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Cultural politics among the Siassi, Morobe province, Papua New Guinea

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CULTURAL POLITICS AMONG THE SIASSI, MOROBE PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

This article deals with relationships between, on the one hand, Papua New Guinean public institutions at the state and provincial levels and statewide organizations such as churches and, on the other hand, groups of rural Papua New Guineans. The article is subdivided into four parts. In the first part, I discuss principal features of the state-subject relationships in Papua New Guinea as they developed over the course of the colonial era. In the second part, I focus on how the Kovai in Morobe Province perceived these relationships and attempted to shape them so as to better their lot. In the third section, I relate their efforts to other similar Papua New Guinean efforts, and in the fourth section, I discuss the applicability of the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationalism' to Papua New Guinea.¹

As for ethnography, this paper is based on my reading of Papua New Guinean literature and my own field research there. I refer in particular to my work among the Kovai, one of the ethnic groups on Umboi Island, located in the straits separating New Guinea and New Britain, where I worked in the late 1970s. I also use results from still earlier research among settlers, petty rural businessmen, in settlement schemes near Lae and in New Britain.

The colonial state

Being a colony, Papua New Guinea was established by conquest, with an alien power setting up an authoritarian state organization, slowly extending it over an increasing proportion of the population. This power

¹ The Siassi fieldwork reported on in this article was financially made possible by a grant from WOTRO, the Foundation for Scientific Research in the Tropics, the Hague, and by Utrecht University. An earlier version was read at the workshop, 'Nation Making and Consumer Culture', held in May 1992 at the Department of Anthropology, the Australian National University, RSPacS, Canberra. The current version of the article owes a great deal to incisive comments by Paul van der Grijp and Toon van Meijl.
attempted to achieve control in face-to-face relationships with the colonial subjects, through its field officers who were ordered to patrol the country and transmit messages about the requirements of the new colonial order. In Nelson's words, by 1939 the government was, for most of the population, 'a patrol officer who arrived twice a year or less frequently' (1974: 73).

By forbidding warfare, the colonial power robbed the multitude of the small pre-colonial polities of their autonomy. However, it simultaneously acknowledged their existence by making these groups the elementary units of the newly formed colony. The groups were often referred to in colonial parlance as 'villages', regardless of whether the inhabitants in fact lived in villages or hamlets, or scattered farmsteads, long houses, or otherwise. In time, the term 'villagers' came to refer to Papua New Guineans living in rural areas and following a largely Melanesian way of life. Following Hogbin and Wedgwood (1953: 253), I use the term 'parishes', defined by them as 'communities composed of persons associated with a certain tract of land, bearing a distinctive name, and forming a political unit', while, over the years, its boundaries may shift and its membership vary. Colonial authorities confirmed the existence of many parishes by making their boundaries co-extensive with the elementary units in the newly formed colony, appointing officials to represent their members, on the one hand, and to carry out administrative instructions, on the other.

For most parts of the colony which had been brought under administrative control, patrolling became a principal instrument of government. West (1968: 163) had this to say about Murray, the long-ruling Lieutenant-Governor of Australian Papua: 'Murray set great store by strenuous patrol work, setting an example with his own journeys on which he took some pride in showing his physical stamina'. Patrolling created vertical relations between parishes and the government, but did not promote or strengthen the links between parishes.

This policy was expanded enormously in the decades following World War II, when the colonial power embarked upon the gradual establishment in Papua New Guinea of a watered-down version of a welfare state. It did so unilaterally, without consulting the colonial subjects. There are several reasons I consider it justified to speak of a 'welfare state'. The range of public affairs which the colonial administration dealt with was widened to include services such as health, education, and agricultural extension. In addition, it aimed at spreading these services as widely as possible among the population. Yet another reason to speak of an attempt to set up a welfare state is that it involved the redistribution of public funds, in this case on an international scale, from Australia to Papua New Guinea.
Over the course of the colonial period, more and more funds were staked on this policy, with the central administration in Port Moresby charged with their distribution, as instructed by the Canberra Department of Territories. The policy resulted in a widespread network of medical aid posts and rural hospitals, the provision of primary education for a growing proportion of children (although never for more than 50 percent of them), the rapid spread of cash cropping, and the growth of wage employment by Papua New Guineans in towns and in the other centres of administration. The overall involvement in the cash economy spread and sharpened.

While the content of government policy had changed, the way it was implemented did not evolve at a similar pace. Patrolling was intensified, with more government personnel representing more branches of the administration. And while the content of their messages had changed, from orders for digging latrines and relocating dwellings to instructions about planting cash crops and setting up co-operatives, messages were still brought to the parishes. As for their delivery, there was at most a shift from an authoritarian to a benevolent paternalism, while the population responded with a complementary filialism. The process again reinforced the vertical relationship between parishes and the government. And again, it did not strengthen ties between parishes. Wolfers (1989: 431) concludes that it is incorrect to blame the dearth of 'country-wide political organization or feeling' on the geography of the country and the small size of its very many political communities. Rather, he argues (1989: 436), 'for all that the Australian government expended considerable time and energy during the 1950s and 1960s preaching the need for national unity [...] its administrative practice, like that of its predecessors [pre-World War II administrations, when Papua and New Guinea were separate colonies], often had the opposite effect'.

Local government was opposed by 'many senior field staff [...] senior police officials and missionaries' (Oram 1973: 20), with the result that the emphasis on vertical relations between parishes and government lasted until late in the colonial period. The establishment of local government gained pace after 1955, and rapidly expanded over most of the country in the mid-1960s. Local government councils brought together representatives coming from and elected by adjoining parishes. They took

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2 There is an uncomfortable similarity with the state-subject relationship as described by Verdery for Eastern European states: 'Subjects were presumed to be neither politically active, as with citizenship, nor ethnically similar to each other: they were presumed to be grateful recipients, like small children in a family, of benefits their rulers decided upon for them' (1992: 8).
over part of the administrative work formerly done by appointed officials, almost always 'expatriates', the term current in Papua New Guinea for immigrants, both from Australia and elsewhere. Thus, councils created an institution which could impress upon people the collective needs of larger regions, and which might serve to strengthen horizontal ties between the parishes within these regions.

In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, the messages of the colonial authorities acquired a nationalist content, a top-down one, first with the 1964 elections for the first House of Assembly, later with talk about independence, and still later, and continuing into the post-colonial era, with the renewed appreciation of 'tradition', or *kastom*, as marker of a Papua New Guinean identity.

Colonial society was a troika, pulled along by three horses, often incompatible, and driven by Walter Benjamin's Angel of History (Anderson 1991: ch. 9). Apart from government, there was the mission and private enterprise. Mission representatives, like those of the government, went out to the parishes, where many of them trained Papua New Guineans as clergy or teachers for the parishes, providing religious instruction and religious services. Some created the opportunity for horizontal relationships between parishes by setting up regional organizations and by holding regular meetings attended by representatives from the parishes in these regions.

Finally, private enterprise set up businesses in the colony, so workers had to be transported from their parishes to work there. In plantations and mines they worked for specified periods of time as contract labourers, or later, as agreement labourers. Employers were responsible (also financially) for their travel to and from their place of work. The latter journey was tellingly called 'repatriation' (Mair 1970: 184, 204), the return of the worker to the place supposed to be his fatherland. Notably, Keesing (1986) has argued that these business establishments provided avenues for the exchange of ideas among the workers and promoted the creation of a Pidgin culture. Lawrence (1956, personal communication 1985) put forward a similar argument with reference to the regional conferences held regularly by the Lutheran mission.

Even after Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975, the country remained financially dependent on Australia, in spite of the development of several huge mining projects which brought in public revenue. In 1992, the state budget received around Aus$ 300 million of budgetary support (N.E.W.S. 1993 (20): 9), as a grant, and without restrictions, thus enlarging the government's scope to implement what I call in this article its welfare programmes.
Kovai responses

I focus this ethnographic section primarily on the Kovai, although I surmise that in many other parts of Papua New Guinea I could have made similar observations. The Kovai live in the Siassi District, consisting of Umboi and the surrounding smaller islands. It is the only archipelago of Morobe Province. In all, there are four linguistic groups living in the district, each with a distinctive culture and a distinct identity (Pomponio 1990: 47). The Kovai are land-oriented agriculturalists, living in thirteen villages. The number of Kovai living on the island was almost 3,000 when I worked there in the late 1970s. At the time, local economic opportunities were poor, but educational ones much better, so there was sizeable labour migration. Many migrants led a dual life, returning to Umboi for varying periods of time and maintaining relations with their kin there. A Kovai urban village, the ‘Siassi’ compound, was among the shanty towns on the outskirts of Lae. Regular shipping services to Lae and Madang enabled people to keep up contacts.

While the Kovai migrants had mainly opted for wage employment, on Umboi, where employment opportunities were few, people responded to the openings offered by the government of the newly independent state of Papua New Guinea by turning to bisnis ventures, primarily cash cropping. These ventures were severely hindered by the miserable state of transport in the Siassi District. People blamed this on equally persistent government inactivity. They felt slighted and disfavoured, compared to other parts of Morobe Province, and talked about breaking away from that province to join West New Britain. Nevertheless, they did not give up their cash-cropping efforts. In the late 1970s they were still increasing their holdings.

Another reason for frustration was the sudden withdrawal of the Lutheran Church from the island, owing to the merger, in 1975 (Strelan 1968: 268), of the Australian Lutheran mission - with its headquarters on Umboi - with the much bigger Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea. The move was a sensible one in terms of church organization, but it was made without consulting the Kovai. Until then, the church headquarters had employed Kovai, and some had been selected for training as church or lay workers. So, the departure of the church diminished their employment opportunities, and demonstrated how painfully little say they had in the running of the church, although they were church members.

The Kovai who had stayed on Umboi had few opportunities to earn money. A sizeable part of the money they did earn, they spent for two main purposes: to buy food (this in small amounts of money), and for ceremonial duties (this in much larger amounts and in larger denominations). In so acting, Kovai had creolized (Hannerz 1991) two

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main sectors of Melanesian life: subsistence, and ceremonial transactions linked to the life cycle. Moreover, by handling and displaying money, people used objects produced by the independent state bearing Papua New Guinean names and images, but for the Kovai this seemed less important than the fact that they did handle money.

By the late 1970s, a number of western institutions had become part and parcel of Kovai everyday life. Apart from the public institutions representing state departments, I refer to matters such as trade stores, a club house with electricity, and sending kids off to school where they were taught in English, a language of colonial derivation. Some of the institutions had become commonplace, while others aroused great excitement. The installation of electricity in the club building took place during my stay and was the cause of great festivity. And, however bored people were by the weekly church services, the (semi-)annual church conferences had remained lively and well-attended. The Kovai felt such conferences were significant events. Trade stores, however, had lost the revolutionary appeal they had before. Nevertheless, in the village where I lived the only store which showed continuity was housed in a striking building, similar to the subclan bachelor houses in size, structure and orientation, but dissimilar in that it was constructed of so-called permanent materials - sawn timber and corrugated iron roofing - which had been imported from the New Guinea mainland. Its small front porch was a favourite meeting and gossiping place.

The Kovai would have liked to see more such imports, if only as evidence of what they saw as the proper functioning of the state of Papua New Guinea. They resented the government's failure to provide such imports and to help them to advance themselves. By failing in this, the government was, for them, failing to live up to its central task, and hence, was losing its legitimacy. The sudden departure of almost all church personnel was for them another instance of an organization not living up to its task, namely the provision of services and projects, in spite of the fact that they had themselves met what the church required, namely worshipping in church, attending church conferences and contributing to collections.

Following Rutz (1982), I am focusing here on the view that government and church are to be middlemen, actively engaged in the transfer of new institutions to the rural populations. More often than not, these institutions were of western derivation. For use in a local Papua New Guinean context, they might be transformed and adapted in a local way. The church conferences, for example, although instituted by the church, were nevertheless typical New Guinean celebrations. Villages hosted them in turn, putting up lavish displays and staging sketches preceding the discussions, and attendants spoke with a lot of oratory. In
Siassi, the government-as-middleman counted for more than the government as the representative of a Papua New Guinean nation, if this idea carried much weight at all.

When the government is to act as a middleman, the question arises as to which groups will unite in the competition for its disbursements. Among the Kovai, in keeping with the colonial practice outlined above, parishes, on Umboi in fact villages, were the primary competitors. Umboi was still in a state of colonial peace in the late 1970s. In the pre-colonial past, villages had fought one another, and in the 1970s the main tensions and quarrels were also between villages. But the innovations brought about by colonialism furnished the present causes of tension: there was greater sexual competition resulting from greater geographic mobility; all villages profited from the existence of the airstrip, without sharing the profits with the village on the territory of which the strip was located; some villages profited from the proximity of a road, and others not, while the road was constructed and maintained by tax money assembled by all villages; and so on.

The Kovai were one of the ethnic groups within the ethnic category called Siassi. The name Siassi is most likely of colonial coinage. Kovai told me it came into use when they were employed as miners on the Wau-Bulolo gold fields in the 1930s. At that time, the name distinguished them from mine workers from elsewhere in the country. In the course of my field research the term was frequently used, mostly, if not always, in the context of development issues, when the relations between Kovai and regional and/or supra-regional agencies were discussed. Its frequent use, however, meant the unification of previously separate villages only insofar as the inhabitants of these villages were forced, by outside developments, to act together in relation to outside agencies of the state, the church, or others. This was the case, for instance, in the parliamentary elections. The Kovai regretted that Siassi did not form a single electorate for the House of Assembly. Instead, they were represented by a man from the mainland part of their electorate who, they argued, was unlikely to have their interests at heart. But the perceived unity of the Siassi, which this argument seemed to imply, was ephemeral, since when the area did become a single electorate for the Provincial Assembly, the complaint was that Siassi should have become two electorates. In my impression, the village, the nuclear family and the subclan remained the most significant groupings of which a Kovai was a member. ‘Siassi’ seemed for them primarily a name, a label, which they had acquired in the course of the colonial era and by which the outside world seemed to know them. Accordingly, it appeared appropriate for them to use the name in
contexts brought about by the colonial situation.³

In the late 1970s, prompted by government incentives, the Kovai and other Siassi again took up elements of their cultures which they had discontinued due to the teachings of the Lutherans. They regarded this as an enrichment of village life and local relationships. In addition, they began putting more effort in displaying their traditional culture to the outside world, especially their dancing. In my view, this was a way of attracting attention, of pointing out that they too were citizens of Papua New Guinea and had to be treated on an equal footing with other citizens whom they judged, with reason, had a better deal.⁴ To make their point, they used a medium emphasized by the government, so-called tradition, which at the same time was among the most cherished elements of their own culture.

Their use of tradition for this purpose, and their merging of elements of their own culture into Lutheran worship, are again instances of creolization, although on a strictly local scale, transforming Kovai and other Siassi cultures. While with their diet and with ceremonial transactions they westernized their own local culture, with their religion they localized a western import. With their dancing, they used yet another strategy: they did not change form or content, but performed for a purpose and in social settings different from the pre-colonial ones, such as the annual Lae Show and other festivities outside Siassi. By contrast, however, they did not creolize the primary school, held to be the means to provide children with salaried jobs, nor did they act upon government efforts to make schools prepare pupils for village life, rather than for wage employment or other forms of participation in the money economy.

Projects

In the first section of this article, I briefly sketched how the colonial and post-colonial governments of Papua New Guinea approached the inhabitants of the country with a sequence of policies, thus creating and, to a certain extent, structuring openings for novel undertakings. In reaction to these inroads, Papua New Guineans turned to a wide variety

³ See also Verdery (1992: 10), discussing group formation under the paternalism in Romania during the Ceausescu regime: 'the us-them division did not necessarily mean solidarity - i.e. belonging - among “us” [...] it does not necessarily join people in comforting ways against the Other they have excluded'.

⁴ MacKenzie (1991: 14) gives an example of an apparently less politicized use of a distinctive cultural item. She writes that in the weekly dances held in many low-cost suburbs in Port Moresby, net bags are worn in 'self-conscious regionalist displays'.
of what I here call 'projects', a term employed by Hindess (1992, political science seminar, Australian National University) to refer to undertakings, by individuals or groups, to realize a common goal. In doing so, they have to deal with other individuals or groups with whom they then co-operate, negotiate or struggle.

Given their variety, the projects have been grouped under a number of headings: 'cargo cults', 'micro-nationalist movements' (May 1982), bisnis enterprises, and so on; and also within these subcategories variety occurs. Nevertheless, a feature many of them have in common is the effort to secure the desirable elements of the culture of the invaders, and to minimize the humiliations and frustrations which were part of the colonial and post-colonial situations.

Following Stanner (1958), I have characterized these projects as 'subinstitutional', meaning that they express 'a one-sided evaluation' which 'cannot lead to a transaction'. On the basis of Stanner's insight, projects such as cargo cults, as well as bisnis undertakings and micro-nationalist movements, can be viewed as attempts at transactions. And, as Lawrence (1964) has shown, the entities with whom transactions are attempted may vary over time, in line with 'changes in the colonial [and post-colonial] situation as perceived by the people [i.e. by Papua New Guineans]' (Ploeg 1975: 194). They include deities featuring in indigenous religions, the Christian deity and/or its worldly representatives, the missionaries, and the government and/or its representatives. Their content may change over time, for example as Lawrence (1964) documents in describing a series of such projects in Madang Province. Few of these projects have maintained a supra-regional following for a longer period of time. Those who have, often resulted in disunity within these regions, most dramatically in the revolt in the northern Solomons.

In my view, the recourse to cultural elements, in shorthand, to 'tradition', is another type of project, a new phase in the ongoing interaction between, on the one hand, groups of rural Papua New Guineans (often parish communities), and, on the other hand, agents of the state and statewide institutions such as churches. I find support for this argument in Harrison's Malinowski Memorial Lecture (1992), discussing how in many societies, in Melanesia and elsewhere, ritual is the intellectual property of individuals or groups, both in the sense that they own it and that they are it. When this is the case, ritual can become an asset, a resource (Harrison 1993: 156), conferring distinction⁵ on its owners, thus setting them off from others, outsiders without title to the ritual. Appadurai, as quoted by Harrison, calls the performance of such

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⁵ Harrison (1992: 235) takes this concept from Bourdieu.
Cultural Politics among the Siassi

...rituals by its owners 'tournaments of value', and Harrison (1992: 237) adds that 'ritual acts are [...] incarnated signs, actions with the rhetorical function of signifying political relationships'.

I apply this argument to the dances performed by the Kovai and other Siassi on trips outside the Siassi area. With regard to dancing, a further comparison can be made with eloquence, which brings prestige and power in so many Melanesian societies. The rhetoric to which Harrison refers is expressed by the Kovai not merely by words and gestures, as in oratory, but by music and costumes as well. By these performances, I surmise, they intend to demonstrate Siassi distinction within the wide social arena which is the (post-)colonial state of Papua New Guinea, and hence their entitlement to the advantages offered by state membership, measured in such matters as development projects and access to the monetary sector via school education. Thus viewed, the dance performances, like the other types of projects mentioned above, are attempts at transactions, in this case with public authorities. Such attempts have been stimulated by government overtures encouraging people to treasure their own way of life. And, as is the case with the other types of projects, the content of the projects in which culture is used as a means to secure the desired niche in the post-colonial state may differ widely, according to place, and over time.

Nationalism

In this article I have done without using the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism'. That this is possible is, in my view, indicative of how the independent state of Papua New Guinea is organized. In an earlier paper (Ploeg 1991), I attempted to demonstrate this point, citing Gellner (1983: 7), who defines a nation as a man-made grouping which unites people sharing a culture, and in which its members can expect solidarity from each other. 'Nationalism' is for him the idea that the members of a nation, and all of them, are further to be united by a single state organization, excluding the members of other nations (Gellner 1983: 1). He goes on to define the 'state' as 'that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order (whatever else they may also be concerned with)' (Gellner 1983: 4). With this definition, he refines Max Weber's conception of the state.

Gellner holds that nationalism is an effect of the rise of industrial society out of agrarian society. This entails a shift from a society 'based on a stable technology, a stable faith, hierarchical organization, cultural stratification' to one 'based on economic growth' with an 'unstable occupational structure, which in turn involves a measure of egalitarianism,
a [more?] homogeneous culture’ (1992: 68). Hence, in his view, an agrarian society like Papua New Guinea, while being a state of whatever type, cannot be a nation. And it seems unlikely to become one in the foreseeable future since widespread industrialization is not in the offing, and cultural stratification is likely to increase, with a small urban-based elite shedding its ties with increasingly remote kin in the rural areas, and following a westernized lifestyle. For them, occupational structure will be unstable due to technological change, while many in the rural areas will remain farmers engaged in subsistence production supplemented with monetary activities.

But even when applying Anderson’s concept of the nation, Papua New Guinea does not seem to qualify. According to Anderson (1991), a nation is an ‘imagined community’, and by using the term ‘imagined’ Anderson draws attention to the fact that most of the members of such a community do not know each other personally. In addition, it is a sovereign group, and it exists not by itself, but is one among a number of nations.

Papua New Guinea is a sovereign state with other sovereign states as neighbours. But is it a community? For Anderson, communities are characterized by a ‘deep horizontal comradeship’, ‘regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail’ (1991: ch. 1). In my view, Papua New Guinea does not form such a community: the state organization was imposed by force over previously independent polities. The welfare measures instituted since the end of World War II entail disbursement of funds and employment opportunities for which parishes, local government council areas, and provinces have become competitors rather than comrades.

Nationalism, which for Gellner can only emerge when a group of people holds that it shares a culture, and comradeship, in Anderson’s view a necessary ingredient of nationhood, are both matters of degree. I do not exclude the possibility that among Papua New Guineans there exist ‘certain forms of collective belonging which already existed [before the colonial conquest] and which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in with modern states and nations’ (Hobsbawm 1990: 47). It remains to be seen if Papua New Guineans will transform this proto-nationalism (Hobsbawm’s term), into straightforward nationalism.

Of the groups of people I have worked among, I regard a group of ex-servicemen settlers as the most nationalistic (Ploeg 1971). They formed a multi-ethnic community, attempting to cash-crop on land leased to them by the government. What they had in common was that they had contributed to the war effort in the service of the government, and that after the war they again followed the call of the government to start
bisaṁi, to work as small-scale farmers. Hence, for these people, their comradeship originated in the colonial situation, first during the war, and subsequently by the policies of the colonial administration. Their feelings of solidarity extended only to their colleagues and not, for instance, to the neighbouring villagers - upon whom they looked down, having concluded that they ignored the teachings of the government and stayed immersed in their petty village affairs. These settlers formed a tiny group, however, and their bisaṁi failed, so their proto-nationalism seems to have been futile.

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Anton Ploeg

190-212. The Hague: Nijhoff. [KITLV, Verhandelingen 74.]


'Even the smallest community has a strength through cultural identity and we must maintain that. If we do not maintain that we will have a state that builds an artificial identity to suit certain political elites or power groups.'
Utula Samana (former Premier of Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea 1988: 57)

This article deals with the motives for and the process of setting up a cultural centre. Such institutions have been established or are planned in many rural areas of Papua New Guinea. From an outsider's point of view they constitute tourist attractions or handicraft centres. However, for the local people and the new emerging leaders involved, their main functions can be quite different: cultural centres have a political character and are considered vehicles for development and means of access to modern political structures.

In 1989, I was asked by the Sapmanga Member of the Morobe Provincial Government and Lutheran Development Services to act as an expert adviser for the planning and realization of a cultural centre in the area where I had conducted ethnobotanical field research, the Yupna valley. I agreed without hesitation, because I considered it a chance to
reciprocate a fraction of all the favours, help and support I had enjoyed in the village where I had lived and worked for thirteen months. I was also fortunate to be able to witness, from the beginning, the process of setting up a cultural centre with all its implications.

Papua New Guinea is characterized by relatively ‘traditional’ small-scale political units based on kinship. At the same time, however, the country is organized as a modern political state according to a western model, with a national level, a provincial level, and a community-based level made up of local government councils. This creates problems and tensions since small ethnic units are poorly represented at the higher levels of political organization.

The Nayudos area is an artificial unity under construction, which includes the Nankina, Yupna, Som and Uruwa valleys in the Finisterre Mountains of Papua New Guinea’s Huon Peninsula (see map). The people of the latter two valleys are usually subsumed under the term Osom. The major obstacles to the population’s participation in the modern sectors of society are the remoteness and inaccessibility of their area, as well as its division between two provinces encompassing three different constituencies: Nayup and Raikos No. 9 of Madang Province, and Sapmanga of Morobe Province. The people living along the Yupna River, the Yopno, are particularly affected, as the provincial border cuts across their territory in a rather arbitrary fashion: the subdistrict headquarters and two villages on the upper reaches and three villages on the lower reaches of the Yupna River belong to Madang, and the remaining thirteen villages belong to Morobe.

Before the unity

In the provincial elections of 1987 the people of the isolated and remote Nayudos area had their first chance to ‘really participate’, because a young Yopno was one of the candidates for a seat in the Tutumang, the Morobe Parliament. Everyone was full of hope, and the general opinion amongst the leaders of the Yopno village was that the ‘big world’ would now open up for them and development will begin). However, the idea of forming a larger political unit was then only a remote possibility for the villagers and not a serious consideration.

At previous elections, most villages of the densely settled Yupna

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1 I use the official term Yupna to designate geographical units, and the term Yopno, used by the people themselves, to refer to cultural units.
valley, which hosts the bulk of the population of the Nayudos, belonged to Madang Province or were not clearly assigned to either Madang or Morobe Province, because the provincial border was disputed. Yopno people in 1987 thus claimed that they had not been able to participate in national elections since Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975, although they previously had a representative in the Madang Provincial Parliament. Generally, the affectional bond with Morobe Province was stronger than with Madang Province. Like most rural populations in Papua New Guinea, the people of the Yupna valley judged the quality of their governments by the amount of services they provided. However, while Madang Province had set up a health centre, subdistrict headquarters, an elementary school, and provided services through the Department of Primary Industries, Morobe Province had been contributing only since 1986. The Yopno people’s preference for Morobe over Madang was, therefore, atypical, but it may be explained by the following situation.

At first glance, the modern political structures of the area appear to be based on the legislation provided by the state of Papua New Guinea. A closer look, however, reveals that the social structure on which people build their actions and understanding within the modern world are church structures provided by the Lutheran Church. Morobe Province is almost entirely under the influence of the Lutherans, while Madang Province can be divided into areas influenced by the Lutheran Church and areas influenced by the Catholic Church: the northern districts of this province are predominantly Catholic while the southern districts are mostly Lutheran. In contrast to other denominations, the Lutheran Church has, from the outset, implemented a policy of localization and, consequently, its political structures are built on a local, traditional distribution of power. This implies that modern church leaders, who are called hetmen, are almost always identical to the traditional elders of the founding lineages of the respective settlement units, and thus identical to the former holders of political power. These men also decide who will be

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3 This Member of Parliament (MP) came from the Nankina valley and was one of the 'founders' of Teptep station and airstrip in the Yupna valley (E. Haab, personal communication).

4 The designation hetman is used in neo-Melanesian Pidgin; in local speech, the Kâte designation songang is preferred. Kâte was the official language of the Lutheran Church in the early stages of the mission.
Map A: Nayudos Area

MADANG PROVINCE

MOROBE PROVINCE

Nankina River
Yopno eserong
Uruwa River

Som River
Osom

3.2 km
made *hetman*;\(^5\) and being a *hetman* is a position of power from which one cannot withdraw: once a *hetman*, always a *hetman*. In contrast, the position of *komiti* (committee member), an official secular position, is usually held by uninfluential men, that is, men who either belong to unimportant or marginal lineages, or who belong to a founding lineage but as members of junior segments of these lineages occupy a subordinate position in the traditional system of power.

In theory, a *komiti* should be elected by the community or the settlement unit which he represents. Elected members, then, are responsible for the performance of public works such as maintaining the walking tracks, a service which the state requires to be performed by all community members each Monday. In practice, however, the *komiti* of the communities concerned are not democratically elected but are usually selected by the *hetmen*. The most important criterion of selection is the willingness to adhere to traditional rules, in particular with respect to the distribution of power, which means they will carry out the orders and wishes of the *hetmen*. A *komiti* should also participate regularly in church activities and be widely acknowledged as a supporter of the church. His tasks are restricted to reading aloud the census list on Monday mornings and then to announce which duties the *hetmen* have decided the community will have to perform under the terms of public work.

Thus, whereas the content and goals of politics may have changed, the distribution of power has not. Most important in this context is that the political structures established by the Lutheran Church provide a common basis for building up larger unities. They provide, as Utula Samana (1988: 88) remarks, 'a common background to Morobe's emerging political identity'. The success of church structures is due to the fact that they not only closely follow the traditional distribution of power, but also follow the traditional cultural divisions. In the Yupna valley, Munsel parish comprises the Yopno *tale*, that is, the Yopno of the mid-altitudes along the lower reaches of the Yupna River and the adjacent Domong Plateau. The Yopno *eserong*, that is, the Yopno of the high altitudes along the upper reaches and the headwater of the Yupna River, are divided into three parishes according to dialect and culture: Nokopo parish on the left river bank, Isan parish on the right river bank and Kewieng parish along the Yupna headwaters. In former times, these units represented separate clusters of settlement units which did not maintain

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\(^5\) A man is made *hetman* by being sent to one of the *hetman* courses which are held at regular intervals in different villages of the Nayudos. For similar observations on the position of *hetman* or *songang*, respectively, in the Uruwa valley, see Wegmann (1990: 43-44).
relations with each other. Within these clusters, however, people maintained alliances which could shift as a result of feuds or intermarriage. The same applies to the Nankina valley, which is divided into three parishes (Bambu, Gwarawon and Gupbayon) following local concepts of division. The different groups of the sparsely-settled Uruwa and Som valleys\(^6\) are subsumed in one parish named Uruwa.

In short, then, the people of the Yupna valley feel emotionally attached to Morobe Province where they feel understood; however, they do not wish to forgo the services provided by Madang Province. This results in statements like the following: 'We are the remotest border area; both governments have to help us and provide services.'\(^7\) At the same time, people do not accept the border crossing their area and refuse to choose between the two provinces. This problem is not felt as strongly among the other groups of the Nayudos: they clearly belong to either Madang Province (Nankina) or to Morobe Province (Osom, that is, Som and Uruwa). Thus, Yopno people have a common political bond with the Osom group, but linguistically and culturally they have and feel more association with the Nankina people.

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Promoting the new unity

After the elections the situation changed: the young man from the Yupna valley, a Yopno eserong of the Kewieng parish, was elected as Member for Sapmanga in the Morobe Parliament. In 1988, he began promoting a new artificial unity among the different cultural groups of the Yupna, Nankina, Som and Uruwa valleys, which he collectively labelled the Nayudos. He also strongly pushed the interests of his home area in the Tutumang and was soon able to tap financial and technical support, such as a hydropower plant established at Teptep by the University of Technology. Needless to say, this further shifted the balance for the Yopno people in favour of Morobe Province.

Being a gifted politician, the young Member of Parliament (MP) knew he had to broaden his home base, which he attempted by forming a local government council encompassing both provinces. The planned council was based on cultural similarities uniting the different valleys. The concept of Nayudos had already been used with reference to a group of young educated people in the area. In 1982, the MP founded a students'