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## **The Conservation Policy Community in Papua New Guinea**

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## **Resource Management in Asia-Pacific**

### **Working Papers**

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# The Conservation Policy Community in Papua New Guinea

## Abstract

A good deal has been written about the ways in which the members of local or indigenous communities in Papua New Guinea perceive and act upon their 'natural environment'. This literature has more recently been supplemented by studies of their interaction with 'conservation projects' that have to be designed around the abiding prevalence of 'custom' in determining the ownership and use of natural resources. Less attention has been paid to the historical formation and internal constitution of the 'conservation policy community' which has developed in the face of this natural and institutional landscape. The question addressed in this paper is whether the social contours of this policy community have primarily been shaped by the global political economy of conservation, or whether it has peculiar national characteristics that can only be explained by the political and economic history of PNG, or by the pattern of biological and cultural diversity for which the country is notorious.

## Introduction

Anthropologists get rather annoyed when conservationists use romanticised images of indigenous peoples living in harmony with Mother Nature in order to attract the funding required to implement biodiversity conservation projects in wild and woolly places. One source of their annoyance might be the fact that their own standards of social realism and 'good practice' have caused them to forsake the same strategy as a device for funding their own research, except perhaps in those few cases where funding is dedicated to 'urgent' research on 'disappearing' or 'endangered' peoples. When anthropologists encounter conservation projects 'in the field', their first inclination is still to explore the discrepancy between the representations of local or indigenous communities which the conservationists are reproducing on a daily basis, and the 'realities' of local or indigenous social life which the anthropologist alone is privileged to behold. Anthropologists with a taste for irony are likely to focus particular attention on that slice of social reality which is made up of local perceptions of conservation and conservationists, especially when these diverge from the self-representations of the conservation practitioners. From this point of view, the anthropology of conservation is simply one species of the genus generally known as the anthropology of 'development', because it deals with the mutual misunderstandings that arise from encounters between local (or traditional) communities and global (or modern) organisations in relatively backward corners of the globe.

In this paper, I propose to take a rather different tack, by putting aside the question of what is or is not an accurate representation of the way that local or indigenous people 'really' relate to their natural environment, or what they 'really' think about the biodiversity conservation business, or how they actually interact with conservationists. These are no doubt very interesting questions, but they tend to obscure another set of questions about the way that people involved in this business relate to *each other*, or to their institutional environment, within the local, national and global domains of conservation policy. Anthropologists can also help to address these other questions by virtue of their ethnographic understanding of the conservation policy *process* as a social process in its own right. Interactions between conservation practitioners and local communities are one part of this process, as are various representations of 'traditional ecological knowledge', but they do not constitute the whole of the policy process at any level of social or political organisation – least of all the national level.

My own interest in the workings of the conservation policy community in Papua New Guinea (PNG) springs in part from a set of gut feelings about my own position in three different national policy domains. I feel quite certain of my membership in a policy community that shares a common interest in the biodiversity conservation business. I think I also qualify as a member of another national policy community that shares a common interest in the development of large-scale mining and petroleum projects, but membership of this mineral policy community has a very different feel to it. I also think that I am a longstanding participant in the national forest policy process, but I do *not* think there is a national forest policy *community*. Instead, I would say that the conservation policy community is a collective player in this forest policy process, and its sense of collective identity is partly derived from this fact, but it also has a common enemy, which is the large-scale logging industry, and the struggle between the two sides is both the central feature of the process and the reason why it does not have a unique policy community attached to it.

The second reason for my interest in the formation of national policy communities is the fact that family circumstances have prevented me from spending more than a week away from home for more than a decade. This means that I have not been able to make first-hand observations of the way that local communities interact with conservation practitioners or any other species of external agent since 1995 (Filer 2004a). Instead, most of my business travels have taken me to meetings about matters of national or international policy in one or other of the three domains which I have just outlined. Some of my colleagues might say that I have therefore ceased to be a proper anthropologist and have become some sort of policy wonk. But what I find to be more interesting, from an ethnographic point of view, is the way in which my movement from Port Moresby to Canberra, midway through the last decade, has affected my understanding of the way that national policy communities are connected to global policy regimes.

Although there are many anthropologists who now recognise that ‘policy’ is a subject fit for ethnographic study at different levels of social and political organisation, there are very few who seem to think that policy *communities* are either substantial or interesting in their own right. For example, in their introduction to a volume on the anthropology of policy, Shore and Wright remark that ‘a focus on policy provides a new avenue for studying the localisation of global process in the contemporary world’ (Shore and Wright 1997: 13), but they keep their single mention of ‘policy communities’ bracketed by inverted commas, apparently to stress the point that such communities are ‘not just rhetorical, but contested political spaces’ (ibid: 15). There is now a substantial body of literature on the representation and engagement of *local* communities in ‘community-based’ conservation projects, which generally shows that these are also rhetorical yet contested political spaces (e.g. Brosius et al. 1998; Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Leach et al. 1999), but does not countenance the possibility that there are conservation policy communities at work behind such projects. And in their recent study of the relationship between environmental science and conservation policy at different levels of political organisation, Fairhead and Leach make passing mention of the role played by national scientific and policy communities, without inverted commas, but without further elaboration of their significance as ‘communities’ (Fairhead and Leach 2003: 230).

What might explain this apparent lack of enthusiasm for an ethnographic study of policy communities? One argument would be that anthropologists are known to specialise in the study of *local* communities, and if they want their voices to be heard by a wider public, including people who make policies, they had best stick to their guns. Another argument would be that policy communities, like policy networks, are metaphors invented by an old-fashioned bunch of political scientists in an effort to explain how real-world policies are made or changed, and have not actually served this purpose (Dowding 1995). A parallel argument would say that metaphors of this kind are simply part of the wider discourse of policy, or discourse of development, whose deconstruction is the task that best suits the discipline of anthropology (Apthorpe and Gasper 1996; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Keeley and Scoones 1999). For some anthropologists, this means that the world of policy is a world from which they must stand apart in order to read it as a set of hegemonic text messages (Escobar 1991; Zerner 1996). Yet Raymond Apthorpe, who is one of the pioneers of this approach (Apthorpe 1986), has shown that it is quite possible for anthropologists to get down and dirty in the real world of policy, even while they let off intellectual steam in each

other's company. So the question then is whether their participant observation of a specific type of policy process in a specific political setting might cause them to invoke the concept of a policy community to describe what is happening or what they are doing.

I have already suggested that policy communities are contingent features of the political landscape, and for that very reason, it is worth our while to ask how and why they appear, persist, or vanish within specific policy domains. This question can be framed by reference to some of the other predicates that make up the world of policy. Starting from the top, we can first make a distinction between global policy *regimes*, which are normally defined by reference to international conventions, and national or sub-national policy regimes, which are defined by reference to legislation. For the sake of argument, we can say that each policy regime at any level of political organisation is both the cause and the consequence of a specific policy *process*. Each policy process applies to the set of issues that constitute a specific policy *domain* but can also transform the boundaries of that domain. For each policy process, there will normally be a policy *network* connecting the actors who have some influence over its direction or outcome. Some, though not all, of these actors will normally be government officials whose positions are formally linked to specific policy regimes. Some, though not all, of these actors may count as policy *brokers*, because their inclusion in more than one policy network enables them to make connections between policy processes relating to the same policy domain at different levels of political organisation or different policy domains at the same level of political organisation.

All these definitions are broadly consistent with the current terminologies of political science. My definition of a policy *community* is that offered by Coleman and Perl (1999), when they suggest it is a type of policy network which manifests a certain degree of social integration or closure. This in turn is indicated by the existence of 'boundary rules' that determine membership of the community, and by a shared set of 'beliefs, values and norms' which anthropologists might choose to describe as a common 'culture'. The same authors suggest that policy communities are a feature of relatively stable policy domains, but each is liable to turn back into a policy network when the relevant policy process becomes too controversial or chaotic. To this I would add the suggestion that policy communities tend to develop within the confines of a specific policy regime or through the vertical integration of global and sub-global policy regimes in the same policy domain. This seems to be related to another point made by Coleman and Perl, when they say that members of an 'epistemic community', which is a transnational community of experts, may function as policy brokers who link the members of different national policy communities to form a single transnational policy community within a given policy domain.

So much for definitions. I should now stress that my aim in this paper is not to test the usefulness of the policy community concept in explaining how national conservation policies are made, revised, or implemented, or whether they succeed or fail. My aims are more modest. First, I want to see how this concept can help to fill a gap which other anthropologists have described in somewhat different terms. For example, Brosius (1999) bemoans the lack of ethnographic attention to the environmental component of what he calls 'national political cultures', and this is similar to what I mean by the national conservation policy process. Second, I share an interest expressed by Brosius in the same article, where he wonders what influence we anthropologists might exercise in the conservation policy process of a country that is not our own by birth or even residence. And finally, I wonder whether the social contours of the conservation policy community in PNG have primarily been shaped by the global political economy of conservation, or whether it has peculiar national characteristics that can only be explained by the country's political and economic history, or by the pattern of biological and cultural diversity for which the country is notorious.

I have previously described PNG's conservation policy process as an 'unpredictable, disputed, open-ended' process in order to indicate my belief that it is not just the national consequence of a global policy regime which tells the actors what they have to do (Filer 2004a: 83-4). In that analysis, however, I simplified my description of the national conservation policy community to the point of caricature, by describing it as a body split between Western and Melanesian conservationists, with a

separate role assigned to Western anthropologists like myself. That is because my main concern in that paper was to explore the ways in which each of these three groups of people speak to or about those indigenous people or customary landowners whose collaboration is required for the success of ‘community-based’ conservation projects. By implication, these *local* people are outside the bubble of the *national* conservation policy community because they do not play an active role in the *national* conservation policy process. Now that I have shifted my attention to the shape and size of the bubble itself, I must also abandon the implication that national or racial identities, or the subordinate contrast between anthropologists and (other) conservationists, will suffice to explain the diversity of roles and characters contained within it.

## The Making of a Policy Community

The common interest that binds the current membership of PNG’s conservation policy community may be traced to one global policy regime – the Convention on Biological Diversity. In very crude terms, this partly explains why the members understand ‘conservation’ to mean the conservation of ‘nature’, or ‘nature-plus-culture’, but not the conservation of ‘culture’ without ‘nature’. The PNG Government ratified this convention in 1993, and the Conservation Division of the Department of Environment and Conservation has been responsible for dealing with the consequences ever since. The professional staff of this agency therefore count as members of the national conservation policy community. However, ratification of the convention was only one moment in a conservation policy process that was already under way, and does not suffice to explain its subsequent development.

If we adopt a somewhat broader concept of what counts as a global policy regime, we could say that the real turning point in the national policy process was the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 and all the agreements and institutions that flowed from it (Berkhout et al. 2003). Even so, the national impact of this global policy process has been conditioned by the fact that PNG is a country full of tropical forests and the sort of biodiversity values that are associated with them. The membership of PNG’s conservation policy community has therefore come to include some of the members of the transnational epistemic community which Fairhead and Leach (2003) call the ‘Tropical Forest International’. But the problem of tropical forest management had been a significant issue in PNG’s conservation policy process for at least 20 years before the Rio Earth Summit, and for most of that period, I would hesitate to describe any of the key players as transnational policy brokers or to ascribe their influence to any global forest policy regime.

It is hard for me to describe the origins of PNG’s conservation policy community because I have no claim to be a founding member. It might be argued that a *national* policy community of any kind can only be formed in the wake of national political autonomy or independence, in which case, this particular community would have emerged in the period following self-government in 1973. There is no doubt that the people involved in making all sorts of policies for the new state did have a strong sense of collective purpose and identity (Ballard 1981), but it is not so clear that they were divided into a number of discrete policy communities. According to Parker (1978), a new recipe for the practice of ‘wildlife management’ was indeed formulated in the mid-seventies, and like other sectoral policy innovations of the time, it consisted in an eight-point plan that was meant to be consistent with the goals and directives of the Constitution. The fourth National Goal, which calls for the conservation of ‘natural resources and environment’, can and has been taken as a charter for the national conservation policy process that predates the Convention on Biological Diversity by 17 years. However, this was not accompanied by any major change in the legislation pertaining to nature conservation.

The *Fauna Protection Ordinance* and the *National Parks Ordinance* were both originally gazetted in 1966, and the first of these was amended in 1974 to allow for customary landowners to establish Wildlife Management Areas on their own land. The *Conservation Areas Act* of 1978 made allowance for greater government control of protected areas established at the request of customary landowners, but was not brought into effect. Another law was passed in 1979 in order for the Government to

comply with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Despite the later ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity, this body of legislation, with a number of minor amendments, has continued to function as the legal basis for the national conservation policy regime. It cannot therefore tell us very much about the origin and evolution of the policy community associated with it.

A better insight into the composition of the conservation policy network or community in the years preceding and following national independence may be gained from the proceedings of a number of regional or national conferences held during that period (Costin and Groves 1973; McAlpine 1975; Lamb and Gressitt 1976; Winslow 1977; Morauta et al. 1982). From reading this material, one has the impression that the core of this network or community was originally a collection of white scientists, including some anthropologists, whose expert knowledge enabled them to drive the bureaucratic and educational agenda within the conservation policy process. With the advent of self-government, they were looking to recruit additional players from the ranks of a nascent national intelligentsia with a very high level of occupational mobility, a small minority of whom had jobs in the Office of Environment and Conservation. As time went by, they also displayed a growing interest in the possible application of traditional ecological knowledge to national conservation policy, and for this reason, there is no clear division between the voice of the national intelligentsia and that of the customary landowner. But even in this early period, the anthropologists were sounding rather sceptical about the application (Bulmer 1982; Carrier 1982; Dwyer 1982).

If a conservation policy community existed in the 1970s, then one of its cardinal values was open hostility to the large-scale logging industry (McAlpine 1975; Routley and Routley 1977; Waiko 1977; De'Ath 1980). In this respect, little has changed in the last 30 years. What has changed is the organisational form of this opposition, because the conservation policy community that now participates in the forest policy process appears to be led by a group of non-government organisations rather than a group of scientists employed by research institutions. This apparent change in the composition of the policy community can be traced back to the scandals that provoked a public inquiry into forest industry corruption in the late 1980s (Barnett 1989, 1992). The Government's response was to initiate a new forest policy process that led to the establishment of a new forest policy regime, legally embodied in the *Forestry Act* of 1992, but the process included a request for international assistance under the Tropical Forestry Action Plan. As a result, the World Bank organised an 'inter-agency review mission' whose report (World Bank 1990) laid the foundation for a *National Forestry Action Plan* that was endorsed by a 'round table' of national and international stakeholders in 1990.

It was this event, more than any other, which served to crystallise the structure of the national conservation policy community, despite the fact that it was not initially conceived as part of a distinctive conservation policy process. There are several reasons for this. First, the inter-agency review mission included a representative of one international NGO, the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development, who made it her business to encourage the formation of a National Alliance of Non-Government Organisations that would claim and receive official recognition in the National Forestry Action Plan. Although some members of this national NGO 'community' were deeply suspicious of the World Bank's agenda (Brunton 1990), many of them turned up to the round table and lobbied successfully, with one voice, for an immediate greening of the plan put forward by the Government (Filer 1991). Some of the government officials at the meeting, and not just those from the Department of Environment and Conservation, were also keen to push the plan in this direction, even if they were less vociferous. Representatives of the 'donor community', including the World Bank, adopted their usual masks of diplomatic caution. However, the looming prospect of the Rio Earth Summit certainly made them amenable to the proposal that later emerged from the national Steering Committee and its Technical Support Team, which was to change the name of the plan to the National Forestry and Conservation Action Program (Filer 1998).

The structure of the national conservation policy community was consolidated, as its membership also expanded, through the design and implementation of a number of donor-funded projects that were part of this action program. This was initially evident in the composition and deliberations of the Steering Committee and the Technical Support Team, both of which made space for representatives of the national NGO community (Mayers and Peutalo 1995). One of the reasons why the PNG Government was quick to ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity was because the World Bank had dangled the prospect of a US\$5 million grant from the Global Environment Facility for a project which came to be known as the Biodiversity Conservation and Resource Management Program (BCRMP). This was 'implemented' by the UN Development Program, and 'executed' by the Department of Environment and Conservation, over a five-year period from 1993 to 1998. Its primary mandate was to undertake two experimental integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) in different parts of the country and apply the lessons learned from these experiments to the development of a new national conservation policy regime (McCallum and Sekhran 1997; Ellis 1997; van Helden 1998, 2001; Filer 2004a). In practice, this entailed an effort to integrate and coordinate the national conservation policy community, and to forge new links between its members and the transnational epistemic community that was already gathered around the Biodiversity Convention.

These efforts are clearly documented in the report presented to the PNG Biodiversity Country Study Workshop held at the Christensen Research Institute near Madang in 1994 (Sekhran and Miller 1994). This explains that the report and the workshop were both steps in a policy process recommended by the international Working Group of Legal and Technical Experts on Biological Diversity, through which signatories to the Biodiversity Convention would be able to meet their obligation to produce a Strategic Framework for conservation in their respective jurisdictions. The report also notes that an earlier step in this process had already been taken by a USAID-funded Conservation Needs Assessment workshop held at the same location in 1992 (Alcorn and Bechler 1993). The identities and roles of the people contributing to both workshops and reports provide a fair indication of how the 'expert' element of the conservation policy community was taking shape under the aegis of the Biodiversity Convention. This portrait can then be supplemented by the proceedings of two more workshops sponsored by the BCRMP, both of which were meant to reflect the experience of 'conservation practitioners' responsible for the design and implementation of conservation projects in different parts of the country (James 1996; Saulei and Ellis 1998). Aside from the two experimental ICDPs initiated and managed directly by the BCRMP, there were eight other initiatives which BCRMP staff recognised as 'ICAD' projects when the second of these meetings was held in 1997. All of them had been initiated in the period since 1989, all had a measure of support from foreign funding agencies, and all involved some measure of engagement by national or international environmental NGOs (Filer 1998). However, they varied a good deal both in scale and complexity. The scale of each project could be measured by the number of people employed to work on it at any one time, the size of the area which they were seeking to conserve, or the numbers of customary landowners with whom they had to negotiate. The complexity of each project was a function of the number of organisations or individuals who were supporting it in some way, even if they had no physical presence in PNG or in the local area. The standard pattern which had developed by this time was one in which a big international NGO gathered money from one or more foreign sources and either shared a proportion of this money with a small local NGO or helped a small local NGO to get some foreign money of its own so that they could work together on a specific conservation project. For example, the Worldwide Fund for Nature entered into a partnership with the Village Development Trust, the Wildlife Conservation Society with the Research and Conservation Foundation, Conservation International with the Wau Ecology Institute, and Greenpeace with Conservation Melanesia. There were some variations on this pattern, but the BINGO-SLONGO relationship, as I shall call it here, was already a significant structural feature of the conservation policy community. It was also a source of tension and conflict because of the amounts of money which had been made available for conservation projects since the National Forestry and Conservation Action Program had taken shape. However, the point at issue was not just the division of money and labour between BINGOs and SLONGOs in the design and implementation of conservation projects, but also the division between what I have

previously called the radical and pragmatic wings of the NGO community within the conservation policy community (Filer 1998).

Oddly enough, this second division came to a head in the second of the experimental ICDPs initiated by the BCRMP, which was known as the Bismarck-Ramu Project. The design of this project led to the creation of a new SLONGO known as the Bismarck-Ramu Group, whose members then decided that anything known as a 'project' had no chance of delivering conservation outcomes because it would simply have the effect of turning customary landowners into rent-seekers and opportunists (van Helden 1998, 2001; Filer 2004a). The pragmatic wing of the conservation policy community then came to be identified with the idea that donor-funded 'projects' were the best or only way to establish protected areas, whereas the radical wing came to be identified with the idea that the best or only way to achieve any kind of conservation was to mobilise popular opposition to the concept and practice of 'development' -- including the developmental component of ICDPs.

The Bismarck-Ramu Group still exists, but the Bismarck-Ramu Project came to an end when the BCRMP failed to secure a second phase of funding from the Global Environment Facility. The fashion for ICDPs has passed its peak within the global conservation policy community (Brandon et al. 1998; Terborgh 1999), but they are still being designed, funded and implemented in many developing countries, including PNG, even if more of them are now known as 'community-based conservation projects'. One of the last acts of the BCRMP was to initiate a design process which eventually led the Global Environment Facility to fund a community-based marine conservation project in PNG, which is once again being implemented by the UN Development Program, but this time being executed by a BINGO, Conservation International, rather than the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation (van Helden 2004). In the meantime, World Bank staff have spent an enormous amount of time negotiating the terms of a Forestry and Conservation Project with the PNG Government, and if this project were ever to be implemented, which now seems unlikely, it would include another grant from the Global Environment Facility to an entity known as the Mama Graun ['Mother Earth'] Trust Fund (Filer 2000). I might now go on to describe how the negotiation of these two projects has changed the shape of the national conservation policy community over the last seven years. But rather than persist in the same vein, I want to take a closer look at the question of how 'we' members know that we belong to it and what the members think about each other.

## Knowing One's Place in the Space

My own initiation into the national conservation policy community dates back to the round table meeting of 1990. I and a couple of colleagues from the University of PNG invited ourselves to that meeting as 'observers', and later secured a position for the national research 'community' on the Steering Committee of the National Forestry Action Plan. We also secured a position within the Task Force on Environmental Planning in Priority Forest Areas, which was established as the first 'project' under the Action Plan in order to meet the demands made by the national NGO 'community' (Filer 1991). Having occupied both of these positions, I then became embroiled in the design and implementation of several other projects under the National Forestry and Conservation Action Program and its offshoot, the Biodiversity Conservation and Resource Management Program. I wrote a chapter on 'The Nature of the Human Threat' for the Biodiversity Country Study (Filer 1994), and facilitated the deliberations of the Socio-Economic Group at the Country Study Workshop. Having left the University of PNG to join the National Research Institute, I took responsibility for another country study, commissioned by the International Institute for Environment and Development, on 'Policy That Works for Forests and People' (Filer 1997 (ed.), 1998). While working on that study, I also had oversight of Flip van Helden's 'Social Feasibility Study' of the Bismarck-Ramu Project (van Helden 1998) and hosted the PNG component of an international research program on 'The Future of the Tropical Forest Peoples' funded by the European Commission (<http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/Rainforest>).

If I was still a member of PNG's conservation policy community when I left the National Research Institute at the end of 2000, what makes me feel that I am still a member today, when I am no longer living in the country or being paid by its government? First of all, there are the projects. My part of the Australian National University has a contract with Conservation International to implement something known as the 'Small Islands in Peril Program' as part of the Milne Bay Community-Based Coastal and Marine Conservation Project. Our input to this project is also part of a sub-global assessment of coastal and marine ecosystems in PNG within the framework of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment ([www.maweb.org](http://www.maweb.org)), and as members of the Sub-Global Working Group, we are also members of the transnational epistemic community whose membership has been established by means of this global process. The conceptual framework of the Millennium Assessment is also informing a separate study of the poverty-environment relationship in PNG that we are conducting in partnership with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF).

However, projects of this type are only one manifestation of a deeper and wider network of relationships and communications in which my feeling of membership is articulated. Take my dealings with WWF, for example. I have been a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of WWF Australia for the last two years, but this does not make me feel like a member of Australia's conservation policy community, nor would I even venture to guess whether such a thing exists in a form that fits my definition. My role on this committee is to advise the Australian branch of the organisation on its own dealings with the South Pacific Program of WWF International, which is the part that operates in PNG. I was invited to join the committee on the recommendation of someone who has worked for the South Pacific Program for long enough to have been a member of the Socio-Economic Group at PNG's Biodiversity Country Study Workshop back in 1994. While this person functions as our principal partner in the conduct of the poverty-environment study, the partnership also includes an official in the Australian Department of Environment and Heritage who is responsible for building relationships with the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation. The triangular relationship between myself and these two other characters is by no means confined to the conduct of the poverty-environment study, but extends to discussion of a range of policy options and possible 'projects' that involve other government agencies on both sides of the border, as well as other members of the NGO community in PNG.

The substance of these discussions is rarely put into writing, and the effect is rather hard to judge, because the inter-governmental element is tied up with the long strings of diplomacy. Another way for me to test my feeling of membership in the policy community is to sample the contents of my physical and electronic mailbox. For the last six years, I have been on the mailing list for *Iko-Forestri Nius*, 'The Quarterly Eco-Forestry Newsletter for Papua New Guinea', which has been published by a SLONGO known as The Eco-Forestry Forum with funds supplied by the (American) Macarthur Foundation and the (Dutch) Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation. I would not claim that my automatic inclusion in such a mailing list counts as a membership card, nor is there any mention of me or my activities within the pages of the newsletter itself, but it does contain a wealth of information about the activities of other individuals within the non-governmental section of the community, and I can therefore gauge my own position in terms of my relationship with each of these people.

While *Iko-Forestri Nius* serves to celebrate the work of some members of the conservation policy community, it also deplores the machinations of the large-scale logging industry. The second of these functions has been taken to a scandalous extreme in an electronic newsletter circulated by a mole whose cyber-name is *Masalai i Tokaut* – a name which I translate as 'Grumbling Bush Spirit' (see [www.masalai-i-tokaut.com](http://www.masalai-i-tokaut.com)). I say this spirit is a 'mole' because it has been able to access and reproduce a number of confidential government documents, and this no doubt explains its need for anonymity. So far as I can tell, people like myself, who have been on the receiving end of these broadcasts since they started in the middle of 2002, are those whom the spirit deems to be fellow travellers in the conservation policy community, whereas those whose names are mentioned in despatches are thereby cast as members of the enemy camp. One of the people who falls into this second category is the Secretary for Environment and Conservation, mainly because of what he has or has not done in his capacity as Chairman of the National Forest Board. Since he is head of the

government agency that is formally responsible for the implementation of national conservation policy, this raises an awkward question about the outer limits of membership in the ‘policy community’.

This question leads me to another part of my electronic mailbox, which consists of email messages between people who clearly do regard each other as members of this community. The example I cite here is one that reflects on the passage of amendments to the *Forestry Act* in August 2005, which had the effect of removing the Chairman of The Eco-Forestry Forum from the National Forest Board, where he had been representing the NGO community, and including a representative of the Forest Industries Association, whose members are the large-scale logging companies. One of the participants in this exchange was one of two MPs who voted against the amendments. This man is familiar to other members of the conservation policy community because he was the founder of a SLONGO that specialises in the practice of eco-forestry, was appointed as Minister for Environment and Conservation after his election to Parliament in 2002, but was later dismissed from this office after he fell out with the aforementioned Secretary. But the main point of interest here is the list of other people who either contributed to the exchange or received copies of it. Two of them are people whom I do not recognise from their email addresses, but seem to be Papua New Guineans resident in Australia and the UK respectively. One is the Papua New Guinean policy officer employed by The Eco-Forestry Forum. One is a Papua New Guinean lawyer who has a record of helping local landowners to sue logging companies. There are two expatriate foresters, one Australian and one New Zealander, who have both been engaged with PNG’s forest policy process for longer than I have, and both of whom were most recently members of the Independent Forestry Review Team established at the behest of the World Bank during the period of negotiation over the ill-fated Forestry and Conservation Project. There is a World Bank staff member who is unknown to me, but presumably retains a residual interest in the fate of this project. There is a fellow Englishman who worked for many years in the PNG Prime Minister’s Department but now works for the European Union in the Solomon Islands. And finally, there is another New Zealander who has taken over the Englishman’s role in the Prime Minister’s Department, having previously worked in PNG’s National Forest Service and then as a consultant to the World Bank.

I would not have been copied in on this exchange if I had not already been in communication with the Australian forester on a related matter of mutual interest. For this reason, I would not currently claim to occupy as central a position in either the forest policy process or the conservation policy community as some of the other people in the list. On the other hand, I have known some of them for as long as I have been involved in either of these things, and that is what makes me wonder how we move around within this semi-structured space, and how we enter it or leave it. This particular snatch of electronic communication tells us that the boundaries of the national policy community are not ‘national’ boundaries in any simple sense of the word, nor do they encompass a set of ‘stakeholders’ whose interests and actions are a function of their duty statements or terms of reference. This is not a world-shattering revelation. But then we must ask how the criteria of community membership are related to what the members actually do, including what they do when they seek to exclude other people from the privilege of membership.

Some years ago, when I must have occupied a more central position in the conservation policy community, I was asked to chair the selection panel for positions on the board of the Mama Graun Trust Fund. After a long debate, the panel proposed that one of these positions should be occupied by the Executive Officer of the Forest Industries Association in order to give the logging industry some sense of corporate responsibility for the success of the conservation business. The panel’s recommendations were duly sent to people in The Nature Conservancy and the World Bank who were responsible for the organisation of the whole enterprise, and this particular recommendation was rejected. I do not know who made this decision, but it was clearly one of the moments at which the exclusion of PNG’s logging industry from the conservation policy community was declared to be a moral necessity. This alerts us to the existence of a well-guarded fence or pale within the forest policy process, where community members stake their views on who can be admitted or who should be expelled. As we have seen, the focal point of this contest is not

the board of the Mama Graun Trust Fund but the National Forest Board. Some members, including myself, would say that it makes no sense to exclude the Secretary for Environment and Conservation, even if it makes sense to exclude any representative of the Forest Industries Association. Others, like the Grumbling Bush Spirit, would still put him beyond the pale. The community is not defined by its agreement on this score, but by the fact that members have strong opinions.

However, if we move to other sections of the perimeter, this no longer seems to be the case. When I turned up at a youth hostel in Brussels for a meeting about the future of the 'The Future of the Tropical Forest Peoples' program, I found that all the participants had been given colour-coded name tags, and when I asked why my own name tag had such an uncommon colour, I was told that this signified my role as a 'gatekeeper'. The gate I was keeping, in this instance, was the one through which foreign scientists gain access to 'the field' in PNG. One of my jobs as a staff member of the National Research Institute was to manage the process through which they sought provincial government approval for their research plans. Some of the scientists who passed through this gate were anthropologists and biologists, some of whom were proposing to conduct research on the people, plants or animals associated with conservation projects, and some of whom might like to claim membership of the national conservation policy community. Some resident members were not very happy about the fact that an anthropologist was organising entry tickets for biologists. More serious was their concern about the protection of indigenous intellectual property in accordance with Article 8 of the Biodiversity Convention (Whimp and Busse 2000). But even if someone in my former position were able to develop a set of protocols for the early detection and exclusion of intellectual property thieves, this would still not count as a method of adjudicating claims to membership of a policy community.

Since I am not a citizen of PNG, my own positions within the national policy community could never be described as positions of leadership. If the community does have national leaders, they might surely be the people with more power to decide who does or does not count as a member. But who counts as a leader? Some members might nominate the erstwhile Minister for Environment and Conservation who voted against the amendments to the *Forestry Act*, but he is not the leader of a Green Party in Parliament, for there is no such thing. My vote (if I had one) would go to a lawyer who presently works for an international organisation in Washington, but has certainly been a key member of the policy community for the last 20 years. I well recall how this lady used her authority to castigate a hapless official of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs who had dared to present herself as an 'observer' at the Biodiversity Country Study Workshop in 1994, thus breaking the unwritten rule that this event was for members only. Yet such acts of public and deliberate exclusion are not common enough to define a hierarchy of power within the policy community, so it tends to have the same headless character as many of PNG's traditional political communities.

My choice for Queen of Green could exercise her leadership in a rather different way, by tightening that porous segment of the national boundary through which the foreign scientists come and go. I suspect that she would nominate Jared Diamond as the leading light amongst the scientific conservationists or conservation scientists who regularly cross this boundary, and in so doing, grant him a sort of honorary membership of the national policy community, for I know that she is a great fan of his work, especially his book-length answer to Yali's question (Diamond 1998). The key to this enthusiasm lies partly in the duration, form and substance of his engagement with the national policy process, but also the manner in which he represents the country in the global conservation policy domain. If other members agreed with this judgement, we might at least have a way of ranking the membership claims of the foreign legion of biologists, whatever their own views about Diamond's scientific credibility. Yet anthropologists and other social scientists would no doubt want to be admitted by another door, and that makes me wonder whether any of the community's putative leaders have the key to it.

One thing that we, as anthropologists, might want to ask is how rural villagers might ever be counted as members of a policy community if they do not write articles, attend key meetings, own

computers, or send emails to each other. Even someone like Saem Majnep, PNG's prototypical parataxonomist, who does write books about (his own) traditional ecological knowledge (Majnep and Bulmer 1977), could hardly be described as a policy wonk. If anything, it might make more sense to say that people should only qualify as members of the conservation policy community if they know who he is. Another person who fits this bill is Kiatik Batet, leader of the Didipa clan of Baitabag village in Madang Province, who died in January 2005. Two months after his death, the weekend edition of a national newspaper carried a long obituary celebrating his role as creator of the Kau Wildlife Area and his long association with a variety of individuals and organisations in the conservation business (*Post-Courier*, 11 March 2005). One of these organisations was the Christensen Research Institute, which hosted the Biodiversity Country Study Workshop in 1994, and workshop participants made a pilgrimage to the Kau Wildlife Area before the meeting started. We might therefore say that folk like Saem Majnep and Kiatik Batet belong to the conservation policy community as icons, rather than agents. We might even say that Jared Diamond belongs to it in the same way, if not in both.

## Signs of Schism: SLONGOs versus BINGOs

In March 2003, some members of the policy community began to receive a series of emails from a character known as the 'Black Saucepan', containing or attaching successive drafts of a virulent diatribe against three of the BINGOs running conservation projects in PNG – Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and the Worldwide Fund for Nature. I guess that many of the recipients would already have been on the mailing list of the Grumbling Bush Spirit, but the Spirit and the Saucepan are two quite different characters. When the diatribe had been finalised, its title was 'Institutionalized Neocolonialism in International NGOs Operating in Papua New Guinea', and the Saucepan was transformed into a group called 'People Against Foreign NGO Neocolonialism'. An American member of the policy community, who denies being a member of this group, then advised other members of the community that he had posted it to his website, where it still remains, with the subtitle 'Unheard Rainforest Conservation Voices from Papua New Guinea' (PAFNN 2003).

This document, which I shall henceforth call the Populist Manifesto, represents the national policy process in terms of a simple split between two ways of 'doing conservation', one of which entails the subordination of the national policy community to a global managerial process, while the other offers the prospect of restoring its former autonomy as part of a wider strategy of national self-reliance. The basic argument is that the BINGOs entering the policy process in the 'early 1990s' soon discovered that the SLONGOs simply could not handle the amounts of money which the global funding agencies were now prepared to spend on PNG, so they hired former bureaucrats and would-be politicians to act as window dressing for their national operations, paid them more than any SLONGO could afford, and by so doing, blocked the further development of 'a truly indigenous conservation movement'. Even where additional funds were made available to the SLONGOs, the result was much the same, because the smell of external funding 'attracts people who are interested more in money than in sacrifice'.

When local NGOs have to write plans and proposals in response to the rules of outside donors, suddenly their activities are driven more by what they think will be funded and less by what they once saw as the problems that created their need for working within an organisational framework. According to this argument, a 'truly indigenous conservation movement' would be founded on the voluntaristic spirit which animated the original creation of NGOs in the countries of the North. At this point, however, the Populist Manifesto displays an ambivalence which might be a sign of its multiple authorship. Parts of the document are presented in the form of an appeal to the donors to stop throwing large amounts of money at the BINGOs.

The real power to change this horrible mess in Papua New Guinea doesn't lie in the hands of the big boys of conservation but in the hands of the donors. The donors could fess up and face up to what's going on. If it struck their fancy, they could learn to become very critical and analytical of

what the international conservation NGOs are doing in PNG, and the subtle but far reaching collateral damage that they're causing to the long term development of indigenous conservation NGOs whenever they fund the idiocy that is now being supported.

In that case, should they simply take their money somewhere else, or could they fund a local social movement without corrupting it? The main body of the manifesto yields only one example of a positive conservation outcome achieved by a local organisation supported by a donor agency, and that is the success of the Bismarck-Ramu Group in helping local communities to resist The Nature Conservancy's proposal to develop a 'sustainable logging project' in the middle of Madang Province. The irony of this particular case is that the Bismarck-Ramu Group 'had begun as a project funded by UNDP', yet the authors of the manifesto are otherwise inclined to ignore the fact that this 'project' was actually part of the Biodiversity Conservation and Resource Management Program. Instead, they condemn the UNDP for going on to engineer another Global Environment Facility grant to Conservation International for the Milne Bay Community-Based Coastal and Marine Conservation Project, and they ignore the national 'small grants programme' that is actually funded from the same source.

To anyone familiar with the process by which these small grants are actually allocated, there is a certain irony in the manifesto's call for donors to apply much stricter rules of accountability to 'community projects' than they currently apply to the 'national frontmen' employed by the 'big boys' of the global conservation movement. The assumption here is that international development agencies and charitable American foundations can and should enter into direct and long-lasting relationships with community-based organisations that would somehow differ from the 'neo-colonial' relationships imposed by the BINGOs. However, since AusAID's Community Development Scheme is chastised for removing the incentive for communities to help themselves, it is not entirely clear how the funding of community-based organisations will achieve a better outcome.

The manifesto's alternative line of argument is that the donors are themselves complicit in a process which sends their own money 'back to the originating country through hiring of overseas advisers, transfer pricing, and purchase of foreign supplies and equipment', or do not care whether their bucks get a real bang on the ground, because '[t]hey just need to get rid of their money in a way that makes them feel good, and doesn't later cause embarrassment'.

TNC, CI, and WWF, driven by outside pressure either of their own making or from timetables set by overseas donors, passively toe the line, draw lines on maps and point to protected forests that are superficially protected at best and sometimes complete illusions. Their efforts should be praised in that they seem to have hoodwinked the donors completely. Either that or the donors simply don't care. Pardon the observation, but it seems that the big donors are primarily concerned with finding a money burner that won't put out a stink. The big boy conservation groups haven't learned to stop the stink, but to the donor's delight, they have learned to use a variety of odor masking perfumes.

By this line of argument, the acts of corruption and resistance which follow from the allocation of vast sums to the conservation of biodiversity pose a political risk for both the donor and the recipient, and the best form of insurance against this risk, from their point of view, is to spend the money on the production of 'lofty plans and pretty maps' which do not entail any substantial engagement with local communities nor any actual transformation of local landscapes. Greenpeace is the only BINGO which gets a seal of approval for its work in PNG, the reason being that it is the only one which 'has ever tried to put most of its resources into education programmes that can counteract the pillage of forest and marine resources by foreign interests'. This is not a reference to the school curriculum, but to the business of advocating public policy positions that deal with what the manifesto calls 'bottom line issues', like the rape and pillage perpetrated by the large-scale logging industry (see Greenpeace 2002). This is presented as a far more productive way of spending foreign money than the business of implementing 'community conservation projects that degenerate into cargo projects'. On the other hand, the authors show

little faith in the capacity of public or community opinion to hold the Government accountable for its own behaviour or influence the formulation of its policies. Instead, the Secretary for Environment and Conservation gets another rap on the knuckles for his grubby deals with the logging fraternity, his department is represented as one of the main recruiting grounds for the corrupt and mercenary staff employed by the BINGOs, and these same organisations are held responsible for the conservation policies posted to the website of the PNG embassy in Washington.

If the Government, the BINGOs and the foreign donors are all polluted by their mutual relationship, one might expect a populist manifesto to praise the cleansing potential of indigenous knowledge and traditional cultural values or assert the need to defend these things against the corrupting influence of the conservation dollar (Chapin 2004). Yet the document contains one fascinating passage that conveys a very different impression:

Once upon a time in the not too distant past an international NGO decided to do nature conservation in the Wasi river basin. This was [an] understandable idea. The place was the environmentalist's dream. Lots and lots of bush filled with a multitude of flying and biting things. A diverse bunch of unwashed and scabrous savages leading traditional lives that they punctuated with stories and wars to give it some meaning. No industry, no logging or mining, just a virginal tract of scrub... One must ask why the Wasis have not stuffed the place up themselves? Are they, as some of our NGO friends suspected, the possessors of native wisdom that has allowed them to live in harmony with nature for an interminably long time? Unfortunately not... The distressing fact is the Wasis would have destroyed the place were it not for the malaria and other parasites that kill most of their kids, sap their energy and make them mad. In essence, their population has not been able to get to the level where it can push the resources to the point of scarcity... The best thing the international NGO ... could do would be to simply leave the Wasis alone while doing what they could to deter the nastier industries from entering the region... IF they could bring health, education and awareness to the villages, only then would there be a need to talk conservation.

It is one thing to say that indigenous communities have no obvious interest in donor-funded 'projects' that aim to secure their collaboration in the creation and maintenance of a protected area, but it is normally the BINGOs that stand accused of representing these communities as an actual or potential 'threat' to their natural environment (West 2001). If some of PNG's indigenous communities are 'sick societies' (Edgerton 1992), one might well wonder how long it would take for an 'indigenous conservation movement' to take root in such soil, even if the BINGOs were not in the business of managing or corrupting the national policy process. More interesting still, the author of this passage asks why the benighted members of the Wasi community 'were unable to smelt steel, ponder nuclear physics and destroy the place like *we* did' (my emphasis). So 'we' may not just be reading a national and nationalist response to a specific form of foreign domination, but a text that betrays a more complex set of personal, institutional and ideological relationships within the conservation policy community.

If the Bismarck-Ramu Group represents a truly indigenous conservation movement, it also has several foreign fans, including the European fans who have been funding it (Anderson 2005). On the other hand, one also encounters the odd foreigner endeavouring to revive a SLONGO that might otherwise become extinct in all but name. Not so long ago, I got a copy of an email from one hapless Australian volunteer who had just joined such an organisation, only to find that there's no money to pay me to do the job I came to do, which is ecotourism development. Instead of hanging around on the beach (which does have a certain appeal), I am going to launch into some serious proposal writing so that we can keep the organisation on the road.... [But] the internet and email connections are absolutely woeful here. 12 kbps on a good day, and even then the microwaves disappear into the ether regularly and the connection drops out. You can imagine how long it takes to do searches and download information. I have compiled a long list of granting organisations but getting the contact information and details on applications is proving to be at the edge of my tolerance.

This is a reality check. From my reading of *Iko-Forestri Nius*, I estimate that there are roughly 20 SLONGOs in the conservation policy community, but at any one moment in time, half of them are likely to be in a state of organisational and financial crisis that may prove terminal. The total number of people gainfully employed by these organisations fluctuates with the level of foreign donor support, but would rarely exceed the 50 funded positions in the Milne Bay Community-Based Coastal and Marine Conservation Project. This small and motley crew does not count as the core of an indigenous social movement in any meaningful sense of the term, nor are they treated as such by the Populist Manifesto.

Aside from the Milne Bay project, whose 50 jobs are essentially funded by the Global Environment Facility, the five BINGOs in PNG presently employ about 100 people with money derived from other foreign sources (Paul Chatterton, personal communication, August 2005). However, with the exception of Conservation International, the BINGOs have also been suffering the effects of 'donor fatigue', because this number has been falling over the past couple of years. The financial afflictions of the conservation policy community have now been exaggerated by the collapse of the Forestry and Conservation Project, because this means that the Mama Graun Trust Fund will be deprived of the US\$17 million grant that it would otherwise have received from the Global Environment Facility (Filer 2004b). A cynic might therefore say that the grievances aired by the Populist Manifesto were just a function of the growing scarcity of money, but this is not the way in which it was interpreted by most other members of the policy community.

Despite the annoyance and embarrassment caused to the managers of the three main targets, there was widespread agreement that the manifesto did point to some significant political issues in the practice of conservation and development. In my view, these are best reflected in its own internal contradictions. However, we should be wary of treating it as a portrait of the actual structure of the conservation policy community, let alone as evidence of a deepening rift between two well-defined camps or factions which have the capacity to form separate communities of their own. For one thing, the functional and political differences amongst the five BINGOs are as great as those amongst the 20 SLONGOs. But more importantly, when we actually try to map out the organisational structure of the policy community, even in its 'non-governmental' form, it is hard to maintain the illusion of a simple duality.

Perhaps the Europeans are to blame for this. The Populist Manifesto has a particular gripe against 'conservation projects' funded and implemented by people and bodies represented as the agents of American imperial hegemony. The Milne Bay Conservation Project fits this bill quite nicely if we choose to regard the Global Environment Facility, as well as Conservation International, as one such body. But if the funding and staffing of this project has served to distort the shape of the national policy community, the same could be said of a range of institutions and activities supported by the European Union's 'Eco-Forestry Programme', which should by now include the publication of *Iko-Forestri Nius*. The foreign consultants directly employed by this program are hosted by the PNG Forest Authority, which some members of the conservation policy community would regard as a den of iniquity, but they work in partnership with a non-profit company called FORCERT, whose shareholders include two BINGOs (WWF and Greenpeace) and four SLONGOs. This company is managed by a European who used to run another project funded by the European Union, and its aim in life is to secure Forest Stewardship Council certification for the operators of small portable sawmills who are scattered around the country. Two of the four SLONGOs have a long history of engagement with this 'sub-sector', and one of them provides a marketing service to yet another SLONGO, the Madang Forest Resource Owners Association, which is essentially a provincial association of 'eco-foresters', but tends to turn up as one of the signatories to petitions organised by The Eco-Forestry Forum.

The European Union has not been the sole channel for European financial support to PNG's eco-foresters over the last decade, because some of these subsidies have come from the same Dutch and German charities which have supported the work of the Bismarck-Ramu Group. But the Bismarck-Ramu Group is certainly not a group of eco-foresters, and the Populist Manifesto says nothing at all about the social structure of PNG's eco-forestry sector, despite the fact that it now

constitutes a significant sectoral grouping within the conservation policy community. If the distribution of foreign funds has opened up a split within the policy community, one could just as well argue that this is a split between people who work in or on different types of ecosystem as a split between people whose work is funded by different colours of foreign money.

## **Conclusion: The Problem of Closure**

Let me imagine for a moment that I have been given the task of designing a test for membership of PNG's conservation policy community that will accord with my own gut feelings about who really does belong to it. What set of questions would best serve to decide which applicants should be admitted to the club? I suspect that three questions would be sufficient for this purpose:

Have you lived and worked in PNG for at least X years?

Who is the present Secretary for Environment and Conservation, and should he be admitted to the club?

Who or what is Y or Z (where Y or Z stands for an iconic person or place whose significance would only be recognised by a genuine member)?

The first question is meant to prevent a horde of foreign scientists, consultants, managers or advisers from dominating the community in a manner that would justify the nationalist outrage of a Black Saucepan. The number of years specified by this residence rule could be the eight years which a foreigner must continuously spend in PNG before he or she can apply for citizenship. Alternatively, it could be the total number of years which Jared Diamond has spent in the country since he made his first visit in the 1960s, so he at least would qualify for membership. Since I do not know this number, I would settle on five years as a reasonable compromise, and if Jared Diamond fails to meet this criterion, he will have to settle for honorary membership as an ancient icon. A five-year residence rule would disqualify most of the foreign scientists whose only visits have been made for the purpose of conducting fieldwork, and that makes sense, because fieldwork does not entail much personal interaction with other resident members of the policy community. It would also disqualify most of the foreigners whose engagement with the national policy process has been an effect of their employment by a foreign government, charitable foundation, or multilateral institution. Of the people previously mentioned as contributors or recipients in the email exchange concerning the passage of amendments to the *Forestry Act* in August 2005, the World Bank staff member is the only one who would not count as a member of the club. Another who would not count is the official who occupies the 'PNG desk' in the Australian Department of Environment and Heritage, and he has told me that this is only right and proper.

The second question serves two purposes. There are some foreigners who might qualify by the five-year residence rule, but have not been in the country for many years and are no longer in touch with the conservation policy process. If the test does not allow them the use of a search engine, they might well prove to be ignorant of the Secretary's identity. But even those citizens and aliens who have this knowledge could be caught out by a preference ranking that enables them to say that they neither 'strongly agree' nor 'strongly disagree' with the idea of letting him into the club. Such indifference would merit automatic exclusion, but the Secretary himself would gain admission unless he also proved to be indifferent to the idea of his own membership.

A third question is required because there are many Papua New Guineans who know the Secretary's identity, and might have strong feelings about his personal or political merits, without having any specific interest in the conservation policy process. There are also people like the Executive Officer of the Forest Industries Association, an expatriate who would qualify by the five-year residence rule and probably have the 'right' answers to the second question, but who would evidently have to be disqualified if the policy community were to retain some semblance of political integrity. We therefore need to test each candidate's possession of some esoteric knowledge that will function like a Freemason's secret handshake, and change the test from time to time in case the secret leaks out of the club. It could be a question about Saem Majnep, Jared Diamond, Motupore Island, or Peckover Haus, but if it were a multiple choice question, like "Which of the following

does not count as an icon or sacred site for the conservation policy community?”, most true members should be able to pass the test.

How many people would presently count as members of the club by such criteria? If I am right in my estimation that roughly 200 of the country’s residents are currently working for BINGOs and SLONGOs in the conservation business, I guess that more than half of them would fail to qualify because they are not being paid to think about policy issues, or are too new to the business, or have only recently arrived from overseas – like the hapless Australian volunteer who had just discovered that she was not being paid at all. On the other hand, my assertion that NGOs now form the core of the policy community does not necessarily mean that their employees form a majority of its individual members. Once we count the bureaucrats, consultants, scientists, journalists, educators, and other enthusiasts, including people who have occupied a number of different roles at different times, and those (like me) who are no longer living in PNG, we could well end up with a membership of 300 or so.

In order to prove that the appearance of a club this size is not just a creature of my own fevered imagination, I would need to show that each member knows a certain proportion of the other members, and that the form and substance of their mutual interaction makes for the kind of social integration that turns a network into a community. I could make a better case for this assertion if I had access to the hard drives or address books of the other members who are known to me, but I am rather glad I don’t, because mathematical models of network closure are way beyond my competence. So my case will have to rest on a record of specific texts, broadcasts, gatherings and conversations – the kind of ‘ethnographic’ record which I have attempted in this paper. And if the case is made, the question then is what explains the element of closure that defines this policy community.

The first answer would pinpoint the existence of a common and exclusive interest in the national policy domain. The Populist Manifesto repudiates this answer, but it also denies the existence of a single policy community and distorts what I would regard as some of its structural features. Perhaps it would be better to represent this semi-structured space (at least in two dimensions) as a Venn diagram with a number of overlapping circles containing specific areas of common interest, like the protection of coral reefs, the promotion of eco-forestry, or the battle against ‘eco-imperialism’. The manifesto could then be read as a sign of unity, not a sign of division, if it spread through several parts of this space but still rebounded off the outer margin and then vanished into a central black hole. But even if one could show that this had been its actual trajectory, it would still only serve to define the community in a formal, not a substantive, sense.

The authors of the Populist Manifesto would no doubt say that most of the people whom I regard as members of the national policy community are merely the local agents of a global policy regime, and if there has ever been ‘a truly indigenous conservation movement’ in PNG, its membership would be invisible to the rest of us. Expatriates could well account for half the membership, as I have chosen to define it, but from my knowledge of their actions and communications, I would say that most of these ‘aliens’ owe more allegiance to the policy community itself, or their alliances within it, than they do to any foreign funding agency.

It would be foolish to deny that the shape and size of the community has been heavily influenced by the river of money flowing under the bridge of the Biodiversity Convention, especially that which has flowed out of the Global Environment Facility (see Vogler and Jordan 2003). But we should not forget that this has funded the ‘local resistance’ of the Bismarck-Ramu Group, as well as the ‘foreign domination’ of the Milne Bay Conservation Project. While the Populist Manifesto represents the ‘national’ policy process and community as the site of a struggle between global structures and local agency, it also contains a sub-text in which the question of national identity is being negotiated between the claimants to a place in this intermediate zone. Local, national and global forces are all represented in this arena, in the sense that people talk and write about them, but what people say, both in public and in private, is not just a function of where they stand in an objective hierarchy of political scales. Nor does this conception of a political and institutional

hierarchy serve to explain the social integration of the policy community to which the manifesto is addressed.

Should we therefore say that the social integration of the policy community has been a function of its relatively stable membership and relatively common values, and then cite the Populist Manifesto as evidence of the sort of controversy which might be turning it back into a loosely associated network of interest groups (Coleman and Perl 1999)? One answer to this question would be to say that the community is stable because the members are unable to achieve their policy goals. In other words, the river of foreign funding flows into a stagnant lake behind a dam, and that is where we swim around. The figurative dam would be the legal institutions of customary land tenure, the social disorganisation of customary landowners, and the ‘ideology of landownership’ which inspires the form of national populism espoused by the Populist Manifesto (Filer 1997). While customary landowners are *not* organised, and *cannot be* organised, in a way that would enable them to penetrate the boundaries of a national policy community, the people on the inside, including the protagonists of an ‘indigenous conservation movement’, are united by their common feelings of frustration in the face of this immovable force.

While this might help to explain the denigration of the Wasi ‘community’ by one (apparently foreign) author of the Populist Manifesto, it does not sit so well with the general tenor of the document, especially its celebration of the Bismarck-Ramu Group’s alliance with other customary landowners to defeat the evil designs of The Nature Conservancy. Then again, the fact that these were designs for a ‘sustainable logging project’ alerts us to a slightly different explanation for the element of closure in construction of the policy community. This would say that the conservation policy community is locked into a position in the national forest policy process where the balance of power between the World Bank, the Government, the logging industry and the ‘customary landowner’ amounts to a stalemate (Filer 1998). It is hard to fathom the power play practiced between the World Bank and ‘civil society’ in their surreptitious alliance against the logging industry and its political allies, even when this is subject to close ethnographic scrutiny (Filer 2000). If the cancellation of the Forestry and Conservation Project means that the World Bank has now got out of the forest policy swamp which it entered 15 years ago, some – though perhaps not all – sections of the conservation policy community may still be stuck in the middle of it. From this point of view, the significance of the Milne Bay Conservation Project may not lie with the strings which connect it to alien powers in New York and Washington, but with the fact that it is not a *forest* conservation project. In other words, the bank’s departure may be one factor in a current tendency for the community to segment along sectoral, rather than ideological, lines.

This finally brings us to the awkward question of ‘culture’, but that in turn can be framed as two rather different questions. On the one hand, we can follow Coleman and Perl (1999) by asking whether members of the conservation policy community share a set of ‘beliefs, values and norms’ which sets them apart from other policy communities or networks operating in the same jurisdiction or at the same level of political organisation. On the other hand, we can ask whether the relative closure of this and other policy communities reflects some generic feature of a national (Papua New Guinean) or regional (Melanesian) political culture.

The first question need not detain us very long. I have already suggested that certain kinds of knowledge – whether of people, places or events – serve to define the limits of community membership, but I would not count these as a set of ‘beliefs, values and norms’. It makes more sense to distinguish the corporate cultures of a pair of BINGOs like Conservation International and the Worldwide Fund for Nature, mainly because of the way in which they have developed their own ‘policy narratives’ about the conservation business (Jeanrenaud 2002). If we lump these together with the policy narrative contained in the Populist Manifesto, we simply end up with a dog’s breakfast.

In answer to the second question, we might point out that this manifesto represents a communitarian ideology that is deeply embedded in the national political culture and grounded in a strident defence of customary land and landowners against the real or imaginary threats posed by the agents of capitalism, globalisation, and ‘development’. But since this only puts the BINGOs in

the same box as the logging, fishing and mining companies that threaten the biodiversity values which the BINGOs aim to conserve, it certainly will not serve to explain the closure of the conservation policy community. What it might help to explain is the evidence that foreign funding agencies in the conservation business are alternately attracted by PNG's biodiversity values and repelled (or should I say 'resisted'?) by its political culture. Members of the national policy community might then be united by a sort of immunity to this magnetic alternation of enthusiasm and fatigue, and if we observe a similar phenomenon in the mining sector, where foreign investors are periodically attracted by another kind of value, we could argue that all national policy communities are formed out of the 'middle ground' between the hesitant foreign investor and the recalcitrant customary landowner.

Another way of answering the second question is to suggest that the Melanesian State is populated by policy communities and bureaucratic communities which *behave like* traditional political communities. The reason for this would be that most of their national members are themselves customary landowners who retain strong personal ties to their own traditional political communities and somehow manage to infect the foreign members with a distinctive form of parochial loyalty. This argument has an understandable appeal to anthropologists like myself (see Filer 1998). One might go on to argue that Melanesian policy communities will tend to segment when they have reached a certain size, in the same way that Forge explained the statelessness of traditional Melanesian society in terms of the cultural and ecological limits to the scale of social cooperation (Forge 1972). In that case, the Populist Manifesto could be read as evidence that the conservation policy community has now grown too big for a pair of Melanesian political boots, that its component clans or factions are thus about to go their separate ways, and if they have not done so yet, that is because the community does not have the institutional capacity to 'absorb' any more foreign money.

Sounds nice – but will it wash? A sceptic could argue that PNG's conservation policy community shows signs of social closure because PNG is a relatively small country, and whatever its level of biological and cultural diversity, the number of people with a mutually accepted common interest in conservation policy goals will be small enough for them to get to know each other fairly well and establish a single set of institutions through which they can interact. This is an ecological explanation of closure, but not a cultural one, and it ought to apply with even greater force to the small island states of the Pacific region, regardless of their cultural heritage or the institutions of customary resource ownership. If we take this line of argument, we might pay more attention to international variations in the 'modern' institutional landscape wherein policy communities are formed and reproduced. For example, the absence of state-sponsored NGOs, of the kind found in some of the countries of Southeast Asia, is a feature of PNG's institutional landscape that may reflect the relative weakness of state institutions, but hardly counts as a feature of its national political culture unless we can tie the weakness of 'modern' state institutions to the strength of 'traditional' political communities. A resolution of these issues must await the more detailed and comparative ethnographic study of conservation (and other) policy communities across the region and the world.

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