

State Society and Governance in Melanesia

DISCUSSION PAPER

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PARALLEL STATES, PARALLEL ECONOMIES: LEGITIMACY AND PROSPERITY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

This discussion paper presents two related discussions on different aspects of contemporary Melanesian economic engagement. We consider the case of U-Vistract, a mass pyramid scheme which not only promises limitless wealth to its investors but even envisages a new global economic system, blessed by God and centred in Bougainville under the leadership of a self-proclaimed king. This is followed by a discussion on a contrasting movement called “Personal Viability” which is based upon self-help philosophies that aim to cultivate an entrepreneurial persona.

In the first section John Cox addresses the recent wave of “fast money schemes”, discussing institutional and ideological links between these scams and Christian churches, particularly Pentecostal prosperity gospel teachings. He also explores the tensions between Pentecostal views of morality, millennialism and the state which may have contributed to the spread of fast money schemes in PNG. In the second section Nick Bainton concentrates upon the uptake of the Personal Viability movement in the Lihir Islands which have been host to

a major gold mining project since 1995. Elite Lihirian leaders were inspired by Personal Viability philosophies as they renegotiated the community compensation and benefits package with the mining company throughout 2000-2007 and as they tried to develop strategies to achieve greater self-reliance and financial independence to address the so-called resource dependency syndrome.

While apparently obscure and even deceptive or ridiculous, these movements have offered alternative accounts of states and the global economy, and the place of Melanesian states and communities within them, which are sufficiently convincing to draw thousands of followers. In Bougainville, they can involve direct challenges to the legitimacy and authority of the state, and in Lihir they have been crucial to the generation of local plans for economic and political autonomy. By studying these movements, we hope to uncover insights into wider concerns of state and nation building (and legitimacy), and also into understandings of economic development and of prosperity within Melanesia.

**NICK BAINTON
& JOHN COX**

FINANCING THE END-TIME HARVEST: PYRAMID SCHEMES AND PROSPERITY GOSPELS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

John Cox

Leading up to the millennial year 2000, Papua New Guinea experienced a rush of “fast money” schemes: pyramid scams promising returns on deposits of 100% within a few weeks or months.¹ While returns of this magnitude might seem self-evidently “too good to be true”, the public response was remarkable. The schemes spread “like a bushfire”. Thousands raced to make deposits hoping to make it rich. Some “investors” put their National Provident Fund or other long term savings into the schemes while others sold real estate for fear of missing out on the “fast money” payments. Churches, women’s groups and schools all put money into the schemes, wanting to cash in on the high returns. The Bank of Papua New Guinea (BPNG), alarmed at the scale of withdrawals from private bank accounts, warned that fast money schemes “had the potential to destroy the financial system” (*National*, 22 Oct 1999). Long queues formed outside the larger schemes’ makeshift offices. Initially lines of people making deposits, they later became lines of angry unpaid investors wanting their money back. When the bubble finally burst, millions of kina had been lost. Yet the story of the fast money schemes did not end with a salutary lesson concerning risk and greed. Almost ten years on, many investors continue to wait for their payments and believe that “the money is there” but that it is being withheld by corrupt government authorities.

This section takes up the story of U-Vistract, the largest and most controversial “fast money” scheme, exploring links between U-Vistract and Christianity, particularly in the prosperity theology promoted by Pentecostals. The intention is to explain how this scam spread using religious networks and ideas against the weak capacity, reach and legitimacy of state institutions.

U-VISTRACT

“U-Vistract Financial Systems” was founded by Noah Musingku, from Tonu in South Bougainville. It emerged in 1998 at the close of the Bougainville crisis and initially promoted itself as the “Bank for Bougainvilleans”, drawing on Bougainvilleans’ sense of having been exploited by international capital. At the peak of U-Vistract’s influence, the President of the Bougainville People’s Congress, Joseph Kabui, described U-Vistract as a “window of hope” for Bougainville and asked for tax relief for U-Vistract and related schemes (*Post-Courier*, 26 August 1999).² Kabui subsequently became a fierce opponent of U-Vistract and more recently described the scheme as “lies and bullshit” (*National*, 23 May 2004).

U-Vistract’s early membership largely consisted of Bougainvilleans living, working or studying in Port Moresby. Several high level Bougainvilleans received large payouts from the scheme, the best known being the then Chief Ombudsman, a Bougainvillean highly regarded for his integrity and support of governance reform (*Australian*, 13 May 2000). Others, even students, made a lot of money and became notorious for their extravagant lifestyles. Often money was sent from relatives in Bougainville to be invested.

Alongside U-Vistract ran other Bougainvillean schemes such as “Nekong” and “Millennium”. “Money Rain” was another very large fast money scheme that was effectively an agency of U-Vistract for non-Bougainvilleans.³ There were at least ten of these schemes running in parallel, all re-legitimizing each other’s extravagant promises. As the pyramid expanded, Bougainvilleans invested on behalf of others. Soon the scheme was opened up to anyone willing to deposit money, regardless of their origins. Within a few years, some 70,000 Papua New Guineans had deposited K350 million into U-Vistract alone. U-Vistract also attracted followers in Australia, Solomon Islands and Fiji. In Australia, a small number of Queensland investors contributed some AUD500,000 between July and October 1999. Some were Bougainvilleans working or studying abroad. This drew the attention of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), which stopped the

further spread of the scheme and required U-Vistract to return the money to its investors (ASIC, 1999).

Initially, U-Vistract had support from the PNG Government, led by Prime Minister Bill Skate. Skate's Treasurer, Iairo Lasaro, exempted U-Vistract and nine other fast money schemes from the requirements of the Financial Institutions Act. Skate and his Deputy are said to have been large investors in U-Vistract and Money Rain. Many Papua New Guineans believe it was their extravagant investments (of public money) that exhausted the schemes' capacity to pay. In late 1999, the incoming Morauta government revoked the exemptions and gave the schemes three months to pay their investors or be closed down. Morauta prepared a new Financial Institutions Act, partly in response to the unchecked spread of the schemes. The new BPNG Governor attacked the schemes, initiating legal proceedings and issuing public warnings (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2000: para 32). These measures resulted in the collapse of the major schemes, who all blamed the government for their downfall.

Musingku defied court orders and continued to operate. He was declared bankrupt (*Post-Courier*, 15 June 2000) and subsequently charged with contempt of court for continuing to solicit deposits. Musingku attempted to set up another money scheme, the "Royal Reserve Bank of Papala", but police and BPNG officials raided the new pseudo-bank and closed it down. In 2002, Musingku fled to Bougainville and thence to Solomon Islands. In Honiara, as the "Royal Assembly of Nations and Kingdoms" (a fictional alternative United Nations), Musingku offered assistance to the Solomon Islands Government (SIG). The deal would have paid Musingku USD10 million for settling SIG debts of SBD1.7 billion (USD350 million). Musingku would pay in "U-V Dollars" (Fraenkel, 2004: 154). This absurd transaction was nearly approved. However, a more substantial arrangement between SIG and the Australian Government meant Musingku's time in Honiara was limited. He again fled, before the arrival of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Back in PNG, Musingku unsuccessfully approached Somare, the new Prime Minister (*Post-Courier*, 25 Sep 2003).

Returning to Bougainville, Musingku courted separatist leader Francis Ona by trying to link the Royal Kingdom of Papala with Ona's Meekamui. This proceeded as far as a coronation of Ona, overseen by Musingku (*National*, 23 May 2004). However, as his promises failed to materialise, Musingku fell out with Ona and retreated to his own village, Tonu, where he also crowned himself "King David Pei II" of the Kingdom of Papala. In 2006, Musingku recruited Fijian mercenaries, provoking the headline "U-Vistract Plots War" (*Post-Courier*, 9 Mar 2006), not to mention a diplomatic incident involving the Governments of Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands (whence the mercenaries had entered Bougainville).⁴ From Bougainville, Musingku continues to attract headlines, most recently for printing the "Bougainville Kina", with the face of Jesus Christ on the fifty kina note (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 2009).⁵

"INSIDE TRACKS" AND "UNRULY COALITIONS": PAYOUTS AND PATRONAGE

"...If public gossip is to be believed, the iniquitous U-Vistract net not only enmeshed ordinary families, but dozens of institutional investors, the boards of management of schools, the elders of churches, and perhaps most significantly, a considerable number of members of Parliament. It seems possible that it is these elected or appointed leaders who are the most unwilling to reveal their exposure to U-Vistract. For how will they explain their action in "investing" public money in U-Vistract, fully aware that the same funding was ear-marked for projects and electoral advancement? They cannot. So these experienced and well-educated people are consumed with shame and embarrassment as a result of their actions. Above all, they do not want their involvement with U-Vistract to come to light, and they will give only the most lukewarm response to responsible attempts to bring Mr Musingku to account..." (Editorial, *National*, 11 February 2005)

Not everyone loses in a pyramid scheme: some early investors may actually receive the promised payments. They then validate

the schemes for subsequent investors by demonstrating that the money really is there and that the scheme works. This “evidence” then fuels a mass rush into pyramid schemes. However, it would be naïve to think that U-Vistract functioned on a rational and orderly “first come, first served” basis. Early payments to prominent and respected people generate interest and confidence in a scheme. Targeting politicians and bureaucrats may also help the scheme to avoid being investigated or may compromise the reputations of others in positions of responsibility, as suggested in the comments above by the editor of the *National*.

Anthropologist Katherine Verdery, studying pyramid scams in Romania, argues that Romanian scams were established to mobilise savings and redistribute these resources to an “inside track”. Those already involved with the scam would always be rewarded, regardless of their notional position in the “queue”. Verdery sees these people as members of “unruly coalitions”: informal groups with common political or economic interests, including criminal activities (Verdery, 1995: 656-664). There are indications of something similar working in PNG. Although the nature of the case makes evidence extremely difficult to produce, some of the political links with pyramid schemes are on the public record. As noted above, U-Vistract and other money schemes flourished under patronage from the Skate Government and were given exemptions from a range of legislative requirements.

Prime Minister Bill Skate and Treasurer Iairo Lasaro, publicly identified as “Born Again” Christians. Skate’s Government sponsored a visit of the televangelist, Benny Hinn (Gibbs, 2005; also Jorgensen, 2005). Lasaro was an elder with the Christian Life Centre (CLC), a Pentecostal church Musingku also attended. CLC members were allowed to invest in U-Vistract, even non-Bougainvilleans. Senior public servants are believed to have “borrowed” government money to invest in the schemes, returning the principal and profiting from the exercise. The Clerk of Parliament, said to have been the key contact person for the Money Rain scheme (another large scheme feeding into U-Vistract) among politicians and parliamentary employees, invested K300,000 of parliamentary funds into Money Rain. He escaped prosecution

as his investment was successful and he was able to repay the parliamentary fund. The Clerk had also taken money from United Church groups in his own area to invest in the scheme (*National*, 29 June 2007).

FAST MONEY AND RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

Fast money schemes made many connections with religious groups. At the community level, many church leaders, congregations and other church bodies invested in the schemes and some even acted as promoters. A United Church women’s group attracted considerable attention when they were left stranded in Port Moresby on their way to a regional church meeting in Samoa. Apparently a Bishop had lost the women’s funds in the Money Rain scheme (*Post-Courier*, 23 Aug 1999). In another incident, a United Church Bishop invested K50,000 of church funds in U-Vistract, losing the whole amount. Salaries for church executives were not paid for a year but no disciplinary action was taken.

The United Church was not the only historic mainline church to become involved in the schemes. However, other churches responded more decisively at an institutional level. A Lutheran congregation in Lae was drawn into the scheme by a former pastor but, because of these activities, he was subsequently expelled from the church. Catholic and Anglican clergy were quick to warn against the schemes, although this did not stop individuals from investing. Perhaps the congregational governance and funding structures of the United Church and various Pentecostal Churches made them more vulnerable to fraud than more hierarchical churches.

Pentecostal networks supported U-Vistract (Gibbs, 2005). Three Pentecostal pastors gave written character witnesses for Musingku during his trial for contempt of court. Pastor Bob Lutu, Deputy Senior Pastor for the CLC, stated that Musingku was “a Born Again Christian... who faithfully attends Christian Life Centre...” (Lutu, 2000). “It has been our experience that the Church income was at a high level when members of the church were receiving returns on their investments under

the programme.” Many members invested in the scheme and donated this income to the church, funding a new building, social programs and the pastor’s own vehicle. Pastor Bob Lutu was even said to be on the board of U-Vistract. He and other pastors endorsed U-Vistract at Sunday worship and promoted the scheme to members. Their preaching also denounced BPNG and those within the church who were opposed to fast money schemes. As U-Vistract money dried up, the role of pastors promoting the scheme and investing church funds came under scrutiny. The CLC split into two congregations, partly due to divisions over U-Vistract. In 2006, the pastors involved were called to account and the church audited their finances. Eventually a formal apology was made and a service of reconciliation held.

To be fair, not all Pentecostal churches were involved in money schemes with the same institutional enthusiasm as the CLC. The pastor of the World Outreach Christian Centre, a breakaway from CLC, was “red hot against the schemes”. Individual pastors from the Foursquare Gospel Church in Madang and Rabaul followed the CLC trend of using their positions to promote the schemes but were rebuked by the General Secretary and removed from ministry. Gibbs (2006: 122) notes the strong central organisation of the Foursquare Church, which may have acted as a check on the activities of individual pastors.

FAST MONEY SCHEMES AND THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

The connections between fast money and religion are not only at the level of personal and organisational networks but extend to ideological affinities, particularly those shaped by the “prosperity gospel”. For Pentecostal Christianity globally, prosperity gospels are displacing the Protestant ethic of hard work and thrift. Where older Pentecostal attitudes to money were more ascetic, prosperity theology promises that God will reward tithing and other practices with even greater material returns. This reflects a “magical” approach to generation of wealth and even sanctifies consumerist desires and material aspirations (Robbins, 2004b: 137).

Robbins (2004b) distinguishes older charismatic and Pentecostal movements from “Neo-Pentecostalism”, with its emphasis on prosperity. This division corresponds roughly to the development of Pentecostalism in PNG. Initially Pentecostal missions were based in rural areas and, like mainline churches, were involved in welfare and service delivery activities. The Four Square Church is an example, having recently celebrated 50 years in PNG. In the 1970s, a “second wave” of Pentecostalism arrived in urban areas and attracted a more highly educated following, who were welcomed into lay leadership positions (Jorgensen, 2005: 448). Educated urban Pentecostals have formed a particularly responsive audience to prosperity teachings. Pentecostal churches teaching “prosperity theology” are growing (Robbins, 2004a; Jorgensen, 2005). Papua New Guineans are increasingly exposed to American televangelists, such as EMTV broadcasts of Dr Creflo A. Dollar.⁶ These preachers teach that faithfulness to God will result in substantial material rewards, especially if the appropriate donations are made. Other international evangelists have also conducted mass rallies in PNG: Prime Minister Bill Skate hosted Benny Hinn, a televangelist notorious for his ostentatious wealth (Gibbs, 2005). The Malaysian televangelist, Dr Jonathon David, also regularly tours PNG. According to U-Vistract, Dr David endorsed Musingku in a prophecy (*U-Vistract News*, 2001).

Describing the “prosperity gospel”, a United Church pastor succinctly observed, “The common understanding is that, if you’re Christian and poor, there’s something wrong with you because God wants you to be rich”. He saw this teaching as common within Pentecostal churches and thought it was also starting to influence mainline churches (cf. Eves, 2008: 20 n6). The teachings of this type of prosperity gospel go well beyond spiritual reward, or even reward for hard work, by promising immediate transformation of Christians’ lives in very material and worldly ways. Christians should expect to be affluent and should see new cars and other status-oriented signs of wealth as divine blessings. These ideas are very much consonant with the promises of fast money schemes. Prosperity theology provided a ready language which Musingku used to sanctify his fraudulent activities.

The prosperity gospel valorises and sanctifies risk-taking or entrepreneurship,⁷ creating a strong sense of moral entitlement needing evidence of fulfilment. The need for authentication of the prosperity gospel meant that Pentecostals were already expecting some mechanism that would deliver economic transformation. They were therefore predisposed to accepting U-Vistract. When pastors accepted U-Vistract money and claimed it as a gift from God (eg Lutu, 2000), this reflected the explanatory power of the prosperity gospel, not a naïveté concerning money itself.

PENTECOSTALS AND THE STATE

While prosperity beliefs may have made U-Vistract seem like “God’s answer to the poverty Christians were facing” (to quote one pastor), educated urban Pentecostals were also exposed to repeated public warnings from the Bank of PNG against the fast money schemes (eg. Bank of Papua New Guinea, 2005). How could devout Christians who supposedly submit to state authorities (Eves, 2008: 4) ignore these warnings from a government agency? I now explore three related themes relevant to this question: personal morality, millennialism and “winning the state”.

Personal morality

U-VISTRAC- CHANGE AND GET PAID

U-VISTRAC investors have been told to clean up their act if they want to get their money back and with profits. Supporters of the so-called “fast money” scheme gathered at the East Boroko house of principal officer Noah Ariku yesterday. Mr Ariku reportedly told the people that only born again Christians would be paid. U-Vistract is one of the schemes that promised thousands of Papua New Guineans huge dividends for their investments. Many are still waiting. Those who gathered after hearing rumours of a mass payout to come were met with gospel songs and a scripture reading from 1 Timothy, talking about the love of money being evil. Mr Ariku told the people “God knows that money is everyone’s weakness”. He said: “U-Vistract will

not pay its investors until they become born-again Christians. “Every Papua New Guinean, whether you are an investor or not, a faithful Christian or not, have to confess that Jesus is Lord.”

He assured the clients that “the money was already in the country, that’s why you see the value of the kina increasing again” (the kina has fallen steadily in the past week against the Australian and US dollars after rising earlier in the year). If payments were to be made, Mr Ariku said, it would be done strictly in line with the Ten Commandments of the Bible. “A person should not be a smoker, a womaniser, a gambler, if he or she wants to receive his monies from U-Vistract. We will screen everybody properly before we make payouts.” He claimed the payouts would be made in three phases. “Do not ask us about the timing. We are not in the business of disclosing dates of payouts. But we will do it according to God’s will and timing,” Mr Ariku said.

(Post-Courier, 31 May 2001)

Pentecostals in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere have actively opposed corruption (eg. Meyer, 2004: 465). This is usually based on ideas of personal integrity, rather than a developed theology of the state (Smith, 2007: 210). Studying corruption and “419” fraud in Nigeria, Smith (2007: 211) demonstrates how Pentecostal Christianity has narrowed the sphere of public morality to focus on personal behaviour. Eves (2008: 11-12) makes a similar point in relation to Papua New Guinea, where personal morality and piety have become part of the language in which political issues are debated (Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger, 2005: 22).⁸

Musingku presented himself as a sincere Christian and claimed U-Vistract was a Christian ministry (see below). When the scheme ran out of money, a U-Vistract officer addressed investors and informed them that only born-again Christians would get their payments. U-Vistract’s Christian moral credentials were impeccable and drowned out the more sober warnings of BPNG. Many investors believed U-Vistract’s claims that BPNG was “jealous” of U-Vistract, or that a corrupt government wanted to appropriate U-Vistract’s investments. Reduction of the public sphere to personal morality has other implications. The role of the state becomes subsumed by religious imperatives. Gifford

(2004: 167-8) argues further that Pentecostal emphasis on personal morality and evangelism distracts from questions of service delivery and institutional strengthening—“only the Word of God can change society for the better and not governments”. As Eves (2008: 20) puts it, “evangelism and prayer take the place of political activism”. U-Vistract’s Christian ministry pitted evangelism and prayer against the coercive and corrupt power of the PNG state.

Millennialism and good governance

“U-Vistract officials have informed their clients that the Company is a Christian Ministry commissioned to finance the End-Time Harvest...”

“...the organization is not a money scheme aimed at cheating people or making overnight millionaires. The organization is here to promote Christianity, peace, justice and equality.”

“The organization is here to ensure that grassroots citizens not only accept Jesus Christ as their personal saviour but also to ensure that each family has enough food to eat each day, enough money to buy clothes, enough money to pay for school fees, accommodation, transport and all other basic necessities of life.”

(*U-Vistract News*, Nov 23, 2001, Vol1, Issue 12)

Eves (2008: 19-20) argues that millenarian expectations of the coming end of the world are fatalistic and so discourage commitment to governmental structures. Poor government services and corruption are explained in terms of millennial timetables and even serve to validate those expectations. Premillennialist Christians have often voiced hostility to the United Nations and other international institutions as they identify them as precursors of the “one world government” which will be headed by the Anti-Christ (Jorgensen, 2005: 444-5).

Musingku’s claim that U-Vistract will “finance the end-time harvest” locates the scheme within these premillennial ideas. He also identifies “globalism” as something driven by the World Bank and other institutions in “the interests of the devil”. “Globalism” is responsible for oppression of “third world nations” and, particularly Christians. “Globalism” has also caused much suffering to U-Vistract investors as a result of the

delayed payouts. Drawing on premillennial images of cosmic battle, Musingku claimed that U-Vistract systems were Godly systems fighting the powers behind “globalism”, which has coopted mainline churches, who are “feeding off the World Bank” (*U-Vistract News*, 2001: 11).⁹

Unlike “globalism”, U-Vistract will guarantee self-sufficiency to all Papua New Guineans and eventually citizens of other developing countries (*U-Vistract News*, 2001: 11). Musingku used this critique to develop his own “ten step program” which would overturn worldly financial systems and bring about the “salvation and/or rescue of our land from all foreign domination” (Royal Reserve Bank of Papala, 2002). The “ten steps” focussed on stages of suffering and conflict akin to premillennialist beliefs concerning the “tribulation” and end times. Musingku’s economic and spiritual nationalism sits comfortably within Jorgensen’s “Third Wave” Pentecostalism. “Third Wave” Pentecostalism is remorselessly expansionist but works in the currency of particular nation states. Countries or groups of countries are targeted for prayer and mass evangelism. The borders of “spiritual warfare” correspond to secular polities and may even intrude into local cultural histories (Jorgensen, 2005).

Winning the state

“OPPOSITION Leader Bill Skate yesterday urged all Christians in the country to “rise up and become politicians, prime ministers and departmental heads, as the ones now in office were liars and a bunch of hypocrites”. Speaking at the launch of the PNG Evangelistic Association, Mr Skate said successive governments as well as the present leaders had failed the nation. He said that he had lost total confidence in the government bureaucracy and administration. He said “wicked people” were running the nation and called on Christians to show that there was hope at the end of the day. He urged all Christians to put Jesus Christ as the head of the nation and as the “bridge” to growth and prosperity.”

(*Post-Courier*, 25 Sep 2001)

In tension with the millennialism just described, there is another Pentecostal trend that engages with the state by seeking to “shape the nation in their own image, to

accomplish their project of a Christian nation” (Roca, 2007: 322; cf. Coleman, 2000: 222-3). Because of their sense of moral superiority (Smith, 2007, 211), Christian professionals have a unique mission to guide the nation (Bill Skate¹⁰ (above); cf. Marshal 1995, 251-2, quoted in Smith 2007: 211). Pentecostals have been successful at attracting successful people (Jorgensen, 2005, 448). In turn, this has led to the establishment of informal networks within government bureaucracies and other centres of power. Having “born again” Christians in positions of influence begins to realign state institutions towards church goals, especially evangelistic ones (cf. Coleman, 2000: 191-2). Hence it is appropriate for the state to pay a tithe to the churches (Eves, 2008: 4). Some further implications may perhaps be seen in the recent investigation of a high level Finance official, also an Assemblies of God pastor, who is alleged to have made illegal payments from public funds (*National*, 5 June 2006). At least some of these monies are suspected to have been used for church activities, such as buying land for the new Jubilee University, run by the Assemblies of God. Here the state has been reduced to a mere resource to support evangelism and church expansionism.

As loyalty to the state is encompassed by loyalty to fellow Christians, ideas of good governance become blurred. Smith (2007: 217) gives an example of a devout Pentecostal doing business with a politician, allowing him to launder stolen money. Because the politician in question was a fellow Pentecostal, the businessman was untroubled by moral questions around the origins of the money. Smith attributes this to the ability to separate private morality from secular business and economic life. This example also illustrates an earlier point: prosperity theology allows people to claim money as a divine blessing, regardless of its origins (Smith, 2007: 213). The willingness of CLC Pastors to accept U-Vistract money and to support Musingku against state authorities provides a similar example.

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding discussion draws an unflattering picture of Pentecostals in PNG. This is unfair to many well-intentioned and sincere Christians. It is far from a complete or

representative treatment of Pentecostalism in PNG. The bias is produced by starting with U-Vistract and exploring how the scam spread. Of course, Pentecostals were not the only ones involved: many other non-Pentecostal Papua New Guineans were also taken in by fast money schemes. However, prosperity gospels and other related beliefs did make PNG’s Pentecostals particularly vulnerable to participation in the U-Vistract scam. Bill Skate’s born-again “inside track” was also highly significant in the early success of U-Vistract and related schemes such as Money Rain.

This is not to imply that Pentecostals and money scams are co-extensive or that Pentecostalism everywhere is invariably predisposed to facilitating the spread of fraud. In PNG, not all Pentecostals were involved in money schemes and many other Christians joined the rush without being Pentecostal. Many pastors who were heavily involved have since repented or else been removed from office. This demonstrates that there is a capacity for self-critique within the movement. It may even be that this self-critique provides the kind of grounds for engagement with fundamentalist Christians that Eves (2008: 20) warns are difficult to locate. Musingku, on the other hand, has not renounced his ways and continues to produce materials explaining the imaginary progress of his payout system. He does so using the language and imagery of “Third Wave” Pentecostalism, embellished with idiosyncratic representations of Bougainvillean traditions and his own flamboyant claims to kingship.

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PERSONALLY VIABLE MELANESIANS

Nick Bainton

The significance of these fast money schemes is thrown into further relief through comparison with the Personal Viability movement which aims to develop an entrepreneurial class and to counter “get rich quick” aspirations. Although Personal Viability is a national phenomenon in Papua New Guinea, I am interested in the ways in which it has been adopted as a development strategy by local leaders in the Lihir Islands in New Ireland Province in the context of large scale mining operations which began in 1995.¹¹ When Lihirian leaders were introduced to the Personal Viability course in 2003, they hoped that the strategies and values propounded in the course would address Lihirian dependency upon mining and the associated economic inequalities that have devastated Lihirian society. This process sheds new light on the ways that Melanesian people respond to and manage political and economic change, and how they view and choose paths to prosperity and economic development. In this section I begin with a description of Personal Viability and the content of the course, particularly as it has been presented in Lihir. This is followed by a discussion on the unique ways that Personal Viability has been integrated into the Lihirian mining compensation and benefits agreement and how it is practiced and perceived in daily contexts.

The Personal Viability course (often described simply as “PV”), was created in the late 1990s by Samuel Tam, a Papua New Guinean-born Chinese businessman, who argued that Papua New Guinea can become a “viable” nation. For the past ten years, Tam has been taking active steps to reverse what he see as negative trends in Papua New Guinea with a view to transforming the country from the “grassroots” up. Where politicians, bureaucratic planners and consultants have searched for policy reform and the right formula for distributing wealth, services and infrastructure, Tam has prescribed strategies that put the onus back on the individual. According to Tam, the apparent development “failures” over the past thirty

years and the palpable decline in national living standards can be attributed to the lack of entrepreneurialism—or Personal Viability. Hence PV is defined very much in financial terms as part of a broader framework of capitalist economic development that should be embraced by each Papua New Guinean.

The PV course is intended to deliver the kind of education that will unleash Papua New Guineans from those constraints that impede economic progress and the improvement of living standards. Tam’s vision is that Papua New Guinea might achieve self reliance and financial independence by transforming its citizens from grass roots subsistence farmers bound by a world of custom and parochial economies, into self sufficient entrepreneurial capitalists, active in a national if not global market. The sentiments of PV reflect a mixture of bottom-up development, self sufficiency, Christian morality, a neo-Protestant work ethic, Western individualism and faith in neo-classical economics. It is a jumble of nationalist and entrepreneurial rhetoric, designed to compel individuals to play their economic role for themselves and their country.

PV has been endorsed by the National Government and various religious institutions who promote it as *the* new answer for Papua New Guineans. The Government has regularly used the course for capacity building exercises, and there has been a growing interest among community groups looking to advance their own grassroots economic activities (see Nalu, 2006; and Unage, 2006). In 2007 Tam took PV to Solomon Islands. The Government Caucus reportedly endorsed PV as the model for future economic development, and awarded Tam the Cross of Solomon Islands in recognition of his assistance.

Born of Chinese parentage in Rabaul, Tam is a reserved man, somewhat suspicious of expatriates, and highly determined to witness change throughout Melanesia. He is tertiary educated, experienced in corporate business and state politics, and affectionately known to PV followers as “Papa Sam”. His Chinese heritage elicits mixed responses from different groups. For some he represents the new wave of successful Asian entrepreneurs in the Pacific (see especially Crocombe, 2007). In these instances his ethnic identity does not

carry the same racial baggage held by *kiaps*, NGO advisers, volunteers, missionaries and emissaries of the Australian Government deployed to keep a watchful eye on foreign aid. For many others, mixed feelings of ambivalence and hostility towards Asians colour their response to PV.¹²

Course participants are told various renditions of Tam's rags to riches experience, beginning with the death of his father in the Second World War, his education in Australia, early entrepreneurial activities in Port Moresby, his leading involvement in the *Stret Pasin Stoa* scheme, and eventual financial demise that inspired him to develop PV.¹³ The story of a businessman of migrant origins, with few familial ties, values wholly derived from modern society and no with customary obligations is now being held up for Melanesians, of all classes, educational backgrounds and cultural origins to admire and aspire to. His story has entered what Errington and Gewertz describe as the "intersection between different narratives of the desirable and the feasible" (2004: 15); it is presented as the apex of achievement and the new definition of reasonable expectation and accomplishment.¹⁴

The PV course is part of Tam's wider program for national development that he envisages will be driven and administered by his Entrepreneurial Development Training Centre (EDTC); however, this programme currently exists only in an embryonic form, and national implementation has not yet been achieved. The courses are taught by "trained teachers" certified by Tam's EDTC, working as faithful disciples to spread the good news of his modernist doctrine. Within the EDTC there are various PV courses, ranging from entry or "village level" to more advanced business courses for those who are already "PV literate". His plans also include the establishment of a national *Grasruts Benk* (Grassroots Bank) to act as a microfinance institution for PV members, and the *Grasruts Yuniversiti* (Grassroots University) which will have centres around the country, teaching PV and other related courses, and will act as bureaucratic hubs for the administration of PV related programmes. These institutions and his administrative system are designed to apply the total PV package throughout the land to create a nation of shop keepers and

managers linked within his politico-economic model.

This national plan hinges upon a complex grading system for PV followers, whereby "PV grades" or ranks are achieved by completing various levels of the PV course and the measuring of individual achievement in entrepreneurial endeavours and other facets of people's lives, such as church leadership or family management, or the ability to meet customary obligations. The attainment of a bronze, silver or gold ranking will objectify social and economic status and determine how much money PV followers can borrow from the Grassroots Bank. According to Tam, course completion and entrepreneurial achievements will officially determine individual social "class", supposedly motivating further individual economic and political ascension.

TWO WEEK TRANSFORMATION

PV courses are usually held in village community halls or church buildings to emphasise "grassroots accessibility". In 2004 it cost 200 kina to participate in a basic two week course. These are open to all adults, regardless of their education or work experience and it is anticipated that children will begin learning PV through the PV Home School Program. Communities can apply to the EDTC for PV trainers to come to their area if there is not already an established EDTC program in their region.

Courses typically begin with a short lecture on the personally viable modern Melanesian based on the following definition:

PV is the perpetual self-discovery, perpetual re-shaping to realize one's best self, to be the person one could be. It is the sustainable development of human resources with individual skills to be their best. PV involves the emotions, character, personality, deeper layers of thought and action, adaptability, creativeness and vitality. And it involves moral spiritual growth....it is about finding yourself and owning your self. (Tam, 1997: 11)

Each day begins with prayers and the recital of the PV and national anthem, designed

to foster national pride and individual obligation. The course is structured around the ideologies of the entrepreneur and the teaching of basic micro economics and after ten days participants are expected to be completely familiar with the Entrepreneur's Doctrine (taken from the official creed of the Entrepreneurs Association of America).

Grounded in quasi world systems theory and neoliberal rhetoric, PV aims to create successful entrepreneurs who can reverse the economic trends of the past millennium. Using terms such as core and periphery, marginal and centre, and first and third world, people are encouraged to think of the ways in which Western countries have progressively created conditions of dependence for countries like Papua New Guinea. Borrowing heavily from neo-Marxist critiques of Papua New Guinea's post Independence economy (such as Amarshi et al, 1979), the idea is to illustrate the global exploitation that keeps countries with people of predominately darker skin on the margins and under the control of the countries in the centre with predominately white skin who are in positions of authority and relative luxury and wealth. Papua New Guineans are presented as cheap labour and nameless peripheral villages are the sites of necessary labour power reproduction for capital intensive centres (cf. Fitzpatrick, 1980; Meillassoux, 1981). In the PV courses conducted throughout Lihir, many participants immediately made the link with the mine and recounted their experiences as "cargo boys" and "work boys". Much of this conversation echoes a more general dissatisfaction among Lihirian employees concerning employment policies and practices of the mining company that appear to privilege expatriates over Lihirians.

Inadvertently demonstrating the internal contradictions of PV ideology, the next stage of the course emphasises that personal failure, poverty and inequality are not the result of a world system that reproduces injustices, but a lack of Personal Viability. On the one hand people are told that their "plight" can be understood through a structural analysis of global capital flows, and on the other hand the onus is put back on the individual; no longer can people blame the Government, isolation, or global history. This is reinforced through the repetition of popular NGO slogans, such as "give a man a fish and

you feed him today, teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". Ultimately participants are taught important lessons in the rhetoric of possessive individualism, particularly as it shadows liberal democracy and promotes the individual as proprietor of the self, who owes nothing to society and is free to act on their own individual conscience. What Tam seeks to foster in Papua New Guineans and the nation as a whole reflects Hobbes' "self-moving, appetitive possessive individual, and the model of society as a series of market relations between these individuals" (Macpherson, 1989: 265).

PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SELF MASTERY

For apprentices of the school of Personal Viability, the course is not all pithy self-empowering aphorisms. Students are assessed and expected to meet deadlines for small assignments and group tasks. There are daily exercises in "grassroots maths" that teach basic requirements for running trade stores and other small businesses. Compared to the time devoted to reciting and rote learning anthems and mantras, a remarkably small proportion of the course is actually dedicated to these pragmatic and useful skills. These exercises are built upon each day over the period of the course, and as a marker of grassroots authenticity participants are told to do away with ideas of "laptops and supercomputers", and to start using their own "neck-top computer". Drawing upon Papua New Guinean agricultural capacities, Tam encourages people to plant "money gardens", a PV term that not only refers to cash crops and market produce, but any small entrepreneurial endeavour that "grows" money. There is a strong emphasis on harvesting "nature's abundance that is given to Papua New Guineans from God", shifting people's focus from being custodians or stewards of God's creation to exploiters and successful managers.¹⁵

Within the rubric of personal transformation, participants are taught how to efficiently manage their daily finances, and how to say no to the demands and requests of their relatives. For the PV minded, it is important to always ask how much money can be

made from a particular activity and how can personal performance be improved? Participants are urged to compare their daily routines with the following time chart for the 'average village person':

Productive—gardening, ploughing, weeding, planting; feeding livestock; fishing; building; selling produce; putting the [nuclear] family first.

Unproductive—gossiping; waiting for opportunities or handouts; visiting relatives (*wantoks*); sleeping during the day; sitting idle around the village; giving *dinau* [loans].

This analysis is coupled with warnings not to waste their time, their most valuable asset: "if you cannot control the time you have left in your life you will find it very difficult to control anything else...Time is running out quicker than you think!" (Tam, 1997: 28-29). In this new order time is privatised and individuals are responsible for its effective use. These lessons also seek to transform generic notions of village relations by positing the individual (and the nuclear family) as a paramount value. In practice this tests the moral grounds for relationships, revealing the deep connection between different forms of wealth transaction and individual moral identities. Learning to favour personal ambition over collective stability means economic imperatives must outweigh social necessities.

SELF DISCIPLINE

PV is divided into the "four growth disciplines": productivity discipline, law of success discipline, economy discipline, and integrity discipline. These disciplines, which can be measured, form the basis of the PV grading system. This is an array of measurements designed to gauge an individual's viability and quantify their ability to "add value to themselves and commodities" (Tam, 1997: 36). By measuring the quantity sold, or the profit achieved, and the rate of expansion and personal progression, "viable people" can prove that they are constantly "adding value". These disciplines specifically target economic output (productivity), savings and

investments (economic), ability to meet projected business targets and maintain satisfied customers (law of success), and finally the ability to fulfil obligations in all areas of life, such as business, family, custom, or church (integrity).

The grading system assumes a lack of motivation among Papua New Guineans; the various ranks are supposed to persuade people to achieve a higher grade that reflects individual earning capacity, credit ratings and supposedly a greater contribution to society. Grading is to be conducted annually by EDTC accredited grading supervisors. In 2004 PV followers could purchase an official "EDTC Are You Viable?" badge with the name of the recipient embossed, to be worn proudly to display one's rank and encourage others to improve themselves.

Grading essentially involves verifying the claims of the PV follower: what activities have been completed; what are the annual profit margins; have expenses, surpluses and savings been recorded, and where are they held; have sales and productivity reports been produced; and what is the quality of the goods and services being sold. Inspectors should report on the morale of the "Team" (family, or staff who work underneath the graded individual), which means assessing whether younger family members only contribute because they fear retribution, or whether they fully appreciate all the benefits that PV can bring into their lives. Ultimately PV encourages a heightened self consciousness and intensifies self derision in the name of personal development.

The entire process from reflection to conversion (and public testimony during the course graduation ceremonies) is significantly theological in tenor. What emerges from this constant assessment and self-reflection is an extension of the Christian moral ethos of self examination so that it becomes a natural part of the modernising process for the aspiring subject. Regular grading increases people's openness to the people and institutions identified with the power and success of the larger world. There is also a clear redemptive strain, where the old "handout mentality" ways register as the analogues of sin. PV adherents are urged to make a "break with the past" so that they might step forward into

the liberating freedom of economic rationality. While PV is not a religious movement, Tam does draw a certain moral justification for his teachings from Biblical Scripture, and there are strong parallels with the type of prosperity theology described by Cox.

COLLECTIVE VIABILITY, OR INSTABILITY?

One of the ways people are encouraged to perform their viability is by organising their family according to corporate structure, where each member continually proves their productivity by contributing income towards living expenses. Weekly meetings should be held, and records must be kept to ensure productivity levels increase; here the nuclear family is the base model for micro-collective enterprise. Supposedly this will instil the PV mentality at the home level, eventually reinforced by a community of like-minded families.

The next level is the formation of village based PV clubs, or collectives that pool resources, finances and labour for individual and group projects. Some function as a microfinance resource, providing small interest-free loans to members (anything up to K200) to start another money garden project, pay school fees or for other emergencies. From Tam's perspective, when left to their own devices Papua New Guineans inevitably fall by the wayside of PV. Clubs provide support and encouragement for floundering entrepreneurs. Modelled on corporate organisations, clubs elect a president and various officer holders, coupled with committees for different projects. Ideally there should be a club for every village and a head member for each local government ward. Their duty is to make sure clubs function effectively, to help recruit new followers, and guard against declining interest or enthusiasm. However, as we shall see in the following section, in the Lihirian context it often proves difficult to enact these ideal strategies. Paradoxically, in practice this reality is hidden by the enthusiasm with which certain Lihirian leaders have embraced PV as a way to mitigate the negative socio-economic distortions and consequences of mining.

PV IN THE LIHIR ISLANDS

Prior to mining there were few economic activities taking place in Lihir and minimal engagement with both the colonial administration and the new Independent Government. Many Lihirians interpreted the mine as the fulfilment of prophecies for radical change that emerged in earlier politico-religious movements throughout the 1960s and 70s (see Bainton 2008a). This has also encouraged the belief among Lihirians that they own the mine, and fostered the unrealistic expectation that all Lihirians will benefit equally from the project. Even though most of the younger generation are sceptical of earlier esoteric interpretations, nearly everybody still expects that the company will deliver unconditional and equalising economic development. Consequently this has generated an ambiguous and often strained relationship between Lihirians, the company and the state, played out in a confusing battle over the roles of "patron" and "client" (cf. Toft, 1997).

Since mining began, the Lihirian population has steadily increased from around 5500 people in 1980 to some 14000 in 2007. Only a minority of Lihirians have become full-time wage earners and not everyone has benefited from the project in the ways that they anticipated. During the early stages of the operation when the company began releasing the first compensation and royalty payments, Lihirians became locked in a vortex of *winmoni* mania—a Tok Pisin term that literally translates into "win money" or windfall, and carries with it connotations of money acquired by luck or that simply "blows in", emphasising the "mysteriousness" and "irrationality" of Western wealth accumulation. However, infrastructure and wealth from royalty and compensation payments have been extremely unequally distributed across the islands.

The Villages of Putput, Kapit and Londolovit, which are comprised of those clans that claim ownership over land within the Special Mining Lease zone, now occupy the upper stratum in Lihir. Prior to mining these villages were relatively undifferentiated from the rest of Lihir, as people relied upon a combination of subsistence farming and sporadic

copra sales. A core group of six men have received over one million kina each in land payments since mining began, and 95 have each received between 100,000 kina to one million kina in payments. The bulk of the “landowning” community is comprised of some 1700 people who have received between two to 10,000 kina in various lands payments. Lihirians expect that individuals will distribute these payments throughout their matrilineal clan networks which spread across the entire group of islands; however in reality this wealth has become increasingly concentrated among an elite minority.

Although royalties and compensation are the most symbolic form of wealth, wages constitute the most regular, and the largest, flow of money into the local economy. In 2002 the company employed 986 staff, of which 366 (or 38%) were Lihirian. In 2007, there were some 1989 full-time employees, of whom 753 were Lihirian, and 1059 were nationals. In 2007 the mine only employed around 10 percent of working age Lihirians, but there were probably twice as many working for local contractor companies. Nevertheless, wage labourers remain a minority and are not evenly spread throughout the islands. Just as royalty payments are heavily concentrated around “landowning” villages these areas also house the greatest number of wage earners. Lihirians generally consider access to employment as their right by virtue of their status as the hosts, or the “owners” of the resource. This is supported by the rather unrealistic expectation that all Lihirians will gain employment with the company and that Lihirians will play a more significant role in managing the operation. Consequently those people without access to royalty and compensation payments who also fail to secure employment feel doubly disillusioned.

The rapid social, economic and political changes experienced through mining have torn apart many existing social networks, presented new challenges to village leadership, altered gender relations (often for the worse), and left many people with a profound sense of cultural rupture (Bainton 2008b, 2009). Lihirians are acutely aware of new inequalities, which are often the source of community conflicts. The growing number of people who feel as though they

have not benefited from the mine in the anticipated ways – where everyone would be comfortably rich – has generated widespread disillusionment with the mining project, the state and capitalism more generally. People regularly blame a combination of state, landowner and corporate greed for their dilemmas, though depending upon the context one might be emphasised over another.

The landmark Integrated Benefits Package (IBP) that was signed by Lihirians, the state and the mining company in 1995 (see Banks, 1998; and Filer, 1995, 2000) was supposed to deliver some form of sustainable economic development to the Lihirian community, with provisions for infrastructure, services and housing improvement. By 2000 when the review of the agreement began, it was apparent that many of the expected outcomes had not transpired. The review wore on as Lihirian leaders from the landowners association and the local level government struggled to reach a satisfactory agreement among themselves and with the company and the state. Lihirian leaders all wanted to address the massive inequality generated through mining, the prodigal spending habits of landowners who had grown accustomed to a constant source of disposable income, the growing dependency upon scarce wage labour, and the more general community expectation that the company will deliver all forms of economic development. For the first time Lihirian leaders were beginning to consider the inevitable prospect of mine closure and the need for long term alternative economic activities to support the continued delivery and maintenance of services and infrastructure. But they were unable to decide on the right path.

When these leaders were introduced to Samuel Tam in 2003 they were soon convinced that the wholesale adoption of PV was the only way to combat the so-called “handout mentality” or “resource dependency syndrome”, and to achieve what they termed “self reliance and financial independence”. They wanted to prove to the state and the company that Lihirians were not backward cultists, but modern Melanesians worthy of respect and equality and capable of achieving a desired level of modernity.

In 2005 the review of the benefits agreement remained incomplete. PV was strongly promoted throughout the islands but there were growing doubts over the suitability of this approach. Leadership was now split as a small number of educated (save) men who were aligned with the leading executives of the landowners association seized control of the review, effectively reducing the influence of the local level government. These men began devising plans for future economic development that combined mining wealth with notions of individual responsibility. These plans would eventually become known as Lihir Sustainable Development Plan (LSDP), which formed the basis for the revised IBP agreement that was finally signed in 2007 – though not without a great deal of consternation, political division, and general confusion throughout Lihir. These local leaders described the LSDP as their “road map” for achieving what they called the “Lihir Destiny”. They had appropriated PV for their goals, reviving earlier separatist sentiments in order to keep mine related wealth in Lihir and to reduce the state’s ability to influence Lihirian lives. In essence they were looking for ways to simultaneously develop individual capacities and to maximise the economic and political opportunities presented through mining operations. This plan was a blue print for a new order to be established through mining benefits and sustained through individual entrepreneurialism.

The new agreement was structured on commitment from the company for the payment of one hundred million kina over five years, funding compensation payments, delivery and maintenance of services and infrastructure, and a raft of community development programs. From an early stage the authors of the LSDP recognised that this amount of funding would be insufficient to meet all Lihirian needs (now or in the future) or to level out existing inequalities. It is for this reason that PV has been so appealing: common goals or “the common good” will only be reached through individual efforts. By using the benefits package to train Lihirians in entrepreneurialism and to create economic activities that Lihirians can engage in, the authors of the LSDP hope to reach some form of self sufficiency. However, competitive capitalism has rarely provided

equal opportunities, and not all Lihirians have been willing to follow this strategy.

There have been some disagreements between Tam and the authors of the LSDP over the nature of their strategy and the ownership of PV, but Tam has generally supported and encouraged their approach. Moreover, given that Lihir is one of the few places with the resources and the desire to adopt the total PV package, Tam stands to reap considerable returns through the EDTC franchise. Although PV is the central plank in this new vision, not everyone has been fully convinced that this road will lead to the desired land of modernisation. Some people have embraced PV as a way of life, while others have rejected it, or at least struggled to reconcile its overtly entrepreneurial emphasis with traditional Lihirian values. Landowners who receive regular payment of mining benefits have generally found PV irrelevant, while many other members of the wider community still impatiently wait for wealth and development to be delivered by the company or some other institution. Consequently there remains a great deal of heat surrounding the new agreement that now commits some 10 million kina to the implementation of PV programs throughout Lihir.

PV IN PRACTICE

Shifting from the planning and policy level to the ground upon which these decisions are made, we find that PV in practice has proven somewhat problematic. Many Lihirians initially thought that PV was the key to wealth accumulation, especially those without access to royalties and compensation payments. Large numbers eagerly enrolled in their nearest course, believing that they could achieve their dreams through this “home-grown” approach. Indeed, this is why it was appropriated by local leaders and the authors of the LSDP – to demonstrate to the company and the Government that they understood the ‘White man’s secret’, and that they also had their own (alter)native answers to the development riddle. Despite initial enthusiasm and the pivotal role of PV in the new agreement there is growing community disillusionment with both PV and the LSDP,

and little evidence of dramatically improved entrepreneurial performance. Although the authors of the LSDP remain ideologically committed to PV, they maintain a tenuous position within Lihir, especially as people begin to question how the wider community will benefit from this new strategy while existing inequalities remain apparent and more immediate needs absorb people's attention.

PV faces several challenges in the Lihir context, in particular the skewed mining economy that is coupled with inflated community expectations, and the heightened sense of traditionalism manifest through an ideology of custom. The huge amount of wealth that circulates throughout Lihir is regularly ploughed back into large-scale customary feasting and exchange activities. Rather than undermining custom, mining has provided the resources for its efflorescence. In response to the extreme experience of mining, many Lihirians have reified Lihirian custom, or the values and social relations associated with these activities, which are opposed to the sociality associated with development, or capitalism more generally.

More often than not, people find that their attempts to conduct business within the village setting, or their strategies to get ahead, are constantly compromised by these competing values. PV followers like to imagine that their economic activities are set apart from the petty market sales of the average villager, not least of all because they aim to advance beyond ad hoc sales, to a regular income supported by a growing "clientele base". More importantly they often state that there will be no bartering, exchange, credit or favours, regardless of kinship and custom obligations. Ultimately PV projects are supposed to operate separately from the gift economy or custom. Although the "integrity discipline" purports to measure individual performances in custom activities, in so far these transactions reflect economic commitments, PV implicitly encourages less, or at least more regulated, involvement in custom.

PV clubs cut across clan and family ties, and exclude anyone that had not taken the course and proven their "PV literacy", which in the village context has increasingly

come to mean the ability to converse using PV idioms, rather than demonstrate any recognisable form of entrepreneurial initiative. The use of commonly understood terms and phrases, exclusive to PV followers, generates a sense of ethos among club members. This is important, because in practice their petty market sales are not always distinguishable from those of non-PV followers.

PV urges people to compartmentalise their daily life in terms of a perceived distinction between socio-economic spheres. In reality it often proves impossible to pry apart the tangled relationship between different domains through ritual adherence to PV which promises some level of financial autonomy from local webs of custom and kinship. It is this tension that causes some people to reject PV, claiming that '*PV em i no olsem kastom bilong yumi*' (PV is not like our custom). This new resistance is couched in the discourse of custom, but it also stems from a realisation that any "secrets" they are learning from PV are difficult to perform and usually contradict existing dispositions, values and expectations. Many try to establish their money garden only to find their efforts strangled by kinship roots. While some people might consider themselves as potential businessmen it is often the same people who are quite disparaging of others who are successful at the expense of social relations. Their reactions capture the contradiction of Lihirian desire: people want to learn how to produce money for themselves and gain financial autonomy, but not necessarily at the expense of existing sociality.

Despite this enduring dilemma and the community's rising disillusionment with PV and the promises made in the LSDP, those leaders who advocated this strategy remain firmly committed. They have responded with increased rational modernist discourse, arguing that Lihirians simply need more motivation, and that once their plans are fully mobilised people will see the light and adjust their lifestyles accordingly. As a result this has only further distanced them from the wider population who feel that plans for their future were made without their consultation, and fail to reflect community sentiments and expectations.

By way of conclusion it is worth briefly considering some of the broader implications of PV in Lihir. We can find strong parallels between the expectations for instant wealth fostered by fast money schemes and the expectations among landowning communities, especially their disenfranchised neighbours and relatives, for mining companies to instantly deliver all forms of economic development. The PV movement, which was deliberately adopted by Lihirian leaders to combat this dependency, might be considered the rational counter-part to the sort of *winmoni* mania generated by fast money schemes and the delivery of huge compensation and royalty payments to landowning communities. However, the ways in which some people have put their faith in PV, almost as an end in itself which is ritually enacted, should give rise to some level of caution. Perhaps even more concerning, is that as a device for addressing issues of economic dependency, PV seems to be more effective as a moral ideology that justifies the very inequalities it purports to reverse.

The dominant neoliberal economic discourse, which PV intensifies and internalises within people, assumes that out of the way places such as Lihir can credibly be developed and diversified. Accordingly, there are no limits to growth and all that is needed is the right attitude, capital and laissez faire government, or as it is expressed in PV terminology, a “conducive environment”. In the end the mine is the central economic opportunity for Lihirians, and while it remains, it will always prove exceedingly difficult to generate significant economic diversification. While there are a large number of successful companies that provide various services in Lihir, they are all dependent upon the mining project for their operation. But the myths of economic development in the context of mining as promulgated by PV conceal an even more disturbing reality. While the grassroots are expected to be content digging around in their money gardens, elite landowners still have the freedom and capacity to invest abroad, send their children to better schools, gain more lucrative business contracts with the mining company, or simply enjoy their wealth with little thought for tomorrow. This is only compounded by the presence of expatriate miners who appear to the average Lihirian to be living comparatively luxurious

lifestyles. Certainly some Lihirians have recognised such discrepancies, fuelling their rejection or antagonism towards PV, whilst leaving them with the sense that the “real development” lies elsewhere.

The question faced by Lihirian leaders, company management and the state, is how to turn resource rents, or the larger benefits package (or what economists term the economic surplus), into long term equitable and sustainable economic development that will maintain service provision beyond the life of the mine. All large-scale resource development projects throughout Melanesia are confronted with this challenge. The LSDP might be considered a progressive response with its emphasis on service delivery that is designed to offer a more socially equitable means of distributing long term benefits regardless of landowner status. However, the question remains whether the strong neoliberal themes emphasised through PV will divert attention from the more equitable distribution of wealth—whether it is through customary channels or governance structures and local development plans—and entrench the elite capture of royalties which remains the most divisive element in Lihir. Ultimately addressing such arbitrary distinctions will determine the long term social and economic viability of the Lihir islands.

AUTHOR NOTES

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ENDNOTES

1. I use the general term “pyramid scam” to include what are more correctly known as Ponzi schemes: scams which generate a great rush of investors based on false promises of huge and rapid returns. Pyramid scams and Ponzi schemes should be distinguished from pyramid selling schemes, such as Amway and the like. Pyramid selling (or multi-level marketing) is not inherently fraudulent, although some scams, such as Questnet, do operate in PNG using multi-level marketing structures.
2. ‘FAST money schemes were risky businesses but provided a “window of hope” for investors, especially simple villagers, according to the late Joseph Kabui, former president of the Bougainville People’s Congress. Mr Kabui said Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta’s announcement on the establishment of a committee to look into the operations of the schemes is a move in the right direction. He stressed a need to exempt U-Vistract, Money Link, Millennium and Nekong from paying tax to the Government in their Bougainville operations. “While investors know that there are risks involved, they are also aware of the benefits provided by the schemes”, he said. “By investing in the schemes, small investors in Bougainville have planned to rebuild houses destroyed during the crisis, pay for children’s school fees and meet costs for other basic needs and services. The schemes, do provide a window of hope and opportunities to a simple villager who has placed his/her trust in the operations of the schemes by investing.” He sympathised with the owners of the schemes who were being pressured by clients to pay out their money. The Government through the Central Bank is also exerting pressure on the schemes to comply with the country’s Finance Acts. He called for understanding from the Government when dealing with the fast money making schemes on Bougainville’ (Post-Courier, 26 August 1999).
3. The closeness of the two schemes may be seen in the case of two Bougainvillean sisters based in Madang: one was the local agent for U-Vistract and other for Money Rain.
4. The Fijians claimed they were coming to Bougainville as missionaries! (Post-Courier 29 Sep 2007)
5. This gesture attracted condemnation from the Catholic Archbishop of PNG (National 31 July 2009) but also serves as a fine symbol of Musingku’s idiosyncratic melding of finance and religion.
6. See www.creflodollarministries.org for the work of this Afro-American preacher with a most intriguing name.
7. Coleman 2000, 195. Compare Cahn (2006) on multi-level marketing schemes in Mexico.
8. Cf. Kurer 2007, who makes a more general remark about good character, corruption and clientelism.
9. In an apparent back flip, Musingku later claimed his money was coming from the World Bank, prompting a denial by the Bank’s Papua New Guinea Manager (Post-Courier 28 Feb 2006).
10. “The two years under Bill Skate were widely viewed as the most corrupt, and the worst administered, in PNG’s brief but increasingly sad history as a nation.” (Callick, 2000). See also Eves (2008, 5-6).
11. The Lihir gold mine is currently operated by Lihir Gold Limited.
12. To be sure, the growing Asian presence throughout Papua New Guinea has come under increased local scrutiny, especially in the logging industry (Crocombe, 2007: 64, 134). Asian influence has shifted from small businesses among the ‘older Chinese’, to corporate investment in the extractive industries, hotels and other areas of commerce, which also seems to be accompanied by greater levels of corruption and organised crime.
13. Details of his life history can also be found at the PV website: <http://www.edtc.ac.pg>
14. There are evident correlations between Tam’s messages and prosperity theology found in some of the more charismatic churches throughout Papua New Guinea.
15. For similar discussions on the ways Melanesians engage with environmental discourse see especially Macintyre and Foale, 2004: 235. Helden, 1998; cf. Kirsch, 2004; West, 2005).

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