However, with plantation labour, migrations, schools, and taxes, the administration gradually involved the people of Papua New Guinea into a system of capitalist production. During their work in plantations, labourers encountered other Papua New Guineans as well as Europeans and their administration, legal system, Christianity, tools, food, different kinds of goods, and money. Money and European goods became part of traditional ceremonial or socio-political exchange systems and a necessary part of marriage ceremonies for young men (cf. Buck 1989: 160). Cultural and economic changes brought by colonialism, Chowning argued, were primarily a result of deliberate colonial economic exploitation (1977: 81).

Colonialism in Papua New Guinea was characterised by a strict structural division between local population and colonial administration. Papua New Guineans were generally not allowed to settle in towns, which were reserved only for Europeans and Australians. Port Moresby, established in 1885 as a small administrative centre that later became the nation's capital, used to be a 'small, sleepy, colonial backwater, functioning mainly as an administrative centre, ... an Australian town, from which Papuans were physically and socially excluded except as workers' (Oram 1976: 27). Even those Papua New Guineans who were allowed to live in Port Moresby, because they worked for the Europeans, were strictly segregated from the white 'expatriates' (Levine & Levine 1979: 15). This changed only after World War II, when Papua New Guinea proved its major strategic importance for the political safety of Australia (Nelson 2000: 275). The Australian government, in its plans to advance the economic and political development of the country, decided to make Port Moresby the future nation's capital and gradually lifted restrictions for urban immigration. State administration was transferred to Papua New Guineans, which eventually led to the country's independence in 1975 (cf. Dorney 1990).

Since the 1970s, many Pacific countries not only became independent, but also actively pursued the constitution of their nationalities and cultural identities (LiPuma 1995: 33; Foster 1995). National identity in Papua New Guinea, which has proven difficult to establish, is based upon numerous and diverse cultural traditions that are supposed to make the country unique, certain common cultural traits, and the standardisation of national symbols (Lindstrom 1998: 144–52; Iamo & Simet 1998: 190, 193; Strathern & Stewart 2000). In Papua New Guinea, which is geographically, linguistically and culturally extremely diverse, this process mainly originates and disperses from urban centres but does not remain confined only to them (cf. Hirsch 1990; 1995). The construction of national and cultural identities became part of structuring political relations (Linnekin 1990: 151), pertaining to the state and dependent upon colonial experience. The prevailing anticolonial nationalistic discourses draw from tradition, idealise the past and even involve cultural revival:

These discourses of cultural identity in the contemporary Pacific, although they depict the precolonial past and claim to produce countercolonial images, are in many ways derived from Western ideologies (Keesing 1989: 22).

Put differently, colonial encounters and eventually inter-ethnic encounters in cities exerted a great amount of influence on past and contemporary processes of the construction of ethnic, national and cultural identities in the Pacific.

Urban settlements as clusters of interaction

Since the 1960s and especially after independence, Port Moresby became a main point of attraction for numerous migrants from every part of Papua New Guinea. Contrary to the slow development in the first half of the 20th century, in the recent decades Port Moresby has become a relatively large city and also a place of unavoidable encounters among people of very different origins and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Because of inter-ethnic encounters and the necessity of organising the constant interactions, people have tended to reconstruct their communities and reformulate their identities in order to face urban challenges. This process started with waged labour at plantations and industrial compounds (cf. Rew 1974; Epstein 1978), but became more apparent in Port Moresby's informal urban settlements, which basically remained structurally excluded from the high-level city sector, despite the number of migrants or residents.

Structural and spatial segregation of different social classes, which do not correspond to different "ethnic" origins but to formal segregation between the local population and white residents, seems to be above all a colonial legacy. During the colonial era, segregation was achieved by building only mid- and high-level apartments that most labour migrants could never hope to afford (Ward 1977a: 56). That was the reason that the labour migrants started settling on the outskirts of the city in the 1960s, mostly on state-owned land or land with disputed or mixed ownership (state-customary), but also often on customary-owned land with the permission of local landowners. They formed (sub)urban informal settlements. These settlements were usually established on the outskirts of the rapidly growing town, on marginal land, riverbanks, steep gullies or even swamps (cf. Chand & Yala s.a.: 88). In Port Moresby's urban settlements, people often settled without permission, "temporarily", and not according to official urbanisation plans. Especially after employers gave up the practice of providing their employees places to stay at compounds, urban settlements on the outskirts became an excellent alternative for workers and enabled the arrival of their families (cf. Rew 1974; Oram 1968: 6; 1976: 97; Goddard 2001: 5–14). Early labour migrants brought in their families and were followed by new migrants from every part of the country. Because of the rapid urbanisation, such settlements were spatially incorporated into the growing city and new settlements kept emerging on the outskirts.

In 1964, there were around 4,500 migrants living in urban settlements around Port Moresby (Oram 1968: 4). This number rose steadily to 12,000 in 1970 (Oram 1976: 99), 15,000 in 1980, and 20,000 in 1990. In the 1990s there was a huge influx of migrants to urban settlements. Their number rose to 42,000 in 1995 and in the year 2000 around 100,000 people lived in more than 50 urban settlements that housed one third of the entire

population of Port Moresby (Muke 2001: 28, 105).⁴

Informal settlements, home to numerous small urban ethnic communities, are marginal urban spaces of intense interactions where social identities are being reconstructed and redefined. Small communities of wantoks – co-ethnics or compatriots – live in close vicinity to people they perceive as different and do not know or trust. Urban settlements in Port Moresby are densely populated, extremely multi-ethnic and thus basic sites of interactions in the urban space. In public and in media, some settlements have a reputation of violence, prostitution, housing criminal gangs (*raskols*) and mass unemployment. However, the most acute problems in these settlements are not violence and unemployment, but the lack of essential urban infrastructure, such as water supply (cf. Goddard 2005: 41). Spatially, the settlements are characterised by physical and symbolic appropriation of small bounded places and informal water supply connections, all of which enable formation of secure owned places and communities. During the decades of immigration to Port Moresby, the urban settlements remained places of informal urbanisation, and still lack basic facilities such as sewage systems, electricity, public services and official water supply. However, all urban settlements illegally connected their own water pipes to the main network.

After coming to the city, most migrants rely on their relatives, friends or their wantoks to settle in:

When I came to Two Mile, there were some wantoks there, but very few, maybe four or five. My wantoks helped me with money, food and a place to stay, but I got a job all by myself ... I also take care of those who came to me. We help each other. I have three rooms available for my wantoks when they come to the city.

Because of the importance of the reciprocal exchange principle (cf. Sillitoe 2000), migrants settle into urban settlements according to possibilities of their wantok system but simultaneously recreate and broaden its notion (cf. Ward 1977b: 48).

The integration of urban migrants predominantly depends upon the possibility of individuals becoming a part of an established wantok system, because only by living amidst wantoks can a person be secure and maintain links to the place of origin.

There [in the city] you meet a lot of people from other villages and you even make some friends. But you prefer to live with your wantoks; they are the only ones you can really trust.

In an urban environment, traditional identities, tied to notions of kinship, community and place, are being actively and purposefully transformed into a new social category: the wantok system. This is an urban network of co-ethnics, co-villagers, relatives and friends. In a broad sense, wantok means ‘one who speaks same language, ... is of the same nationality, a compatriot, [and] is from the same country, a neighbour’ (Mihalic 1983: 202). The Wantok system is an urban category, constructed through interactions

⁴ In the official census covering 55 settlements in 2000 the number of people living in urban settlements in Port Moresby totalled 53,390 (see Chand and Yala s.a.: 91). However, estimates are often more relevant.

and upon a notion of a common place of origin that simultaneously implies a common linguistic and cultural background, and represents ‘relationships that effectively combine kinship, ethnicity and more individualistic friendship ties in a new, pervasive, social idiom’ (Levine & Levine 1979: 70). It expresses the agency of individuals who create new social networks according to a common place of origin (i.e. urban ethnic communities).⁵ This category partly corresponds to Weber’s definition of ethnic groups as those who ‘entertain a subjective belief in their common descent ... because of memories of colonisation and migration ... in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of non-kinship communal relationship’ (1961: 306).

Since identities are relational constructs, the politics of identity builds on ambivalent relationships between imagining similarities and differences, in which cultural differences are presented as given, natural, obvious features, but are in fact intentionally socially created, often out of a denial of similarities (see Harrison 2007: 13). The wantok system as a dynamic and newly emergent urban social category was initially constructed due to colonial encounters between the European administration and Papua New Guineans, and was later reformulated and reinforced by urban interactions among individuals belonging to different ethnic, linguistic or cultural groups. Interactions are structured in a way that allows the persistence of cultural differences or similarities by creating, emphasising or downplaying social, cultural and biological attributes. In contemporary urban Papua New Guinea, interactions function as a basic underlying mechanism in the organisation of life among urban migrants in a completely new environment, characterised mainly by potential dangerous encounters⁶ and a general complexity of interaction.

Living among wantoks and being included into the wantok system is a prevailing social strategy of organising life and identities in the city. Wantok ‘is assumed to be an ever-present resource for townfolk: everybody, it is said, has a wantok somewhere in town on whom they can call for financial assistance’ (Goddard 2005: 13). Similarly Strathern (1975: 289) argued for urban Hageners,

part of the value of “being Hagen” lies in the support and domestic services which a migrant can claim from among those he is familiar with. Fellow Hageners, who share his culture, provide a ready made security circle, and are important as a reference group: because they share the migrant’s culture they, and to some extent only they, can provide rewards in terms of prestige and social standing.

The country’s diversity is reflected in the social space of Port Moresby and especially in the constitution of its urban settlements, which are very diverse, and consist of numerous relatively closed small communities. In that way, urban settlements are locations

⁵ In this sense, ethnicity – as an ‘aspect of relationship, not a property of a group’ (Eriksen 1993: 12) – is not used as an essential category, but as an analytical concept for understanding the processes of community construction and modification of the notions of place and identity due to migration to the city. On the (dis)similarities between ethnicity and wantok system, see Whiteman (1973); Strathern (1975: 288–99); Levine and Levine (1979); Gustafsson (1998); Repič (2004).

⁶ On the concept of violence in Melanesian societies, see for example Harrison (1993).

where new social networks or urban ethnic communities of migrants are being formed. In Two Mile, as in other urban settlements, different ethnic groups appropriated their own places and live close to other groups but maintain clear-cut conceptual and physical boundaries between them.

Ethnically, culturally and linguistically, the urban settlements are locations of diverse ‘cosmopolitan networks ... which have often been defined by ethnicity and regionalism within an urban culture’ (Muke 2001: 7). They are associated with many urban problems such as poverty, crime and prostitution, and as such still function as an opposition to the high level areas of the city (cf. Goddard 2001). However, the urban settlements also represent an excellent solution to city’s shortage of available housing (Jackson 1977: 41), especially for the majority of migrants who maintain the idea of an eventual return to their village. As clusters of interactions between different groups, urban settlements are consciously and carefully transformed into bounded places where familiar relations are established.

Okapians in Port Moresby: symbolising community and appropriating urban space

Okapians in Two Mile constitute one of several urban ethnic groups that live in the urban settlement of Two Mile or Rabiakani. Two Mile is one of the oldest urban settlements in Port Moresby, in which close to three thousand people lived in the year 2000.⁷ It is located next to the Hubert Murray Highway, two miles from the old centre, hence its name.⁸ It stretches on the slope of a hill between the coastal village of Koki-Badili to the west and the economic centre of Boroko to the east. At certain places, the slope is quite steep, but still allows the construction of dwellings and many small gardens next to the houses. In contrast with the otherwise quite arid surroundings, the settlement looks like a green oasis. Two Mile emerged as a temporary settlement of migrant workers in the 1950s and began to grow in the 1960s after Boroko was established and was connected to the city centre by the highway. Its strategic location between the city’s administrative and economic centres encouraged immigration, but also limited its growth due to the lack of space. Next to the settlement are some tall buildings and other modern structures that create a visible structural contrast between the modern parts of the city and the shanty houses compacted together in culturally diverse urban settlements.

The life of the Okapians in direct proximity to a number of other communities is characterised by continuous encounters and interactions with non-Okapians. Even though each individual interacts with people of very different and diverse backgrounds in their everyday lives while moving through the urban space, interactions, which are most commonly characterised by cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds and perceived differences, are predominantly organised around community’s place of residence in the city.

⁷ According to Muke and Gonno (2002a: 84) there were 2,648 people living there in 1999; however, since there is no control over migration to and from the settlement, the number is very approximate and constantly changing (Muke 2001: 65).

⁸ At first, the name Two Mile was informal for Rabiakani but later became its main label (Goddard 2001: 26).

These interactions are also main factor in the formation and redefinition of community and personal identities (cf. Barth 1969). An important part of these interactions is the constant appropriation or confirmation of spatial and symbolic ownership of “their place” (*ples*) in the settlement. The Okapians in Two Mile maintain very unambiguous physical and symbolical boundaries with their neighbours.

Their settlement is located on the north-eastern edge of the Two Mile settlement and is enclosed by three visible borders. In addition to being located next to the outer border of Two Mile, delineated by high railings and adjacent to some modern buildings, Okapians also maintain physical and symbolical boundaries with a group of Goilalas and a group of Chimbus. In most parts, all three ethnic settlements are physically separated by fences, but are also symbolically demarcated. All of the outer-lying houses of the Okapian settlement face inward; some of them also have gardens with typical Highland plants at the back, which symbolically demarcate a community, its location and its boundaries.

Many inhabitants of urban settlements have vegetable and fruit gardens adjacent to their houses. Okapians cultivate bananas, sweet potato (*kaukau*), corn, peanuts, sugarcane (*pipiti*) and other vegetables. These plants represent their *place* as ‘symbols of identity that invoke subtle messages about the differences and similarities, demonstrating how ethnic communities live together and retain some traditional identities’ (Muke & Gonno 2002a: 79). These exact symbols, which are taken from the traditional rural life, represent a community in an urban context and enable individuals to identify with their community vis-à-vis other symbolically represented communities (cf. Cohen 1998). Through such symbolic construction of communities, the cultural landscape of the city is created and cognitively mapped into places as locations of identities. Thus, the place where the Okapians live has been transformed into a symbolic place that also represents the landscape of their home and invokes identifications with the homeland. Each urban settlement includes different cultural places or microlandscapes:

Plants are used as symbols to mark boundaries and ethnicity, where the traditional elements of the concept of the management of cultural landscapes – landscapes that have been given meanings by ethnic groups – are reinvented in a city context (Muke 2001: 40).

Creating typical micro-cultural landscapes in urban settlements is a common practice in the city. It functions as a tool for symbolising a community on the basis of their common origin, but also symbolises the connections people maintain between city and homeland. Okapians idealise rural life and their homeland in contrast with urban life and urban space.⁹ Most of them claimed that their homeland provides a much better lifestyle than the city because of its better environment and climate, and because people there are much more friendly. The city, they claimed, is expensive, dangerous and the climate is awful. In the city, they have to buy almost all their food and though they work and earn money, they spend a lot. Back at home, as some put it, one does not buy food, it is free

⁹ Even a process of creating nationality takes place simultaneously with the creating of cultural meanings of localities, and it often includes idealisation of the past and rural space (cf. Keesing 1989: 22).

because one can grow it in the garden. Besides, one lives amidst one's villagers and does not have to cope with strangers, urban dangers and conflicts.

Small bounded physical localities in informal settlements have emerged due to the pervasiveness of inter-ethnic interactions in urban space. Physical localities are imbued with symbolism of ethnic or cultural distinctiveness and boundaries. Some visible manifestations of the interactions between the communities and of appropriation of urban space are the illegal water supply networks in the settlements.

Waterscapes: Appropriation of water in urban settlements

Interactions between different communities and the significance of spatial and symbolic appropriation in urban settlements are manifested in the construction of the water supply. Since most of the urban settlements are informal, water connections bringing the necessary water to the settlements are also illegal. People in the settlements have illegally connected their own water supplies to the main water pipes closest to the settlement (Muke & Gonno 2002b). Between Koki Badili and Boroko, there are four main 100mm water pipes to which major 50mm or narrower pipes are connected and then distributed into eight main distribution nodes feeding the local water pipes that supply each settlement in Two Mile. Muke and Gonno also noticed that in Two Mile the selective appropriation or 'tribalisation of pipes is a common practice ... the eight distribution pipes ... represent the major cultural groups' (Muke & Gonno 2002a: 88). "Tribalisation" or differently put, the appropriation of water connections thus symbolises ethnic delineation, organisation and the appropriation of urban space.

Illegal water connections are a common practice in Port Moresby's urban settlements – water is a necessary condition for life in the urban settlements. Before urban settlements were accepted as part of the urban landscape, there were attempts of evictions or denying water supply to discourage new settlers (cf. Goddard 2005: 65). Even political campaigns sometimes revolve around legalising old or establishing new water connections for the urban settlements. On two very different occasions (the first time in the Two Mile settlement and the second time at the presentation of a research project at the University of Papua New Guinea on water usage in informal settlements in Port Moresby) I heard a joke about a politician who gained a lot of weight during his political campaign in Port Moresby. It was because he had recently been drinking a lot of water. Every time he helped establish or improve water connections in the settlements, he drank some water in front of the residents to gain votes. Chand and Yala wrote that often migrants claim their rights to state land on the basis of political patronage:

This right, the settlers acknowledge, remains until their patrons remain in office. Settlers have, as a consequence, been far more active in national elections compared to the rest of the population ... A number of politicians continue to reward such participation including, through providing "free" water, electricity and land (2006: 3).

Usually, the connections are made illegally and by each group on its own. The water pipes are clearly visible, laid on the ground surface and form an extensive network

that symbolically represents organisation and division of space in the settlements. Water connections to any settlement have to go from the main pipe or local distribution centre through or around other settlements, depending on the inter-group relations; when two neighbouring communities have very good relations, they sometimes share the same connection. Because there are many small groups in Two Mile, the network of water pipes has become extremely chaotic. Due to the unprofessional water connections (typically, when connecting, a hole is drilled into a main pipe and new pipe is inserted without a proper fitting), there is an enormous amount of water leakage in Port Moresby's informal settlements – around six million kina (or USD 1.5 million) worth per year was a 2001 estimate (Muke 2001: 7; Muke & Gonno 2002b). Hence, the name of the national water company *Eda Ranu*, which in the Hiri Motu language¹⁰ means *Our Water*, is perfectly justified.

In the contrast to the external divided organisation of the water supply, the people inside of each community use the same supply.¹¹ Water pipes are owned by wantoks. Okapians have two pipes, one in the higher laying and one in the lower laying section of the settlement, which also corresponds to the two-clan division. However, both are connected to the shared pipe. The pipes were installed in the open space and people fill containers to take the water to their houses when they need it. There was also a communal shower next to the lower pipe. The wastewater along with other waste and sewage then flew downward to the Goilalas, but they no longer regard this as their concern.

Conclusion: Notions of place and urban identity

The case of the Okapians who moved from the Eastern Highlands to settle in the nation's capital Port Moresby offers an insight into a complex network of rural-urban migration flows and a range of subsequent social processes such as adaptation strategies, construction of urban community, its symbolic representation and appropriation urban space. Their life in informal urban settlements is predominantly characterised by perpetual inter-ethnic encounters and interactions with non-wantoks, and by the continuous confirmation of their newly constructed places. Spatial attachment (*ples bilong mi* – my place), language (*tokples*) and the wantok system are in fact very important and intertwined fundamental spatial and cultural categories that characterise everyday life, relations, mobility and identities of migrants who established their life in the city (Ward 2000; cf. Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Most Okapians I talked to were determined to eventually move back to their home villages, because they believed life was better there than in the city, where they were surrounded by people they did not know and who could be potentially dangerous. Among them, there was only one who claimed that he liked city life better, because it gives him many more opportunities. He was a Hagener who married an Okapian woman and did not share the attachment to Okapa with the others. However, even he said he intended to move back to his home village when he reaches old age.

¹⁰ Hiri Motu is a language based on a Motu vernacular, which is a local language in an area of Port Moresby.

¹¹ The water pipes are connected locally by each group and are free to use by all the members of the community. Electrical connections appear to be made similarly, however since electricity is charged for, a person who has an official electric connection can agree to distribution against contribution to payment of the bill.

The urban identity of Okapians is constructed upon ambivalent spatial referents (home, origin, place in the city) that enabled multi-local social participation and a changeable relationship towards all of their places. Their place in Two Mile showed a strong symbolic correlation to their place of origin, which was preserved as essential identification referent in memories, stories, idealisation of their village, and a certain level of transference of social relations into the city. Moreover, remembering and storytelling not only preserve native village as central spatial referent for establishing urban community, it also creates spaces through their relations (cf. Gregorič Bon 2008: 14). Most adults have idealised images of their homeland or rural place of origin, and have maintained these ideals throughout the time they have lived in the city.

Even many youngsters reported this and referred to the villages of their parents as their home, although they themselves have never lived there. Although they construct their identities upon their rural origins, they did not express intentions to move there, because all they knew was life in Port Moresby. They were generally not even fluent in the language of their parents' village even though they themselves referred to it as the language of their home, their tokples.

The concept of place (ples), which primarily means a place of origin but also one's place in the city, is constructed through interactions and appropriation and used as a powerful essential spatial category that incorporates a whole spectrum of urban life. It functions as an underlying concept for the construction of urban identities, belongings and social obligations, thus basic to wantok system. However, even such a powerful category becomes a somehow dynamic and ambiguous in urban context. It is conceptualised in layers, since it includes different cultural or geographical landscapes. As the category of wantok is conceptualised through encounters and interactions with a significantly different Others, so is the notion of a common (or different) place of origin conceptualised according to the perception of Others. Sometimes Okapians presented themselves as (or excluded themselves from) Gorokans,¹² stressing the importance of Eastern Highlanders as one of the most numerous groups in Port Moresby: 'Gorokans are the most civilised people in Papua New Guinea. The others are not that good; there's too much violence and fighting elsewhere. And even cannibalism.'

In contrast, there was a visible delineation between Highlanders in general and others, i.e. groups from the coast, plains or islands. However, even the network of Gorokans is stratified according to the social contexts and to different, sometimes overlapping spatial categories. There are subtle differences even inside the mono-ethnic settlement. Although the settlement of Okapians in Two Mile is very small, there is a vague social and spatial distinction between the two clans: the Lasota and the Pagataisa clan. All of them claim their origin either in Henegaru or nearby villages in Okapa and are traditional allies and friends, but also differentiate among themselves on the basis of their village origins, different clans, and languages (tokples). In Two Mile, they all lived in the same community, wantok system, without clear distinctions. However, the pattern of their settlement reveals two vague clusters. Urban ethnicity in Port Moresby is not based upon a single spatial category, but depends upon the social situation and a context of encounters. When constructing their identities, as Levine and Levine argued, 'local townsmen use an expandable spatial referent' (1979: 60), incorpo-

¹² Eastern Highlanders are also often called Gorokans after the largest town Goroka in Eastern Highlands.

rating concepts of home, their place in the city, cultural landscapes and even waterscapes. The water network is not merely a basic physical precondition for urbanisation and life in informal settlements, but a layer of socially constructed and highly contested urban space. Moreover, it is a symbolic representation of spatial appropriation, ethnic delineation, interactions and social organisation, all of which have changed significantly in the urban habitat.

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POVZETEK

Članek obravnava medskupinske odnose in prilaščanje prostora in vode v neformalnem urbanem naselju Two Mile v Port Moresbyju na Papui Novi Gvineji. Od šestdesetih let 20. stoletja dalje na Papui Novi Gvineji poteka ruralno-urbana migracija, zaradi katere so v Port Moresbyju nastala neformalna naselja, ki predstavljajo dom številnim manjšim skupinam in socialnim omrežjem. So marginalni urbani prostori močnih socialnih interakcij, ki redefinirajo tradicionalne identitete in oblikujejo urbana socialna omrežja. Odnosi med skupinami se kažejo v (ilegalnem) vodovodu v naselju. Vodovodne cevi so jasno vidne, saj so položene po tleh in oblikujejo kompleksno omrežje. Prilaščanje vodovodnih napeljav je pogosta praksa v urbanih naseljih v Port Moresbyju. Celo politične kampanje se občasno dotikajo vprašanja legalizacije obstoječih ali postavitve novih napeljav. V naselju Two Mile prilaščanje prostora in vodovodnega omrežja med različnimi skupinami predstavlja redefiniranje prostorskih konceptov, kakršen je dom, in sisteme urbanih socialno-kulturnih identitet. Prilaščanje in izgradnja vodovodnih napeljav v naselju torej predstavlja razločevanje, organizacijo in prilaščanje urbanega prostora.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Port Moresby, prilaščanje, prostor, voda, neformalna urbana naselja

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