

## **TITLE PAGE**

### **‘Seeing’ Papua New Guinea: Making Order and Disorder through a Petroleum Project**

#### **Abstract**

This article contributes to debates about how capitalist corporations ‘see’, and how they concurrently relate to the places where they are located. It argues that an analytical focus on seeing illuminates how internal organization and outwards relation-making are tied together in complex ways. Even so, corporations of the extractive industries in particular cannot be assumed to encompass a single coherent view. The empirical case is a critical examination of how a gas project employed strict health, safety and security measures to generate order, when encountering alterity in an unfamiliar environment in Papua New Guinea. It reveals how the project was organized around two conflicting ways of seeing its host country—trying to separate itself from while simultaneously having to engage and provide benefits for it.

#### **Keywords**

Papua New Guinea, corporate organization, order, disorder, capitalism, alterity

## Introduction

Anthropologists have for many years debated how institutions ‘think’ (Douglas 1986), or how organizations—private or public—‘see’ (e.g. Scott 1998; Ferguson 2005). In other words, what practices and discourses do corporate groups employ to order and categorize the world, and how do they act through those categories? This article contributes to this debate by analyzing how a capitalist corporation sees when it finds itself amidst a foreign population in an unfamiliar environment. It thus brings together a cultural theme of alterity with a more political economic theme of capitalist and corporate organization of extraction. The specific case is how the petroleum company ExxonMobil saw Papua New Guinea (PNG), when it organized and operated a project meant to extract natural gas from sites in the PNG Highlands, and how this project called the ‘PNG LNG Project’ (henceforth ‘the Project’) dealt with the foreign culture(s) of its host country during parts of its construction phase in 2010-11. All too often corporations such as ExxonMobil are presumed to have only one purpose (and one way of seeing) when operating their projects, namely profit. I will not downplay the importance of this motive in keeping such an organization together, but I will nonetheless argue that a shift in ethnographic gaze towards how organizations see in multiple and sometimes conflicting ways can help us understand how they organize themselves as well as interact with their surroundings. They can be ethnographic objects of study in their own right, and interestingly so when they face cultural alterity.

The debate that I engage has been shaped by James Scott’s *Seeing like a State* (1998) and James Ferguson’s commentary on the same piece (2005). As I read them, Scott and Ferguson both discuss ‘seeing’ as an essentializing, totalizing and yet simplifying vision constituted by techniques and ideologies (of either modernism for Scott or of modular and flexible market capitalism for Ferguson). In other words, seeing is a structural and organizational dynamic; an unfolding process of interpretation and representation, which is not reducible to any single employee’s view or position within the structure. Since they discuss techniques and ideologies, seeing to Scott and Ferguson does not imply a mutual or reciprocal gaze, however (cf. Vigh and Sausdal 2014: 67-68). They thus underestimate, in my opinion, how seeing is a factor in creating *both* a subject that sees, and an object, which is seen (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1998: 476-77). If seeing should work as a useful metaphor for the description and analysis of organizations and corporate bodies, I would suggest taking into account the heterogenous relations between subject and object through which views are composed. This harks back to the well-worn anthropological insight that cultures—

including those of western corporations—are not singular, distinct or easily bounded. They are “involved in relations of alterity as a condition of their internal consistency, their status as some sort of entity, and their identity.” (Sahlins 2010: 103).

A related departure from Scott and Ferguson is Marina Welker’s proposal that corporations and their projects should not be regarded as prior seeing subjects, and that such a subject cannot be understood as a singular *Homo economicus*. They are enacted *as* seeing under specific sociomaterial and practical circumstances. This enactment is not static or a priori reducible to just one type of view (Welker 2014: 80, see also Appel 2012a, 2012b). Welker’s aim is to present an understanding of what comprises a corporation—where it ‘begins and ends’. When focusing on practice, it is clear that corporations in general and extractive projects in particular are heterogenous assemblages of multiple actors that often have different and even conflicting agendas. It is misleading, then, to assume that they see in just one way, or appear as coherent agents, but their attempts to do so should be taken seriously (Welker 2014: 2, 217-18). While pursuing an anthropological contribution that resembles Welker’s, I particularly want to emphasize how the view(s) of the outside contributes to making an alleged coherence on the inside, and vice versa. That is, a focus on how corporate categories and discourses are enacted as views in practice, can relate the way order is created internally to the way the inside is differentiated from the outside.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, I analyze the Project’s work of ordering and differentiation as comprised of in this case two contrasting views or ways of seeing. The Project’s first view, of PNG as in need of and as having a potential for development, stemmed from having to comply with expectations to openness and the provision of benefits for both locals and the PNG state in order to be allowed to operate. Managers and planners in the Project headquarters proposed that the Project could help generate wealth and development for the Project Impacted Areas (PIAs) and PNG more generally, and that positive influences could ‘trickle down’ to the communities via locals employed as Project staff. Planning for benefits and development was the most important justification for the Project’s presence in PNG, and it was frequently communicated to stakeholders at all levels. This communication was part of the pursuit of ‘best practices’ of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and of giving free prior and informed consultation.

The second view, of PNG as danger to be avoided, enacted a separation of personnel and facilities from the outside through a focus on health, safety and security (henceforth ‘HSS’). Such work of ordering and differentiation attempted to position the Project in PNG in a way that has been

categorized as ‘enclaving’ by Ferguson (2005). Even if HSS-measures partly grew out of CSR-concerns and played an important role in fulfilling such aims, HSS also dominated the internal organization and the way boundaries to the outside were erected, which made enclaving easy to identify. In short, HSS indicated a view that presumed order to exist on the inside, and saw the ‘disorder’ of PNG, a country which in corporate circles had a poor reputation as an unstable and unsafe destination, as either something that had to be made ‘legible’ and controllable through the ordering practices of HSS, or something uncontrollable to be bounded off also by HSS-measures.

HSS-measures in practice thus implied a dual view of PNG and its people. On the one hand PNG was presented as chaotic, violent-prone and unpredictable, and therefore had to be kept at arm’s length. On the other hand, PNG was under other circumstances ascribed an underlying sameness when assuming that its people could develop and become ‘like us’ with the opportunities delivered by the Project. The two contrasting views thus comprised a dilemma between *relating* to PNG in order to contribute to development and justify the Project’s presence, or *separating* oneself from PNG in order to maximize profit and minimize liabilities.

### **The petroleum project assemblage and its ‘views’**

Social science perspectives on extractive projects have since the 1990s focused on the impact that these projects have on societies that host them. I will distinguish between two mainstream and one more critical perspective. The first mainstream perspective argues that such projects are opportunities for growth that will benefit host societies and stakeholders by providing employment, royalties and much more (see Davis and Tilton 2005). This perspective, which I here label ‘modernist’ or ‘developmentalist’, has often provided legitimacy for the extractive industries operating in the Global South. It was propagated by the Project too. This perspective has, nonetheless, been confronted with analyses from political economists and geographers that have gained widespread influence. These theories aim at explaining the lack of economic growth that often comes with extraction in the Global South (e.g. Auty 1993; Karl 1997). Their critique is as much leveled at the institutional behavior of the state and the absence of its capacity to manage the resulting wealth. Terms such as rent-seeking, resource curse, or paradox of plenty attempt to explain the social, political, and economic order (or disorder) of the host states and their societies caused by windfall revenues. This latter perspective has itself become a way for extractive projects

to justify enclaving and autonomy from host societies (Appel 2012a). It thus describes a mode of operation embedded within neoliberal flexible capitalism, which I will follow Appel in referring to as ‘modular’ (ibid.).

The two mainstream perspectives have both guided the extractive industries in planning and operations. Apart from being academic perspectives, they entail practical but contrasting views through which these projects see their host societies. It is not unproblematic to navigate between them since the modernist perspective stresses how extraction is beneficial and can generate and maintain positive relationships to states and local communities, while the modular on the contrary stresses the need to keep extractive activities isolated from corrupted states and disruptive community relations. The projects are in other words positioned between two views holding them in a dilemma between interaction and relation-making, and isolation and boundary-making. As mentioned, each of these views furthermore imply distinct perspectives on their hosts. Both views constructed PNG as somehow lagging behind (morally or economically), but while the modernist perspective is aimed at helping PNG develop, the modular perspective tries to shy away from any responsibility.

A third perspective is the anthropologically oriented critiques that have highlighted the extractive industries embeddedness in the very making of the resource curse and the consequent societal disorder (e.g. Appel 2012a; Behrends et al. 2011; Rogers 2012; Watts 2004; Yessenova 2012).<sup>2</sup> My own analysis follows the critical anthropological track by engaging with the processes and practices that stem from and form the views of such projects. This third perspective has developed through a dialogue with Scott’s (1998) investigation of state ‘schemes to improve the human condition’, where he outlined state governance as a modern way of seeing and generating knowledge about society and citizens. Scott argued that seeing and ordering by homogenization, standardization and simplification had been the *modus operandi* of the modern, developmental state, which he also saw as a driver of global capitalism. In his discussion of Scott’s book, Ferguson counters this latter claim by arguing that oil projects leapfrog between secured enclaves and do not interact with society. Instead of an entity making claims to a holistic, nationwide impact through a grid-like standardization, the oil industry and its capital pops in, sucks out resources, and leap-frogs to the next spot in a point-to-point movement that skips the territorial space in between (see also Auty 1993). The mode of seeing stressed by Ferguson is enabled by enclaved infrastructures secluded through private security measures and an abdication of responsibility. What Ferguson refers to as

the social thickness (wages, social services and insurance for the workforce) of the African mining industry of a previous high modernist period has in the contemporary oil industry been replaced by ‘thin’ social relations and a detachment from liabilities (Ferguson 2005: 379, see also Yessenova 2012).

Ferguson’s short piece does not really engage with the question of how the enclaving is enacted in practice, though. Hannah Appel’s work from Equatorial Guinea (2012a; 2012b) takes up this mantle by exploring the offshore as an ideal for what she refers to as the modularity of the enclaves: “the use of mobile, compliant, and self-contained infrastructures, labor setups, forms of expertise, and legal guidelines to enable offshore work in Equatorial Guinea to function ‘just like’ offshore work in Ghana, Brazil, or the North Sea.” (Appel 2012a: 693). The offshore is the site, where the ideal of separation from local entanglements can at least in theory be perfected, but the modularity is also often carried onshore, where it is enforced by discipline and infrastructure (Appel 2012a).

Such research focused on the practical constitution of a project, and on the practical interaction at the boundaries of an enclave, reveals the many different interests and stakeholders involved in extraction, and how seeing is multi-faceted. The external boundaries—especially onshore—can be fuzzy and depend on constant work to keep out unwanted liabilities and influences, but extractive projects can also be quite differentiated and enacted in multiple forms internally. They are usually complicated assemblages of human and non-human resources brought together for limited periods of time through temporary rotations and time-limited contracts. The fluidity of the work force in particular calls for procedures that generate stability and continuity. If extraction projects are assembled from multiple entities and techniques, it follows that labor is needed to ensure that they appear as having coherent aims, intents, cultures, norms, boundaries and thus ways of seeing (cf. Ballard and Banks 2003). Yet even such labor of enclaving meant to ensure stability can itself be practiced in many different ways. A project can be enacted for instance as employer, patron, or partner—each potentially corresponding to a different way of seeing its outside depending on the professions, locations, and circumstances involved (see Welker 2014).

Whether a project sees in one or many ways is not a productive question in itself. More important is what the views do, and how they are related to different sociotechnical arrangements and interactions (Welker 2014). I will return to examples of contradictory, unstable and conflicting aspects of different views below as I elaborate on the internal mechanisms of the Project and how its seeing was comprised of conflicting views fostered by or in response to HSS-concerns. HSS not

only maintained boundaries to the disorderly outside, a process aimed at ensuring profits and avoiding liabilities. It also helped create a degree of internal cohesion and communicated to stakeholders and (especially) international lenders that concerns over the Project's contribution to the resource curse were being met. HSS as a view thus had a performative effect (Appel 2012b).

In what follows, I turn to examples derived from my own experience of working for the Project as a stakeholder engagement consultant during 2010 and 2011 while its main infrastructure was constructed. This inside position gave me access to the views, how they were created, and what consequences they had for interaction and operations in PNG. The examples will be presented as differently situated viewpoints based upon sites and circumstances where the Project was located. First I account for the two views (modernist and modular) and the main viewpoints I encountered upon my arrival as an expatriate employee cocooned by the Project's HSS-measures in PNG's capital Port Moresby. From there I move to the remote extraction site and a focus on the challenges or spaces of contention emerging from the negotiation of boundaries between inside and outside, including the challenge for local employees of harboring crisscrossing and often conflicting loyalties.

### **The hotel as viewpoint: separation**

The Project had commenced in 2009 and with an approximate investment of 19 billion USD during construction, it was one of the largest foreign investments in the history of PNG. Because of its size, ExxonMobil and the other equity holders of the Project had to rely on loans from international lenders, which forced it to adhere to the Equator Principles<sup>3</sup> and to demands from the International Finance Corporation that stressed the need to address social and environmental issues. Under these circumstances, the Project subscribed to CSR-based policies of best practices consisting of strict managerial and bureaucratic rules and standards for how to assess and mitigate social and environmental risks. In response to the demands, community relations and stakeholder engagement teams were formed with a mandate to ensure that landowners<sup>4</sup> and other stakeholders (such as local level governments, NGOs, and businesses) had indeed been consulted about the Project. Overall, the requirements formed as mentioned a basis for ways the Project saw PNG—firstly as a country that entailed risk and needed to be kept out, and secondly as one that the Project was obliged to help develop.

This section addresses the modular view of PNG as dangerous, and how the adherence to assessments, engagement, reviews and other requirements was related to the classification of PNG as a ‘high-risk’ country generally associated with disorder, corruption, and weak state institutions (e.g., Dinnen 2001). Port Moresby where the main Project headquarter was located suffered from an especially bad reputation, and the security risks of the city were popular conversation topics in the gated communities of expats (e.g. Voigt-Graf 2014). The Travel Risk Assessment form that I signed referred among other things to criminal gangs being behind “a persistently high number of indiscriminate violent break-ins, hold-ups, muggings and rapes” and that “tribal rivalries motivate violent crime in the countryside”. Apart from these problems, frequently mentioned issues included corruption (in the guise of *wantok* relations<sup>5</sup>), diseases ranging from malaria to HIV, and the natural habitat itself, with crocodiles, snakes, and much more.

This view was communicated to Project employees in several ways through repeated inductions and meetings, symbols, training, tests as well as a variety of procedures and rules meant to facilitate the internalization of HSS as a way the individual employee should think and act. For example, we went through inductions prior to travel to PNG and upon every arrival at a new Project location. At Project camps there were daily meetings and briefings in order to introduce the different groups in a camp to each other and to share problems, ideas, and knowledge of the environment in which their work was taking place. In Port Moresby, some of us attended a course in first aid and a course about how to act outside the Project boundary—referred to as ‘uncontrolled environment’. The course included theoretical and practical work with risk assessment exercises, safety reviews, and emergency response plans, which tried to identify all possible threats but also regarded any type of encounter and work task *as* a potential risk. Naturally, the work practices at the construction or drilling sites could benefit from such scrutiny and measures were aimed specifically at professions such as engineers, welders and rig operators rather than social scientists, but there were also guidelines for how to hold the handrail when ascending or descending ladders in office buildings.

Apart from deliberate training, all Project premises, from Port Moresby offices to the camps, displayed HSS-messages repeated through slogans (‘nobody gets hurt,’ ‘look after your buddy,’ ‘safety is everyone’s business’) and logos on posters, signboards, and Project merchandise (mugs, rubber bracelets, key rings). We were required to wear Project-approved ‘PPE’ (personal protective equipment such as long-sleeved permethrin-treated clothing to ward off insects) when going outdoors. When doing so, we were not allowed to move around by any means other than the cars of



one of the security companies; we were not permitted to go for a walk or get on a bus. Even police cars and hotel minibuses were considered too unsafe and insecure. Clubs and restaurants in the city were subject to recurrent security checks, and the most unsafe parts of the city were classified as no-go zones, where the security companies were not allowed to bring us. In order to facilitate our travel, all Project staff was assigned a call sign and a mobile phone each so we could ring the security dispatch, which would send us a vehicle 24-7. The most extreme example of restrictions on movement was that we were not allowed to walk the approximately 100 meters between the Project headquarter in Port Moresby and our hotel (The Crowne Plaza, jokingly renamed ‘The Crowne Prison’ due to our circumstances of confinement). Security thus kept employees in as much as it kept PNG out. The health and hygiene-measures also created isolation from the outside by listing the restaurants that we were permitted to visit. In terms of hygiene, rules included how to avoid germs by using the arm and not the hand when closing the tap after washing hands, and one colleague told me he had been instructed to avoid shaking hands with locals and to use the hand sanitizer issued by the Project if handshaking could not be avoided.

All these HSS-precautions can be summarized as an extremely detailed discipline accentuating *everything that PNG was not*—hygienic, safe and secure. The overall austerity of HSS-discipline was unique compared to other projects operating in PNG, and especially newcomers thought it to be absurd. Yet as a mutable form, the Project needed HSS to create a shared understanding through discipline and socialization across the diversity and frequent rotations of employees, contractors and subcontractors (cf. Minnegal and Dwyer 2017: 208). While only few employees championed the slogans and standards, the repetitions of procedures may still have given large parts of the workforce a point of reference and a sense of a shared purpose, with PNG as the entity against which Project success and order was implicitly assessed. The abundance of communication about dangers and risks relied on the objectification of PNG as strange and savage, and it simultaneously presented what should be done to avoid its perils. HSS then served to both enact and justify the Project’s isolation and enclaving. Seeing PNG (as well as the work tasks of the industry) as entailing high-risk made the corresponding set of HSS-measures a legitimate response, although it is possible to see the concern with HSS as co-creator of PNG as risky and disorderly rather than a mere reaction (Appel 2012a).

This boundary-making between Project premises and the non-Project outside had several consequences for our ability to work (how do you conduct stakeholder engagement when you are

confined to your office and your hotel?). The ideal of modularity in other words seemed to be a self-obstructing mechanism for making relations to and learning about PNG. Even more problematic was the boundary for Papua New Guinean employees, who lived in Port Moresby where affordable housing is almost impossible to find, even for middle-class professionals with fair salaries by local standards. Many local employees thus had to live in the no-go zones, because it was cheaper. However, getting to work then posed a challenge for them (cf. Appel 2012a). While all employees were picked up in the morning by Project vehicles driven by personnel from a security company, those living in a no-go zone would first have to walk or travel by public transport to get to a permissible pick-up point, despite the restrictions on movement that we otherwise faced. They thus had to hop in and out of the zone, where Project rules and responsibility would be in effect, which complicated the question of who could be held accountable when something happened. To them, HSS provided a particular contrast to an outside with different prohibitions, different risks, and no Project-sanctioned rules or measures offering any protection. Local employees were also in other ways subject to liminality. As employees they were insiders (although ones with much lower salaries and thus recognition as insiders), but still they needed to negotiate the boundaries going in and out.

The HSS-measures displayed a view of PNG as dangerous and disorderly, which demanded strict boundaries between inside and outside. For the Port Moresby-based expatriate employee, these boundaries were well policed with point-to-point travel and a minimum of contact with outside elements. Around us, the enclave was relentlessly reproduced and defended, while the HSS-measures internally comprised a set of shared practices offering knowledge and rules that allegedly avoided the danger. Yet the car-jacking incident demonstrated how porous these boundaries could be, and how the boundaries and their enforcement themselves caused contention. Maintaining the modular fiction of Project versus non-Project and keeping the risks at bay was difficult even in the city-scape, where the security infrastructure was well developed, and where there was little need to interact directly with local stakeholders.

### **The office as viewpoint: planning**

While HSS-measures produced enclaving and relied on the image of PNG as dangerous, the Project seemed to diverge from modular descriptions of extractive operations, when it came to planning.

Planning is often seen as a technology or technique of governance using rational-bureaucratic activities to arrange and distribute people and resources to enable positive intervention. As an activity, planning—at least in its origin—is then closely associated with the modernism discussed by Scott (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013). Planning was here also infused with discourses of CSR and implied a view of PNG’s population as different yet characterized by an underlying sameness that allowed them to be trained and included into the modern world of the Project. Despite the boundaries, management plans and several employees—local, national and international—thus held the expectation that the Project and its HSS-measures would play an important social role and benefit PNG with positive change (cf. Golub and Rhee 2013).

By presenting expectations to development and change, the Project indicated a commitment to social thickness and local engagement. Various Project plans authored within the confines of office headquarters mentioned the positive impacts to be achieved in communities neighboring the Project. These plans were a response to PNG’s legislation on oil and gas extraction and to the aforementioned Equator Principles and International Finance Corporation demands. An important background to this is how the PNG legislation and PNG’s politicians accept and protect the authority and claims of customary rights to land. Customary landowners often prove vigilant and demanding in the face of resource or development projects. They are used to constantly renegotiate deals and expect to be embedded in project activities (Filer 1997; Weiner and Glaskin 2007). To appease legislation and landowners in particular, the Project had then agreed to source as many contractors and employees as possible from the PIAs. If the skills needed by the Project and the contractors were not found locally, it could source workers from other parts of PNG or internationally as the last resort. To facilitate this, the Project promised to fund training facilities for industry-relevant skills near the main extraction site as well as in Port Moresby. Here locals could be trained to leave their ‘undeveloped’ existence behind and become co-workers.

Project management and planners also had visions for how to include locals and PNG nationals in the Project in other ways and for how to interact with local communities at the extraction site. One aspect of this was the plan to support and give contracts to local landowner corporations and businesses (see Jackson 2015), but it also concerned the trickle down of HSS-socialization. The management plan for community HSS exemplified the interrelationship between the Project and locals that was imagined prior to the construction phase. It stated among other things that Project employees who were sourced locally or from other parts of PNG could be peer educators in their

home communities and households and thus promote behaviors and practices positively affecting local safety and health. Project planners did not harbor the illusion of hermetic ‘internal project’ versus ‘external community’ categories, since the workforce was part of social relations extending beyond the Project perimeter. It was hoped, though, that such relations could be an advantage rather than a liability (Esso Highlands Limited 2013).<sup>6</sup> HSS was in this perspective both a set of rules and directives that separated the enclave from its outside, *and* the means by which even the local outsider could develop and become ordered through education. People on the outside were in this view imagined not as dangerous but as characterized by an underlying sameness in their potential and desire to become ‘modern’.

The ambition of developing PNG did not, however, imply an intention of taking over state responsibilities as educator and provider of services. It was rather evidence of the difficulty of disentangling the two views from each other in practice. Social engagement may be an alibi for extraction (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013: 8), or it can be a public relations performance of a project’s success in partnering with local communities and complying with CSR-expectations (Gardner 2016: 136). According to Muñoz and Burnham (2016), CSR may in practice thus promote enclaving even further. For example, notions of best practices can maintain enclaving through their control of the long and sometimes obscure supply chains that are found in the extractive industries. And while support for local businesses can be a stated ideal, CSR-systems control such business partnerships and disentangles the local from the equation through the enforcement of standards that are difficult to live up to. Partnering—for example by demanding that locals ‘help themselves’ or ‘participate’—still requires partners to comply with best practices, which thus enables projects to disengage at any time from those relationships that prove difficult (Gardner 2016). The employment situation mentioned in the previous section is an example of how difficult this partnering and inclusion can be in practice when it has to be integrated with the practical exclusion perpetuated by HSS-measures: locals were included especially at the lower ranks of the Project, but the circumstances of boundary-traversing in particular meant that they were caught in a liminal space between inside and outside. CSR-based plans and initiatives may thus be a strategic resource allowing the extractive industries to abdicate responsibility and be detached from the sociality they claim to create.

Planning with CSR, social thickness and similar demands from international financial organizations may then not challenge enclaving at all, and can be analyzed as reinforcing modularity rather than as a

genuine commitment to engagement. Yet, the Project's social initiatives were nonetheless planned and enacted with categories organized through modernist, bureaucratic means of classification. It was not only the local Papua New Guinean, who was a potential modern. It was also the Project's practices of seeing, which exhibited modernism, when enclaving and HSS relied on standards stemming from developments in science, engineering and management disciplines in particular. The determination of Petroleum Development License Areas identified via GPS coordinates is an example of a scientifically based grid view rather than an enclaving view, when the coordinates determined who were included and thus eligible for royalties, compensation and benefits (Allen in Koim and Howes 2017). Contrary to what Ferguson seems to argue, preparing the ground for the flexible movement of capital may thus itself rely on standardization, homogenization and grid-making in order to determine both engagement and detachment (e.g. who will receive benefits and who will not?).

Apart from the GPS grids, several of the modernist techniques (e.g. standards for HSS) may not have been directly felt as an effect outside the enclave. Yet precisely such ways of seeing guided many practices on the inside. HSS was highly bureaucratized for example through the use of ExxonMobil's Operations Integrity Management System, which is the corporation's 'sacrosanct text' for responsible business conduct put into place in the wake of the Exxon Valdez (cf. Appel 2012a; Muñoz and Burnham 2016: 153). Examples of this bureaucratization of accountability includes the need for gaining permissions for every work task, accounting for every possible threat to safety or security beforehand, and reporting standardized counts of 'near misses' or 'lost time incidents'. The management plans and the digital platforms used to organize social engagements (stakeholder engagement in particular) also employed accounting formats to categorize, count and monitor impacted locals and their 'issues' as boxes to be ticked. These practices conceptually laid out both the order (or disorder), which was to be addressed, as well as the optimistic promises that the Project provided (cf. Abram and Weszkalnys 2013). The social engagement thus constructed simplified legible entities as Scott has stipulated (cf. Jorgensen 2007). This work of fortifying entities such as 'landowners' and 'clans' led by 'chiefs' relied upon assumptions that organized the local social world into manageable Excel sheets depicting persons as possessive individuals rather than as composite of relations (cf. Strathern 1988), and on groups as mutually competing but static assemblages of those individuals rather than as shifting and dynamic entities (cf. Gilberthorpe 2013). Consequently, expatriate managers were surprised when local landowners would dispute and try to renegotiate agreements (which could be considered quite normal in PNG, cf. Filer 1997).

They considered such disputes to be a form of disorder, since the Project's attempts at understanding why local employees or landowners acted as they did (e.g. in terms of explaining claims to land, work stoppages, requests for goods, absenteeism etc.) was obscured by references to chiefs or clan membership imagined as stable entities.<sup>7</sup>

The practices of categorization and management integral to the Project's way of seeing thus relied more on techniques associated with modernism than Ferguson's and Appel's focus on modularity and flexible capital seems to suggest. The social engagement could itself be conceived of as another technique for enclaving, but the Project did not hesitate to emphasize the grandness of its transformative and modernist potential either. It is tempting to compare the enclave to what Scott calls miniaturization—the making of a more easily controlled micro-order in a model community, when grand schemes are thwarted (1998: 4). At the very least, one should be cautious in seeing the two views (modularity and modernism) as mutually exclusive in extractive capitalist projects. They may co-exist and both be enacted under different circumstances, sometimes even through the same practices of ordering such as HSS (see Welker 2014).

### **The camp as viewpoint: permeability**

Due to their remote locations, the sites of extraction should in theory be where the enclaving discussed by Ferguson and Appel was the most visible. The site I visited as part of my employment did indeed resemble an enclave, when approaching in a helicopter and seeing it from above. It consisted of a network of dispersed camps and construction sites located in what is today the Hela Province of the PNG Highlands. Travel to the enclave was via air straight to the Project camps surrounded by fences and with access controlled by security guards. The orderly Project sites constructed from metal, gravel and concrete were surrounded by mountainous bush and garden-land with scattered homesteads built from bush materials. The landscape provided a stark contrast to the Project sites, befitting narratives of civilization's frontier. Once I was there, I noticed all the familiar signs, practices and procedures that were in place to enforce the enclaving—including modernist ways of counting and accounting for HSS-measures. However, these locations also turned out to be where boundaries were the most permeable. Despite the contrasts between camp and surroundings, the so-called enclave was in practice a mix of circumstances and techniques indicating the different and sometimes contrasting views. At least part of the reason for this was the

need for practical interaction with the outside. For example, the building of various infrastructures from telecommunication towers and roads to quarries and waste dumps required the Project to make agreements with several local landowners (for which we were allowed to go outside!). The need for movement between the dispersed sites comprising the Project enclave also created interfaces with multiple local social realities and made enclaving hard to maintain. In addition, contrary to the desire for HSS-based isolation, many employees had relations across the boundaries in ways that could not be delimited nor purified by HSS-measures. Consequently, there were several forms of entanglement that had to be negotiated.

In this section I do not dwell as such on the HSS-requirements that saw PNG as risky and disorderly, or the planning that tried to see PNG as potentially modern. I focus instead on some of the spaces of contention between engagement and separation that became clear at the camp and the sites of extraction. This touches especially upon the locals who occupied liminal positions between Project inside and Project outside, but also the dilemmas emerging from attempts to simultaneously engage and disengage, include and exclude PNG. The zone-crossing employees in Port Moresby was but one instance of a phenomenon seen much more clearly at the extraction sites.

At these sites, low- or unskilled positions such as drivers, cleaners, kitchen staff, guards or manual construction workers were usually filled by affected landowners, but the Project also benefitted from having people, who were local or at least could speak the local language (Huli) in positions with responsibility for community relations. There was also an essential office bestowed upon local representatives, namely the ‘village liaison officer’ (VLO), whose main task was to organize meetings between Project officers and local settlements and assist community affairs.

The employment of people from neighboring settlements both gave the Project the feeling of an intimate relationship to the local communities, knowledge about local affairs, and generally a more relaxed interaction across the boundaries. It was also thought to give a security buffer, albeit it is unclear how well it worked. In sum, with VLOs and other local contacts as middlemen, the danger of the outside was not felt to be as comprehensive as one would think from the pervasive discourse of security.

Despite these apparent advantages, local employees also provided significant dilemmas for the HSS-enforced boundaries at the extraction sites. Firstly, among the local employees were people, who seemed to pursue multiple agendas as landowners or even as local government representatives

while also receiving Project salaries. Their loyalties towards the Project frequently appeared to be jeopardized by their social and kin-based relationships (cf. Imbun 2000). For example, community relations officers who were local landowners could be evaluating compensation claims staged by their kin or, conversely, their rivals.

Secondly, while project managers did their best to employ the most qualified people, many landowners considered themselves entitled to work for the Project as a result of the agreement to employ locals. In some cases, refusing work to young local men (usually due to their lack of qualifications or understanding of HSS-demands) led to minor vandalism and occasionally blockades. Having locals inside as employees could correspondingly challenge security by enabling the smuggling of materials across the fence (e.g. food was given to locals outside, sometimes in return for sexual favors, drugs, or alcohol—all forbidden according to the Project's closed camp policy). There were also accounts of minor theft of tools or work clothes, possibly as a result of Project staff failing to engage in exchanges with locals and thus 'seeing' them as they would like to be seen (cf. Strathern 1988; Minnegal and Dwyer 2017).

Thirdly, as insiders with local ties could not easily be detached from the exchange relations they had with other locals, nor could they be detached from conflicts. I personally witnessed a situation, where one of our drivers was provoked by a young man with whom he had previously been involved in a dispute. What looked like an attack on a Project vehicle was more likely the continuation of another conflict now carried into a larger scene involving the Project. The new relations did not replace existing ones—they were instead enacted in a different form, where personal animosities or competition could be conflated with access to employment or other Project benefits. By this I do not intend to imply that the Project managers regarded its employees as pure individuals detached from any local context, when they donned their work gear and clocked in for work hours, but the complex interrelationships and loyalties of locally sourced labor did not always seem clear from the different Project viewpoints, which as mentioned addressed the local situation as one of 'communities' (in the management plans) led by 'chiefs' (in the expectations to whom one would have to settle disputes with).

On a final note, the two different views also proved to exhibit conflicting temporalities of Project presence. Project management saw it as important to communicate that the Project would be present in the area for 30+ years. The modernist view predicated on partnership was thus one that temporally extended further than foreseeing and avoiding the next hazard or conflict. However, the



long-term concerns were likely not shared by the many companies with fly-in fly-out expatriates subcontracted to oversee specific temporary parts of the construction. The HSS-backed circumstances of quick and temporary engagements, where there was little attention paid to exchanges with the local individuals or groups, provided the structure for the modular view that focused on avoiding danger now rather than one promoting HSS in the long-term (see Minnegal and Dwyer 2017: 239). At least the hoped-for trickle down of HSS-practices to locals did not seem to happen. Arguably, the Project presence generated more HSS-concerns than it solved for example due to the heavy influx of people and machinery into rural areas unaccustomed to such traffic.

HSS-boundaries that could keep out PNG's 'disorder' were impossible to erect and maintain in reality, and it was difficult to believe in the narratives of a Project separated from the outside, when witnessing the circumstances mentioned above. The modernist ideal of including PNG and aiding its development through planned and helpful interaction was equally a far cry from the actual influences across the boundaries. The Project tried both. Excluding and including PNG at the same time.

## **Conclusion**

Paying attention to how organizations 'see' infers an analysis of how they order and categorize the world, and how they act through those categories. One critical contribution of this article is to argue that seeing must be understood in relation to both the seeing subject and the object it sees, a point which is somewhat lacking in the otherwise inspiring works of Scott and Ferguson, where seeing implies a rather essentializing and totalizing vision. I have argued that the view(s) and the concomitant ordering actions of an organization may shape both its internal social dynamics as well as how it tries to engage—or disengage—its surroundings. Another contribution, following Welker among others, is the argument that given how extractive projects are organized as fluid and often temporary assemblages of multiple actors with different and even conflicting agendas, it may be misleading to assume that they see in just one way, or appear as coherent agents. Different views can co-exist and be difficult to keep separate in practice even if they in some ways are opposites. Acknowledging the multiplicities and contrasts of views can thus rather help us understand some of the social intricacies of the corporate organization of extraction.

On a larger frame, this analysis suggests that the theme of corporate organization of extraction can be interwoven with a theme of alterity; it focuses not only on how the corporation sees and enacts itself in different ways, but also on what it tries *not* to be (or see) when it finds itself in a foreign environment like ExxonMobil did in PNG. The Project's response to alterity was to attempt to construct an enclave through strict health, safety and security measures, which in turn generated numerous complications and frustrations especially across the Project boundaries that were vaguer than the HSS-discourses wanted you to believe. An analysis that pays attention to such practices and discourses as ways of seeing can elucidate how it can be that a Project like the one analyzed here turned out far from the extractive capitalist dream of being the secluded enclave it hoped to be, and equally far from being regarded as the benevolent and socially responsible agent it claimed to be.

## **Acknowledgements**

The interpretations presented in this article are solely mine and do not represent those of the Project or the company through which I was hired. Nonetheless, my gratitude goes to colleagues there, and I hope my thoughts strike a chord with their experiences. I am also grateful for the insightful comments given by Andrea Behrends, Veronica Davidov, Martin Holbraad, Stuart Kirsch, Douglas Rogers, Timothy Sharp, James Weiner, Saulesh Yessenova, and three anonymous reviewers.

## **Notes**

1. It should be noted that this article is not about 'seeing in Melanesia' but how an international corporation *sees Melanesia*. Thus, I do not engage the Melanesianist literature, which sees such corporations from the outside. Instead, I shift the ethnographic gaze to the views and practices of extractive industries. These are equally in need of analysis if one is to understand the interaction between them and their surroundings.

2. One could add that where the mainstream perspectives assume 'society' (and the state) to exist *as* local perspectives on social relations, this could be questioned especially in a PNG context (Strathern 1988).

3. The Equator Principles ([www.equator-principles.com](http://www.equator-principles.com)) is a framework for financial institutions to determine and handle social and environmental issues in the financing of projects. They require borrowers to live up to relevant laws and standards, set up assessments, action plans and grievance mechanisms, engage in consultation and dialogue with relevant stakeholders, and accept independent audits and monitoring.

4. It is beyond the scope of this article to explain in detail the complex dynamics of landownership in PNG, as it depends on localized relationships of both kinship and exchange. Landownership affects deals about local participation and the sharing of benefits, and a project's access to land is never easily settled (Weiner 2005). One cannot assume that there are stable 'groups' or 'clans' that one can make deals with (Jorgensen 2007; Weiner 2005), and negotiations are often a fluid affair with competing actors expressing strong attachments to the land in question.

5. *Wantok* ('one talk' in the lingua franca Tok Pisin) refers to the PNG way of expressing the social obligations that Westerners classify as the double bind of social security and corruption/nepotism.

6. The plan currently accessible online is a revised version of the 2009 plan that I saw when I was employed, but the passages I refer to remain. By alluding to these plans I do not want to imply that every employee was aware of the overall planning and strategies, or that these were prioritized in actual communication with local stakeholders.

7. Anthropologists knowing their classics would remember that the PNG Highlands are historically known for big men and other 'manly' leadership types, but not chiefs (Sahlins 1963). Employees with long-term PNG experience challenged this simplified idea of order/disorder by conveying understandings of the processes by which leadership and kinship were established locally, but to little avail from what I could gather.

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