THE ORTHOGRAPHY OF IDENTITY
Losing land and claiming place in Papua New Guinea's National Capital District

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ABSTRACT. It has become a convention in Melanesia that there is a vital relationship between group identity and land. Understandably then, as Papua New Guinea's National Capital District has continually spread across the traditional territory of the Motu and Koita people, many people in the two groups fear their identity is threatened by their loss of land. Applying a historical perspective to their experience and contemporary apprehensions, this article critiques the discursive connection between land and identity, arguing that identity is connected not to 'land' but to places, and that toponymy is integral to the temporality of identity. In this regard**,** the contemporary orthography of urban Koita toponymy provides evidence of the resilience of identity – related to places – in the course of long-term socio-political change.

INTRODUCTION

There has long been a conventional understanding in anthropological literature that Melanesian societies are inextricably connected to the land, which is considered integral to their identity. The generality is handily summarized by Curry, Koczberski and Connell:

> Land holds a prominent position in providing sustenance, cultural and spiritual beliefs, in social and ritual activities, social organisation and in creating an individual and group's sense of social identity and belonging […]. To be landless is an unimaginable and inconceivable misfortune (2012:115–116).

The special relationship to land has become a popular rhetoric among Melanesians themselves, to the point where, as Chris Ballard has written of Papua New Guinea (PNG), 'Like the presence of taro or sweet potato in a Highlands meal, no public statement by a Papua New Guinea leader on the issue of identity is complete without reference to land' (2013:49–50). Ballard also importantly points out that 'land' is a shorthand for 'ties to locality, whether terrestrial or marine' (2013:48), and that Melanesian tropes of a special relationship to land may have become 'an almost dangerously common act of elision' (2013:48). Where Ballard sees 'land' as a discursive shorthand in Melanesia, Tim Ingold describes land more generally as 'a kind of lowest common denominator of the phenomenal world […] in terms of which any portion may be rendered quantitatively equivalent to any other' (Ingold 2000:190). He distinguishes between 'land', which is quantitative and homogeneous, and 'landscape', which is qualitative and heterogeneous (2000:190). From this perspective landscape, not land, is the temporal environment of

human activity, and further, landscape is composed of p l a c e s , each of which 'embodies the whole at a particular nexus within it' (2000:192).

In this article I critique the discursive Melanesian connection between land and identity, mindful of the distinctions made by Ballard and Ingold that imply that identity is connected to places, rather than to 'land'. In Melanesia, ties to places have traditionally been demonstrated in productive activities such as gardening, hunting, fishing, building houses, and so on. By these means a temporally enduring relationship is created between social groups, as units of production and exchange, and the places where their productive activity has been regularly conducted. Before the anthropological application of the culture concept, group identities were grounded in this relationship. As Weiner and Glaskin observe:

> [T]he perception of what we call cultural difference was a feature of […] life, however the conclusions that were drawn from the perception of linguistic, ceremonial and productive differences did not concern 'culture' as such, but things like myth and place as sources of human distinctness (2006:8).

Ties to place are also demonstrated in toponyms, whereby places are named not only according to their immediate natural characteristics, but also mnemonically after the actions of ancestors, or for mythical creatures and events, or for their ritual significance, sometimes poetically, sometimes prosaically.[1] Weiner's comments on place-naming among the Foi of PNG encapsulate the relationship between places and identity:

> The names of places a man has occupied, upon which he has built houses, made gardens, caught fish, and so forth – these place names act as an effective mnemonic for his productive and social history […] They encapsulate not only the specific events for which the name was first given, but the lives of the succession of men who have left their mark there (Weiner 2001:19).

I bring these themes – the distinction between land and place, toponymy, and the temporal relationship between identity and places – to a discussion of the effects of the growth and spread during the past century and a quarter of Port Moresby, PNG's capital city, across the traditional territory of two ethno-linguistic groups, the Koita and Motu. Since the 1970s, when Port Moresby was designated the National Capital District (NCD), the two groups have identified themselves jointly as the 'Motu-Koita'. Among those whose traditional villages and adjacent land have in recent decades become engulfed by the NCD, the experience of an increasing loss of land (as per Ingold's distinction) to the city and its overwhelmingly migrant population has generated a sense of socio-political marginalization. They have responded with 'cultural' preservation projects

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[1]   See, for example, Hirsch (2006), Leenhardt (1998:116–121), Malinowski (1961:298), Van Heekeren (2012:65–84; 2014), Weiner (2001:15–30).

and political advocacy to maintain their joint identity.[2] However land alienation has continued to an extent that the chairman of their representative political organization, the Motu-Koita Assembly, has expressed fears for the loss of their culture, declaring in a newspaper interview: 'If we lose our land, we lose our culture – and our way of life will certainly follow' (Gerega 2019).

Yet while the Motu-Koita have lost a great deal of land (that is, 'land' according to Ingold's distinctions), their relationship to p l a c e s endures, as I will show below. Arguably, then, their identity is not facing the existential crisis that their leaders fear. My argument is grounded in the relationship between identity and place expressed through toponymy. In particular, a recent development in the Koita orthography of place names indicates the resilience of their identity. The orthographic turn is notable particularly because, unlike urban-dwelling Motu, urban-dwelling Koita no longer speak their own language.

Prehistory

The Motu are one of a number of groups descended from an original migration of speakers of Austronesian languages who arrived on the south-east coast of New Guinea more than two thousand years ago and began to disperse along the coastline.[3] These dispersing peoples developed into territorial ethno-linguistic groups, whom European missionaries and explorers first encountered in the 1870s (Chalmers 1887, Moresby 1876). Oral tradition, linguistic research and archaeological evidence suggest that the marine-oriented people now called the Motu established themselves in a scattering of settlements along 120 kilometres of the coast several centuries ago (Dutton 1969, Oram 1981, Richards *et al.* 2017). The city of Port Moresby has since developed at roughly the centre of that coastal territory. Europeans ascribed 'tribal' status to the Motu and subdivided them into the 'Western Motu' and 'Eastern Motu' (geographically divided by an inlet slightly east of the nascent town of Port Moresby), marked by some mutual hostility and differences of dialect (Oram 1981:211, Dutton 2017:41).

The origins of the Koita are very different from those of the Motu. They spoke a Papuan or 'non-Austronesian' language related to that of further inland whom Europeans in the late nineteenth century collectively called the Koiari.[4] The Koita had separated from the Koiari in the distant past and gradually moved towards the coast, hunting and gardening from shifting hamlets (Dutton 1969:23–31, Oram 1981). Myths

[2]   See, for example, Goddard (2010, 2011).
[3]   The prehistory of the human occupation of the south coast of PNG has been a matter of debate among archaeologists since the 1970s and is still subject to revision due to new excavations and progressive dating techniques. Consequently my description here is cautiously abbreviated. See Richards *et al.* (2017) for an extensive account of recent evidence and findings.
[4]   This was an inadequate generalization, as later research revealed: see Dutton (1969).
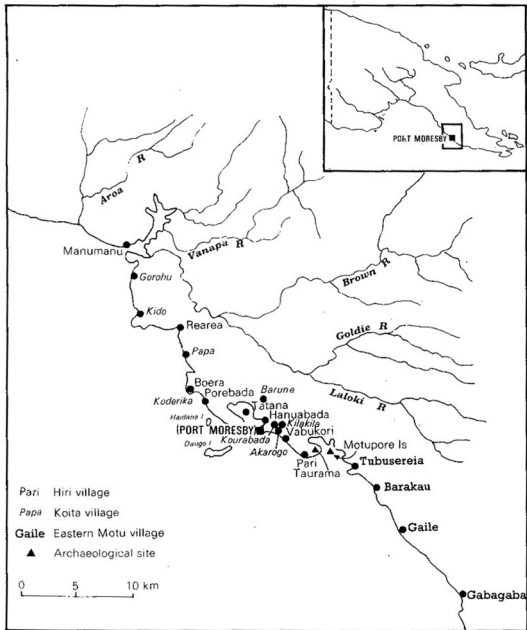
Figure 1: The colonial headquarters at Port Moresby in the late nineteenth century, showing Motu and Koita villages in the surrounding area (Dutton 1982:4)
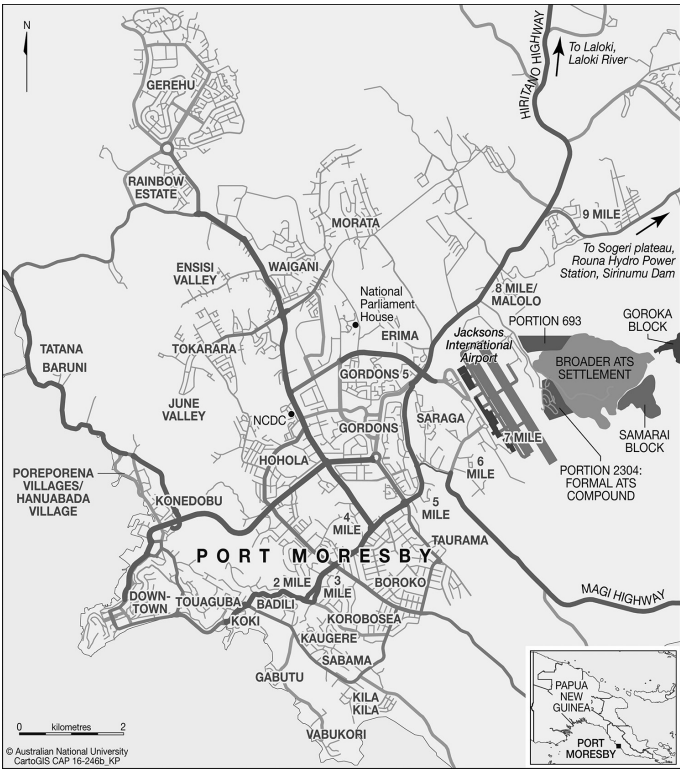

Figure 2: Port Moresby 2013 (CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University)

and oral traditions represent them as having established territorial control of coastal land before the Motu arrived. The Motu subsequently acquired settlement sites by ne-gotiation with the Koita.[5] The Motu, being marine-oriented, built stilt houses arranged in lines stretching seaward from the foreshore and rarely ventured inland beyond the gardens they established nearby. An important corollary of this negotiated settlement pattern is a traditional argument by the Koita that all coastal land in the Port Moresby area is really theirs.[6]

The Motu and Koita intermarried for several centuries before European contact (Groves *et al.* 1957, Swadling 1981), resulting in a number of the coastal villages being composed of the descent groups of both peoples. Villages further inland tended to be composed entirely of Koita descent groups. In early colonial times, despite inter-marriage and genealogical links between the two peoples, descent groups within the coastal villages still distinguished themselves as either Motu or Koita. Nevertheless, the social organization of both peoples had by then become overwhelmingly similar. Descent groups were often named after places, their names being modified with ad-ditional names when they segmented and moved. Thus for example, a Koita descent group called Gorobe segmented over time into four derivatives, Gorobe, Gorobe Badiri, Gorobe Kae and Gorobe Dubu. The Motu word for descent group was 'iduhu' (nowadays translated into English as 'clan'), the Koita term 'toneta'.

LANGUAGE, PHONOLOGY AND ORTHOGRAPHY

The word 'motu' is common in Austronesian languages and can be translated as 'is-land'. Missionary linguists of the early colonial period applied an English grammatical framework to their interpretation of the Motu language, and by today's standards their analysis and orthography was crude, but they noted some interesting ambiguities, par-ticularly in Motu consonants. The Reverend George Pratt observed: 'one peculiarity is in the use of letters so much alike as to be scarcely distinguishable', citing the pairs b/p, d/t, g/k and r/l (1896:ix). These, and other vocal ambiguities contributed to consid-erable orthographic variation in early colonial documents.[7] Subsequent historical and linguistic research has indicated that the variations heard by Europeans may have been related to the variety of communalects among Motu villages. For example, Tom Dutton noted that:

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5   See, for example, Erua (1929), Gadiki (1972), Hicks (1973).
6   See, for example, Chalmers (1887:2), Malinowski (n.d.:77).
7   For instance, a large settlement near the colonial headquarters was variously referred to in print as 'Anuapata', 'Hanuapata', 'Hanuabata', and 'Hanuabada'. See, for example, Bailey (1898:6) British New Guinea (1887:7), Chalmers (1887:1), Stone (1876:267).

> [T]here is no /h/ in the Western Motu villages of Manumanu, Pari and part of Hanua-
> bada and [r] often occurs where [l] is expected and vice versa in Lealea and Boera (to a
> lesser extent), also in the Western section. Formerly /l/ was generally realised as [n] in the
> Western villages of Tatana and Vabukori but is now only so realised in the speech of older
> speakers (1995:770).

During the colonial period the early consonantal variations gradually disappeared, and
by the late twentieth century there was a relatively common pronunciation and a stand-
ard orthography.

The Koita language contained less phonological variation and lacked the ambigui-
ties found in Motu. Noticeably, Koita consonants did not include the alveolar lateral
/l/, but did have the voiced alveolar vibrant /r/ (Dutton 1975:285). Grammars and vo-
cabularies of the Motu language were published and revised from the late nineteenth
century,[8] but the Koita language received less attention. A retrospective reading of a
short Koita word list that appeared in 1890 (MacGregor 1890) reveals a number of Motu
loan words. More recent research (Dutton 1994) has indicated that Koita borrowed
significantly more from Motu than vice versa. Dutton translates the autonym 'koita' as
'person' or 'people' (Dutton 1975:375).

European colonial practice affected the comparative use of the Koita and Motu
languages. A pidgin form of Motu, so-called 'Police Motu', developed that was easily
intelligible to missionaries and colonial officers, who used it as their main vehicle of
communication with groups in the region, including the non-Austronesian Koita (Dut-
ton 1985). The predominance of the Motu language, particularly in the immediate vicin-
ity of Port Moresby, increased after it was adopted as a Church language and a lingua
franca of the Administration. Koita language prevailed in the more distant hinterland
Koita villages, but nearer the administrative headquarters the Koita increasingly used
Motu, adopted Motuan modifications and pronunciations of Koita and even the Motu
name for them, Koitabu. Also, the Koita term 'toneta', referring to what anthropologists
would call a 'descent group', gradually disappeared after European contact, the Koita
adopting the Motu term 'iduhu' in its place (Haynes 1990:69fn2).

For the thematic purpose of this article I will detail here just two examples of
orthographic developments in the early colonial period arising out of European engage-
ment with the phonology of Motu and Koita. The examples concern place names in the
Port Moresby town area, conventionally rendered 'Badili' and 'Kilakila' throughout the
colonial period and after. As Koita does not have an alveolar lateral ('l'), any foreign
listener or reader slightly familiar with Motu would infer that these are both Motu
words. 'Badili' was the name used by the colonial Administration for an area of land
near its headquarters purchased from the Koita in 1885. In a report on the transaction,
a nearby Koita village was also referred to as 'Badili' (British New Guinea 1887:17). As

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8   Lawes (1885), Lister-Turner (1913), Lister-Turner and Clark (1930, 1931)

Port Moresby grew and developed suburbs, 'Badili' became (and still is) the name of a suburb encompassing the purchased land area. However, this was a misrepresentation of the Koita word 'badiri', originally the name of a Koita descent group, not of an area of land. Two decades later the anthropologist Charles Seligman visited the area and attempted an ethnology of the Koita (Seligman 1910). However, such was the integration of the Koita and Motu people by then that his use of indigenous language terms displayed a relative paucity of Koita words and a predominance of Motu (1910:*passim*). He listed the names of Koita 'clans' in the vicinity of Port Moresby, three of which included the word 'badiri', which Seligman nevertheless wrote as 'Badili', following colonial convention (Seligman 1910:4).

The *badiri* group from which the Administration bought land in 1885 lived at the foot of a hill whose name was pronounced and written 'Kilakila' (also written 'Kila Kila') throughout the colonial period. The hill was the site of prehistoric skirmishes and consequent peace talks between the Koita and the Vula'a, an Austronesian-speaking group about a hundred kilometres to the east (Van Heekeren 2012:54–56). In the late nineteenth century there were shifting Koita hamlets at the foot of the hill, but by the Second World War one growing village was being referred to by the Administration as 'Kilakila' (Orrell 1977). Relocations during and after the war resulted in two 'Kilakila' villages, one at the foot of the hill (locally called Kilakila number 1) and another at the top (Kilakila number 2). Towards the end of the colonial period the Koita began selling land to the Administration, resulting in the eventual disappearance of the upper village (Orrell 1977, Haynes 1990:101–102). With the growth of the city the remaining site has become an encompassed 'urban village', and the name 'Kilakila' has become conventionally associated with the village and its immediate locality, rather than the hill above it.

While there is agreement among oral traditions that the hill is Koita land (Haynes 1990:71, Oram 1981:224–226, Orrell 1977), 'kilakila' is not a Koita word. Furthermore, linguists specializing in Motu have provided no etymological support for the assumption that it is a Motu word. In the Vula'a (also known as 'Hula') language, 'kila' means 'talk' and is a common personal name, its reduplicative form, 'kilakila', being an intensifier (meaning 'much talk'). When discussing their history, Vula'a interlocutors relate the term 'kilakila' to traditional encounters with the Koita.[9] Nevertheless, during the colonial period 'kilakila' came to be considered a Motu word, even by the Koita themselves. In 1952 the anthropologist Raymond Firth briefly visited Port Moresby and made some notes on local kinship and social organization. After conversing with Koita villagers at Kilakila, he reported that 'the men I was talking with insisted that the proper Koita name of the community was Badili (heard by me as Badiri), and that "Kilakila" was the Motu name' (Firth 1952:87). The Eastern Motu, whose dialect is traditionally distinguishable from that of the Western Motu (Dutton 2017:41), pronounce and write

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[9]   Deborah Van Heekeren, personal communication

the place name 'Kirakira'.[10] The only extensive lexicon of Koita (Dutton 1975) includes the word 'kira', meaning 'throw', but no reduplicative form is given.

In the 1880s the British Administration bought land near Port Moresby Harbour from the Motu and Koita, as well as acquiring some land they classified as 'waste and vacant' after consulting indigenes about whether the latter intended to use it themselves (British New Guinea 1887:16–18, Oram 1970). The township of Port Moresby grew slowly in the early twentieth century, and government controls on migration from other regions meant the Motu and Koita were relatively secure in their territory. Missionary influences and Administration regulations contributed to the loss of a number of traditional ritual and social practices, including some dances, collective feasts, mortuary behaviour and inter- and intra-ethnic warfare and raiding (Oram 1989, Wolfers 1975:16–61). Traditionally the Motu conducted seasonal trading voyages known as 'hiri' to destinations hundreds of kilometres westward in fleets of multi-hulled craft called 'lagatoi'. They exchanged huge cargoes of Motu-made pottery and other valuables for large quantities of sago (Oram 1982). The *hiri* trade atrophied and was finally discontinued in the mid twentieth century largely because of the growth of a cash economy that affected traditional exchange practices, and the impact of wage labour on the amount of time men had to devote to the lengthy building, organizational and ritual preparations for the voyages (Oram 1989:63–64).

   With the disappearance of elements of their traditional lifeworld and despite the early colonial Administration's conservative approach to their 'advancement' (Oram 1989:59–62), by the late 1930s the Motu, Koita and nearby coastal groups were developing literacy, learning trades and receiving technical education, and they appeared to have adjusted quickly to the London Missionary Society's (LMS) structural integration of Christian institutions into their village sociality and to the developing cash economy (Austin 1978, Oram 1989:56–7, 70–74). Church rituals and opportunities to win prestige through church group leadership compensated for the discouragement or banning of a variety of traditional rituals and prestige-seeking activities by the LMS or the colonial Administration.[11] Also, extensive fundraising competitions among church groups replaced traditional competitive food-gifting rituals among descent groups (Gregory 1980). The presence of an administrative headquarters in the middle of their territory and the educational services provided by the LMS – while hinterland societies remained relatively unchanged by European influences – raised the possibility that the Motu and

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10   Andrew Taylor, personal communication
11   See, for example, Groves (1954), Belshaw (1957:182–189).

Koita could become an educated élite in the slow political and economic development of the Australian colony.

Port Moresby grew rapidly after the Second World War, as permanent infrastructure and buildings began to spread. Administration policies changed, and migration controls were lifted, allowing a fast-increasing influx of migrants from around the country. In the absence of adequate formal housing, some migrants negotiated with Motu and Koita landholding groups to build informal housing on their customary land, paying regular tributary gifts in traditional fashion. Others paid a peppercorn rent for blocks of government land on which they built informal housing (Hitchcock and Oram 1967, Norwood 1984). Despite the impact on their traditional habitats, land transactions seemed to offer monetary benefits for the Koita and Motu as the cash economy, education opportunities and health services grew. For example Koita villagers in the vicinity of Kilakila hill sold areas of land to the Administration for the establishment of a hospital, schools, military barracks and other installations (Orrell 1977:24–25).

By this time capitalism and Christianity had become syncretized with traditional sociality and moral economy, and the traditional world views of the Motu, Koita and nearby coastal groups had by no means been destroyed. Their participation in wage labour or small businesses did not end their participation in a complex communal web of obligations and reciprocity (Goddard 2019:134–135). Congregationalist churchgoers and pastors could praise and pray to the Christian God while fearing and practising malevolent magic (which Europeans called 'sorcery'), as well as ritually engaging and appealing to ancestors to benign or malevolent ends (Pulsford 1974:13–48). Increasing literacy and fluency in English did not end the habitual use of village vernaculars, although Koita inhabitants in villages shared with Motu on the coastline spoke Motu, at the expense of their own language (Dutton 1969:26).

The town continued to grow, and by the 1960s the Motu and Koita villages in its immediate vicinity had become concerned by the transformation of previously open territory into formal and informal housing areas, expanding shopping precincts and service-industrial sites. When a Lands Title Commission was established in 1963, Motu and Koita groups began to make legal claims to land they considered had been illegally taken from them or wrongly sold during the early colonial period. They were impeded by imprecise notions of customary land, ambiguities in the colonial records of early land transactions, and confusing conceptions of inheritance and descent groups, exacerbated by a long period of Motu-Koita intermarriage, particularly in villages close to Port Moresby. Consequently in court their mutual efforts to recover land or be granted compensation payments were frequently undermined by conflicts among themselves over who were the rightful contemporary representatives of late-nineteenth-century Motu or Koita landholding groups (Goddard 2016). This fuelled ongoing but diplomatically

suppressed tensions between the Motu and the Koita over land near the coast,[12] under-
scored by the traditional Koita argument that the Motu had only settled there with their
permission. At the time the Koita, whose population was conservatively estimated at a
little over 8 500, inhabited eighteen villages, eight of which were in fact Motu-Koita vil-
lages (Dutton 1969:82). Dutton estimated that there were about 2 260 Koita who spoke
their own language, but only a handful of these lived in Motu-Koita villages (1969:82).

Despite having allowed migrants to establish settlements on their land in the 1950s
and 1960s and having willingly negotiated land sales to the colonial Administration, by
the mid 1970s the continual growth and density of the city was causing apprehension
among the Motu and Koita. The 'colonial town' had become a 'Melanesian city' (Oram
1976), and the increasing *de facto* loss of their land to what had become a city of migrants
from all parts of the country was developing into a major issue for the two groups. The
Motu and Koita in the vicinity of the capital had by this time long been fluent in English
and had been the dominant groups pursuing small business enterprises in and around
Port Moresby (Andrews 1975:77–113). In the colonial climate of capitalist development,
they had appeared to have clear political and economic advantages over indigenous peo-
ples from other parts of the country. Now that they were experiencing socio-political
marginalization in their own shared territory, their united front on the matter was sig-
nalled by a joint self-referential term: 'Motu-Koita' (also 'Motu-Koitabu').

Marginalization and 'development'

In 1974 Port Moresby became the "National Capital District" of what had latterly been
called the "Territory of Papua and New Guinea", and in 1975 the country became the
independent nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG). During the late 1970s industrial and
shopping areas of Port Moresby spread, and the populations of the city's formal housing
estates increased steadily. Informal housing settlements on government land grew more
crowded, and settlement populations on 'customary' land also grew steadily larger. The
rent-in-kind arrangements previously negotiated between traditional landholders and
settlers (Hitchcock and Oram 1967:25–33, Norwood 1979:79) were no longer adequate
controlling systems. The Motu-Koita sense of being marginalized on their own territory

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[12]   The suppression manifested mainly in a professed amnesia among elders about connections and
emnities between villages beyond two or three past generations, when directly asked by outsiders
if such disputes existed. However, genealogical investigations by researchers commonly elicited
explanatory anecdotes about ancestors' *iduhu* and their movements, which exposed the tensions as
unresolved and embedded in community memory (see, for example, Papua New Guinea Land Court
Secretariat n.d.). I discovered the unresolved nature of such disputes during discussions with elders
about the history of village *iduhu* in my fieldwork village, Pari, in the 1990s, despite initially being
told that old land issues involving relations beyond the village were 'forgotten'. Since that fieldwork,
land issues and claims in the NCD (see section on "Land and 'development'" below) have rendered a
number of 'forgotten' land disputes more public.

was becoming palpable. Politically, in the 1970s many Motu-Koita expressed support for a Papuan separatist movement known as 'Papua Besena',[13] led by Josephine Abaijah, a politician from Milne Bay in the eastern Papuan region. The rhetoric of the movement played on implications that Papuans were being subjugated in the integration of the Territory of Papua with New Guinea. It included a dichotomization between Papuans and New Guineans (i.e., people from the northern half of the nation, particularly 'highlanders' from the interior), the latter being characterized as communicating via so-called 'Pidgin English'.[14] Of the difference between New Guineans and Papuans, Abaijah said, 'Culturally we are different, socially we are different and politically we are different' (Pacific Islands Monthly 1973:4), and she referred to Pidgin English as a 'kanaka' (i.e., 'primitive') language in the view of Papuans, in contrast to the Papuan lingua franca Police Motu, which she described as a 'Melanesian type of language' (1973:4).

Despite Papua Besena developing into a political party during the mid-1970s, its impetus as a broad-based separatist movement had waned by 1982, at which time the Motu-Koita established a representative political organization called the Motu Koitabu Interim Assembly. The Assembly's name and organization underwent revisions over subsequent decades, and eventually, in 2008, it became the Motu Koita Assembly, legitimized by the Motu Koita Assembly Act of 2007. The Act states among its objectives 'to protect and strengthen the identity of the Motu Koita people as the original landowners of the National Capital District' and 'to protect the customary land and natural resources of the Motu Koita people' (Motu Koita Assembly Act 2007:4). However, it is clear from a careful reading of the Act that the Assembly remains subservient to conventional national and provincial political bodies and lacks legislative strength of its own in respect of the main concerns of the Motu-Koita, namely the loss of land (2007:1–2, 14–15).

The Motu-Koita also turned to 'cultural' preservation initiatives in the mid 1970s. Cultural diversity had been a defining catchphrase of the country in the late colonial period, proclaiming more than seven hundred languages and celebrating diverse ethnicities at annual exhibitions featuring 'traditional' costumes, music and dancing. Melanesians, of course, do not share anthropologists' increasingly critical analytical perspective on the culture concept. In popular usage in PNG 'culture' is an unsystematic amalgam of putative traditional social norms, beliefs, language and rituals that collectively signify ethnic identity. The Motu-Koita sought to reassert themselves and restore their prestige by inaugurating a yearly festival called Hiri Moale (roughly, 'hiri festivity'), celebrating the centuries-old *hiri* voyages which had been discontinued in the 1950s. Each year, from the 1970s on, they built replicas of the traditional multi-hulled *lagatoi* and danced

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[13]   McKillop (1982). 'Bese' is a Motu word that can broadly mean 'descendants' or, in an imprecise sense, 'children'; '-na' is a possessive suffix. As used in Police Motu, the lingua franca, 'Papua Besena' can be interpreted as 'Children of Papua', or 'Tribe of Papua'.

[14]   Pacific Islands Monthly (1973:4). 'Pidgin English' was a demeaning term used of the lingua franca Melanesian Pidgin, which is nowadays conventionally called 'Tok Pisin' in Papua New Guinea.

and sang in traditional costumes in public displays of ritual behaviour formerly associated with the departure and return of the fleets (Goddard 2011). The festival became popular and has continued to the present day, supported by commercial sponsorship.

Despite the success of the Hiri Moale as a yearly spectacle, it had no practical effect on the fundamental problem that the Motu-Koita were increasingly perceiving as a threat to their identity: their land loss. Meanwhile, ironically, while they were publicly celebrating their traditional 'culture' through the Hiri Moale, their parochial praxis in matters of landholding and inheritance was changing significantly. Early colonial descriptions indicated that the Motu and Koita were not governed by unilineal descent principles.[15] However, early twentieth-century anthropologists represented them as 'patrilineal' under the restrictive kinship models of the time,[16] and the label was perpetuated by anthropologists of the mid-twentieth century (Belshaw 1957:12–13, Groves 1963). In retrospect, Motu and Koita descent groups could more usefully and less narrowly be conceived in accordance with Eric Wolf's 'modes of production' schema (1982), that is, as 'kin-ordered' units of production, consumption and exchange (1982:88–96) within which fundamental moral imperatives were generated by a need for cooperation. These imperatives included reciprocal obligations among kin – near, distant, affinal, or ancestral – and trading or exchange partners. In respect of land distribution and inheritance, neglect of duties and obligations, or alternatively, behaviour judged to be notably generous, were significantly influential.[17]

At the end of the colonial period, increasing land shortages were affecting this moral economy. By now the Motu-Koita had discursively absorbed the concept of patrilineality from its use by anthropologists and colonial officials. After the Second World War colonial attempts to clarify territorial boundaries, descent group structures and principles of land inheritance among non-unilineal groups had generated a preoccupation with recording genealogies and establishing a quasi-legal model of patrilineal descent and inheritance with which the Motu and Koita acquiesced in court, even though it was not reflected in their parochial negotiations over landholding and inheritance (Goddard 2019:131–135). As early as the 1960s, however, it was observed that, as the land available for traditional house-building and gardening became scarcer and population densities increased, there was a trend to restrict the number of persons who would formerly have held 'minor rights' (Bramell 1964:7) in a piece of land. The trend was exacerbated in the following decades as losses of land became more acute. Subsequently patrilineality became a dogma among the Motu-Koita as juridical-political circumstanc-

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[15]   See, for example, British New Guinea (1894:72–73).
[16]   See, for example, Rivers (1914:90–103), Seligman (1910:16).
[17]   Oram (1963–1969). Anecdotes about the effects of people's good and bad behaviour on inheritance and landholding were frequent when I discussed historical land issues with elderly villagers during my own fieldwork in Pari, a Motu village, in the 1990s.

es forced litigants in land cases to 'prove' their claims of inherited land rights in accordance with rationalized descent criteria.[18]

Post-independence identity-preservation initiatives included a call in the 1990s for greater emphasis on traditional Motu 'knowledge' in the local school curriculum, drawing attention to a lack of familiarity with it among younger generations of Motu-Koita,[19] and some strategic alliances with development-aid organizations. The latter included a UNESCO workshop or conference on 'Motu Koitabu Development' (UNESCO 2001) and, by virtue of their long involvement with Christianity, participation over several years in a 'Church Partnership Program' supporting local projects that were deemed appropriate by the developers (Papua New Guinea Church Partnership Program 2006). 'Motu-Koitabu Village Development Committees' were also introduced, representing the interests of the Motu-Koita to the National Capital District Commission that governed the Moresby area. In material terms these kinds of projects have proved ephemeral and have not achieved much beyond occasional local media publicity. Moreover, a significant aspect of the 'cultural revival', following on from the inauguration of the Hiri Moale festival, has been that the symbols, ritual re-enactments, traditional costumes and other material presentations of such joint Motu-Koita projects are predominantly associated in popular perception with Motu rather than Koita traditional culture. Further, use of Koita language was diminishing. In 1969, when surveys indicated that there were ten extant villages identified as Koita, and eight identified as mixed Motu-Koita, Dutton commented that Koita living in the mixed Motu-Koita-villages had practically forgotten their own language, but that the Koita as a whole were still 'very keen to preserve their identity, especially as expressed through language' (Dutton 1969:26). However, fewer and fewer Koita nowadays speak their own language. When I began fieldwork in the Motu-Koita village of Pari in the early 1990s three of its 17 descent groups were Koita, but nobody in the village could speak the Koita language.

LAND AND 'DEVELOPMENT'

The overall success and benefits of several decades of 'development' and development aid in PNG, and the Pacific islands generally, are equivocal. A recent volume of three dozen personal recollections and reflections by social scientists and 'recipients' of development aid (Development Bulletin 2018) provides mostly uncomfortable reading. Although the success or failure of development-aid projects according to their own terms of reference is not the primary concern of this article, such projects are evidence of the degree to which the Motu-Koita, like many other societies in PNG, have become incor-

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[18]   See, for example, National Court of Papua New Guinea (2013:4–6), Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea (2016:21).
[19]   See, for example, Avei (1995).

porated in recent decades into the global politics of neoliberal capitalist development. Their incorporation is particularly evident in relation to the commodification of land (Ingold's representation of 'land' is particularly relevant here), which is complicated by an enduring distinction between what, in the early colonial period, were called 'native land' and 'government land'.

'Government land' was land bought from indigenous groups or taken from them on the basis that they acknowledged it was not currently used and would not be in the foreseeable future (Amankwah, Mugambwa and Muroa 2001:2–6). As time went by the term also came to include land taken by the government for purposes deemed unavoidably necessary, theoretically with some practical compensation to the indigenous landholders (2001:14–15). Later the terminology of this dichotomy changed into a distinction between 'customary land' and 'state land'. Customary land was originally intended to be used for so-called 'customary' purposes (habitation, gardening and hunting), but by the end of the colonial period Papua New Guineans were exploring ways to negotiate land-use regulations for their own economic benefit without customary land losing its categorical status in the process (Filer 2019:2–4). Subsequently, under new 'lease-lease-back' regulations, groups could lease customary land to the state and, having given themselves a business identity, lease it back for commercial purposes. This gave rise to a proliferation of 'Special Agriculture and Business Leases' (SABLs) that extended to leasing customary land to outsiders (Filer 2019:1). An increase in mining, logging, and other resource extraction projects introduced problems into this solution, as leasing land, compensation arrangements and royalty payments created social inequalities and conflicts over the advisability of leasing in the first place, or the appropriate distribution of royalties or other 'benefits' if projects were approved.[20]

Legislative attempts to control leasing and land loss and to clarify conceptions of group and individual land-ownership in the context of the enduring dichotomy between customary land and state land have not so far resolved these conflicts or tackled the widespread corruption in land dealings (Filer 2019:75–84). One development in 2009 was an amendment to the Land Registration Act and Land Groups Incorporation Act, under which 'customary' groups could register themselves as Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs) asserting 'ownership' of traditional land. In attempting to prevent abuses of the previous, less rigorous rules (Filer 2019:30–41), the amendments imposed stronger regulations on the demarcation of land boundaries, group membership, registers of members, and so on (Minnegal, Lefort and Dwyer 2015). However, they have also contributed to the emergence of intra-group tensions over who the 'real' landowners are, as well as an increase in treating descent rules as a dogma.[21]

These tendencies have been exacerbated for the Motu-Koita in the urban context of the NCD. The parameters of their 'customary land' were shrinking by the 1990s,

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[20]   See, for example, Bainton (2009), Beer (2018), Leach (2011).
[21]   See, for example, Bainton (2009), Beer (2018), Minnegal, Lefort and Dwyer (2015).

resulting in an increase in parochial disputes among them over gardening and housing sites (Goddard 2009:174–180; 2019:139). Moreover, much of their traditional land has become state land under what many of them regard as illegal dealings.[22] In an attempt to secure control over customary land and receive whatever economic benefits might be available from it, they have embraced the concept of ILGs, submitting or resubmitting dozens of requests to register groups from the mid-1990s onwards.[23] Some ILGs are coalitions of several descent groups, trying to avoid the divisions that occurred in the late colonial period when attempts to reclaim land lost in the late nineteenth century were likely to pit them against each other in court to the detriment of their shared goal.[24] Others represent single *iduhu* or *iduhu* segments. Inevitably, the proliferation of ILGs has been accompanied by conflicts over the legitimacy of ownership claimants, articulated through rationalized criteria of 'patrilineal' inheritance. These conflicts are made more complicated by the ongoing segmentation and merging of *iduhu*,[25] which have always been mutable but are now treated as structurally stable by the bureaucracy.

Moreover, in the new century, intra-community divisions are emerging as the incipient commodification of customary land is accompanied by nascent entrepreneurship. Ageing Motu-Koita leaders influenced by a sociocentric tradition of decision-making involving lengthy group consultations and negotiations have mostly sought legal remedies for socio-political marginalization and losses of land on behalf of their 'clans'. However, individualist tendencies have been developing particularly among younger people whose attitudes are being increasingly shaped more by a globalizing market economy and futuristic capitalism than by 'cultural' tradition.[26] Plots of land that they claim to own according to a dogma of patrilineal inheritance are treated as an immediate commercial resource. Intra-group and intergenerational conflicts are growing as young entrepreneurs lease or sometimes surreptitiously 'sell' plots of land that they claim to own as individuals (National 2015, 2016b; Post-Courier 2018).

Orthography and identity

The foregoing history indicates an accelerating shift by the Motu-Koita away from traditional lifeways towards embracing global capitalism in recent decades. Yet their concern to reclaim and consolidate their possession of traditional land lost to the spreading

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[22]   See, for example, Kamba (2010), National (2016a, 2017), Kep (2018).

[23]   See Filer (2019:60, 66–67). As Filer notes, it is impossible to calculate exact numbers of Motu-Koita submissions, or even ILGs, due to the inaccuracy of official data, a significant amount of reformulation, and changes in titles and membership of ILGs. I am grateful to Colin Filer for sharing his own data on ILGs with me.

[24]   See Goddard (2016).

[25]   See, for example, Nao (2018a, b).

[26]   See, for example, National (2015).

NCD has fostered an orthographic turn that emphasizes the pre-colonial distinction between the Koita and the Motu. Many local places in what is now the NCD traditionally had both Koita and Motu language names and additional names that varied prehistorically among small, mobile descent groups, describing activities and events or naming ancestors who established camps or hamlets there.[27] In the early colonial period, as Port Moresby developed from a tiny colonial administrative settlement into a small town, colonial toponymy used a combination of 'native' terms for local places and the names of prominent missionaries and colonial officials (the latter mostly for street names, such as Douglas St, Musgrove St, and so on).[28] As the city spread and the colonial toponymy increased, the English terms included more names of prominent colonial figures (for example, Murray, Scratchley, Healy), as well as the names of birds, plants, and so on. The native terms used were predominantly Motu, but they included some Pidgin terms, and increasingly words borrowed arbitrarily from elsewhere in the country. By the late twentieth century, when PNG had become 'post-colonial', the names of prominent Papua New Guineans (mostly politicians, such as Somare, Toliman, Kiki) were also used.

By the twenty-first century, with growing numbers of suburban street names and casual local descriptive names for the city's shopping, administrative and housing areas, many early-colonial Motu and Koita place names had been changed, and Koita names in particular had become scarce. However, when Motu and Koita began registering their ILGs, old toponyms reappeared as they specified the areas of land – that is, p l a c e s in the landscape – they were claiming. The ILG names themselves, representing descent groups, descent-group sections and sometimes descent-group coalitions, were also, of course, indigenous. In the process, alongside Motu names, a specifically Koita orthography has emerged. For instance – returning to the examples I gave earlier in this article – whereas 'Kilakila' and 'Badili' had been conventional spellings since the early colonial period, the Koita spellings 'Kirakira' and 'Badiri' are now common among the details of registered ILGs.[29] The village and surrounding area that had always been spelled 'Kila Kila' (or 'Kilakila') are nowadays almost exclusively spelled 'Kira Kira' (or 'Kirakira') in PNG news media.[30] And the original Koita term for descent group, 'toneta', (long

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[27]   See, for example, Oram (1981), Papua New Guinea Land Court Secretariat (n.d.). For local places traditionally having both Koita and Motu language names, see, for example, Bramell (1914).

[28]   A notable exception to the use of names of foreigners was the naming of Boe Vagi Road, after the man colonially designated in the 1880s as the 'chief' of the Motu.

[29]   See, for example, Papua New Guinea National Gazette [PNGNG] (2014–2018).

[30]   Relevant news items and letters in the two main PNG newspapers (The National, Post-Courier) during more than a decade now are too numerous to list. For just four examples, see Kamba (2010), Nouairi (2014), Post-Courier (2019) and Nick (2020). I have a collection of dozens of maps of Port Moresby dating from the late nineteenth century until the present day. Of these, only one – a 1:50 000 ratio topographic survey map produced in 1977 by the Royal Australian Survey Corps – does not spell the area either 'KilaKila' or 'Kila Kila': it represents it as 'Kira-Kira', for reasons unknown.

displaced by the aforementioned 'iduhu') has been revived, being used in the names of some Koita ILGs (including 'Badiri Vamaga Toneta', 'Badu Toneta', and others).[31]

No reliable statistics are available on the number of contemporary Koita speakers (or for that matter the size of the population that identifies itself as 'Koita'). Dutton's estimate of 2 260 (1969:82), now more than fifty years out-of-date, has been the indirect source of successive classifications of Koita as a 'threatened' language.[32] As stated above, there are very few Koita capable of conversing in their own language nowadays in the NCD. There is no evidence of a deliberate attempt at Koita language recovery. But the phonemic distinctions discussed earlier in this article still characterize the speech of the Koita, just as they did when they spoke (in English) with Firth in the early 1950s about 'Badiri', and as evidenced in Dutton's discussion of their language in 1975. Contemporary Koita literacy draws on their own phonology, and their orthography accordingly manifests a distinct ethnic identity. The attempt to reclaim, control and exploit traditional land is a project shared by the Motu and Koita, under increasingly rigorous politico-juridical conditions (including the ongoing legal codification of putative custom), but the use of specifically Koita spellings and place names asserts the Koita's own ethno-linguistic identity.

Conclusion

Melanesian tropes of a special relationship to land may have become 'an almost dangerously common act of elision' (Ballard 2013:48). This is perhaps evidenced in the Motu-Koita Assembly chairman's statement above that 'If we lose our land, we lose our culture' (Gerega 2019). Yet the common rhetoric among Melanesians that 'land is life' (Filer, McDonnell and Allen 2017:18) veils a more powerful truth about the resilience of identity and its embeddedness in place becomes visible when the discursive reference to 'land' (and the related proprietary notion 'landowner') is submitted to Ingold's distinction between 'land' and 'landscape', and his added qualification that landscape is made up of 'places'. The Koita and Motu loss of (quantitative and homogeneous) l a n d to the spreading city – sometimes through their own dealings – has contributed to their experience of socio-political marginalization, but their identity is inseparably related to p l a c e s in the (qualitative and heterogeneous) landscape. The 'land' loss preoccupying the two groups can be interpreted as a loss of control over their territory, from which, importantly, they have not been dis-p l a c e d. The overwhelming presence of migrants and the physical growth of the NCD have certainly brought about their incremental reduction to a minority-group status: they are estimated to now account for only six or seven per cent of the NCD's resident population (Filer 2019:66).

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[31]   See, for examples, PNGNG (2014–2018), Knight (2015).
[32]   See, for example, Endangered Languages Project (n.d.).

Places change over time due to natural events and human use. In the process, they gather new names, new myths and new meanings for their users. Toponymy reflects the changes, as well as remembered and mythologized pasts for those who have lived in them, gardened, hunted and fished in them, fought in them, and invoked ancestors who previously lived in them. It was observed half a century ago that the Koita were seeking to preserve their identity, 'especially as expressed through language' (Dutton 1969:26). That language has now virtually disappeared among NCD-based Koita, yet its expressive potency remains, in their orthographic expression of identity – identity that endures through connections with places. For however they might change, places cannot be legally alienated, in the sense that 'land' can when it is commodified. It is too early to assess the socio-political consequences of the orthographic expression of a specifically Koita identity. It is also too early to judge the extent to which neo-traditional proprietorial claims will end the diplomatic suppression of old land-related disputes and the underlying Koita argument that the Motu were only allowed to settle on the territory by permission of the Koita. The recent emergence of a Koita orthography may cast doubts on the united identity represented since the late-colonial period by the collective term 'Motu-Koita'. Regardless of these possibilities and the fears expressed by the Motu and Koita that they are in danger of losing their 'cultural' identity (as if culture were not adaptable and ceaselessly temporally mutable), their ethno-linguistic identities remain resilient in the face of 'development' and its discontents.

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