

# Body and Mind on the Move: Emplacement, Displacement, and Trans-placement in Highlands Papua New Guinea \*

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## Introduction

Throughout history people have moved and migrated. The motivational drives influencing human movement (voluntary or forced) and the social and political accommodations that arise in response to movements continue to be fruitful and dynamic research topics. In this paper we point to historical experiences and perceptions of what we are calling *trans-placements* (i.e., the movement of individuals or collectives across, beyond, or through physical places and ideological spaces). We also look at the transformations that have occurred in the lives of those who have moved as well as those who have been left behind. Our examples are from Highlands Papua New Guinea, but the theoretical approach is one that can be suitably applied diverse geographical settings around the world today.

When people move to new places they bring a corpus of cognitive and bodily experience with them. New places are “inscribed” by incomers with the remembered experiences of previously lived places (both physical and imagined) and identities are formed through amalgamations of previous and currently lived emplacements within political, religious, geographical,

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and social environments that are very much individual and shared constructs of the mind and of bodily experience (see e.g. Stewart and Strathern 2003b). The inscriptions of a new place can involve aspects of resistance against power, or alternatively they may be inscribed by the more powerful incomers. Domination of environments or subjection within new environments are classic themes of diaspora movements of Pacific Islanders throughout the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. These power struggles can often play themselves out at the micro-level over time. But the “spiritual”/cosmological aspects of places left behind and places newly arrived at are vital to the adjustments by people to trans-placements. Memory, history, and the emotions are all involved in the construction of cultural selves in new places. Through migration, as well as for other reasons, conflict, contradiction, and opposition between globalizing forces and local senses of identity can emerge even when opportunities are being sought after by individuals.

Theories of change in social life tend to stress either people’s capacities for mobility and the creation of networks or else their feelings of rootedness and emplacement in particular localities. In practice these apparently contradictory capacities are closely interrelated. When people move, they retain a sense of the places they have left, with a view to possibly returning to them through the action of reverse migration. In this way the themes of circular migration and bi-local or multi-local systems emerge in contexts from temporary labor migration to more permanent diasporas. Practical issues of adaptation may cause people to leave their home place; but equally practical concerns may cause them to retain ties with home if this is possible. Where this is not possible, forms of nostalgia and memory of landscape, real and imagined, keep senses of connection alive and may lead people to seek out their origins generations later, as is very popular with North Americans seeking their roots abroad. Trans-placement is thus a complex topic that encompasses travel, migration, adaptation, nostalgia, change, imagination, and continuity, all in one conceptual form (Strathern and Stewart 2001;

compare Edwards 1998).

## **The Duna and Pangia People of Papua New Guinea**

Here we discuss the ways in which people from the Duna and the Pangia areas of the Southern Highlands Province in Papua New Guinea have transformed their lives through movements within their wider territory and outside of their territory over time.

We discuss trans-placement further here with examples from the Pacific. Within the two areas of Papua New Guinea that we will discuss, Duna and Pangia, the lives of the people have been impacted by various influences, including pre-colonial tribal fighting; colonial impositions of various sorts; post-colonial influences associated with work in urban settings, and the disillusionment of people with governmental corruption; and with disputes that arise between individuals and groups. And, of course, nowadays people face the devastating impact of HIV/AIDs within Papua New Guinea.

The Duna people are situated in the central Highlands of Papua New Guinea.<sup>1</sup> The people are horticulturalists and rearers of pigs and speak the Duna language. They live in forested mountain areas containing numerous lakes and streams. Our research area is a valley system (the Aluni Valley) that has a population of approximately 1,000. The territory backs onto large stretches of high forest in addition to areas of low-lying bush and high forest ridges, and there are no paved roads leading into this settlement area, only footpaths.

Beliefs about the placement of bodies, living and dead, within their territory reveal ways in which the Duna situate themselves in relation to their dwelling places and in relation to outsiders (i.e., non-Duna people). The emplacement (physical and social positionality within an area) of the Duna serves as a marker of historical memory and as a holder of contemporary legitimacy to the land and environment, its resources, and its

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the Duna people with whom we work see Stewart and Strathern (2000b, 2000c, 2002c, 2002d, 2003a, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b)

cosmological dimensions. One expression of concerns with emplacement is found in songs and stories<sup>2</sup> which are filled with details of the local territory in relation to historical, mythical, and contemporary events. These forms of expression continue to be important, for various political reasons, and because they lock into the mind's eye a place that people contextualize their lives within even if they are physically separated from that place.

Like the Duna, the people of Pangia are also horticulturalists and pig rearers. They live in an upland terrain and they speak the Wiru language. The total size of the Wiru-speaking population in Pangia is about the same as that for the Duna, some 20,000 people. The lives of the Pangia people were greatly impacted by Australian colonial enforced re-location policies, placing people into new, consolidated settlements and forcing the local people to work on road construction and other projects, within their territory, which the colonial enforcers called "development".<sup>3</sup>

The Wiru, in the area that we discuss, were brought together into larger villages by the colonial administration in the early 1960s. Before that time they had lived in much smaller settlements or outlying hamlets. The actual sites that the Wiru used for the larger colonially promoted villages tended to be the locations of ritual centers that were important to the local members of a particular named, dispersed phratry (a category of people sharing a distinct origin story). Pre-colonial ritual sites of this sort had been the places where the skulls of male ancestors had been kept in special ritual houses (*tapa yapu*) for use in ritual ceremonies aimed at preserving and protecting the environment and the people and animals living on the land, in terms of generating good health and fertility. These sites were called

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<sup>2</sup> We have written previously on Duna songs, stories, and other forms of expressive genres. Duna expressive genres include: *pikono* (sung ballads), *ipakana* (songs), *ipakana heiya* (mourning/lament songs), *laingwa* (courting songs), *tambaka* (formal speeches), *hapiapo* (stories about the past), *malu* (group genealogy/origin stories), *tambaka* (formal speeches), etc. See footnote 2 above for references.

<sup>3</sup> For information on the Pangia people discussed here see Stewart and Strathern (1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d, 2000a, 2000d, 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b, 2004d), Strathern (1970, 1971, 1980, 1984), Strathern, Stewart, Carucci, Poyer, Feinberg and Macpherson (2002).

*tumbea ta*, “the big places”, indicating their importance. The smaller, pre-colonial settlements had been separate dwelling places that were affiliated with the ritual centers, and it was at the ritual centers that people from the affiliated settlements of a given phratry and its congeners would come together to make sacrifices, dance, and hold general pig kills that were associated in one way or another with ritual practices.

Despite the colonial coalescence of settlements into consolidated villages, land claims and use continued to operate as they had before, with each family tending to use land in settlement sites where they had formerly lived. After the political independence of Papua New Guinea in 1975, patrolling by government officers all but ceased and the Wiru shifted back to live in their former settlements. They returned to using the larger village areas for ritual practices as before, but now, since they had converted to Christianity during the colonial period, the ritual practices tended to be centered on churches (Lutheran or Catholic ones in this research area; Wesleyan or Evangelical Bible Mission in other areas). Living too closely together in the large villages produced too many disputes and problems with the management of pig herds, so people preferred to move out from these and return to the privacy of their smaller places.

For both the Duna and the Wiru, contact with outsiders (non-Papua New Guineans) has had a shallow time-frame of only 50-60 years. Thus, older people may still recall when they first saw these outsiders who entered their areas and brought new ideas, tools, and ways of living. Christian missionaries soon followed colonial government movements into these remote areas, bringing another set of new ideas and ritual practices.

While emplacement of persons within their landscape is important in both these areas, people have also been keen to use various opportunities to engage in travel and trans-locations, which can be seen as voluntaristic actions. In pre-colonial times people also traveled to other areas and brought back knowledge of new ritual practices; or purchased this knowledge when it was brought in by other Papua New Guineans. In

colonial times, some younger members of the communities went on contract labor to coastal or more economically favorable highlands areas in order to earn money and bring back goods.

Colonial policies had a double effect. First, they brought into these remote rural areas whole packages of practices associated with “development” and change: such as aid posts, roads, agricultural schemes for growing coffee, injunctions to abandon older ritual projects and take up the new ones of Christianity. These were seen as diagnostic of the new ways of life to which they were being introduced, including new structures of representation and authority like local government councils and later electorates with Members of the national Parliament and of Provincial Governments.

In both the Duna and the Pangia areas this complex of changes was introduced at considerable speed because of the relatively late stage in colonial history at which these people were confronted with administrative regulations. In areas such as Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands Province, changes came in from the 1930s onward and at a time when there was as yet no overt, internal pressure towards de-colonialization.

The Duna and Pangia people thus experienced early on a kind of time-space compression in their lives which forced them to transit rapidly from one set of practices to others under colonial guidance. Outsiders to these areas, including Papua New Guineans from other areas, came in as agents to effect change.

In Pangia, Lutheran evangelists from Hagen set themselves up as influential local leaders, requiring the people to build houses and make gardens for them, using the prestige of their mission to persuade people to do this. Coastal Papua New Guinean policemen struck fear into people with their patrols. The Australian patrol officers made them do road-work and jailed them if they did not comply. There was less of this sort of pressure among the Aluni Valley Duna because their area was even more remote and thus there was less point in coerced road-building, and no

outside evangelists were explicitly brought in to dominate the religious scheme. But, taken together, this first effect of change itself represents a massive translocation of elements *into* the local landscape, altering it profoundly.

The second effect of colonial policies that we will discuss is that, particularly in the earlier years before independence, the Australian Administration deliberately encouraged *out-migration* by young males on labor schemes elsewhere, largely on coastal plantations or plantations established in areas of the Highlands that had entered the development process earlier. The Highlands Labour Scheme in particular took men from many different language areas in the Highlands and put them into one or two year contract labor positions doing basic work on expatriate-owned plantations. One of the most significant effects of this scheme was that it played a big part in the genesis of ethnic categories based on language and locality ties but forged on a wider basis by the shared experience of work as migrants. This process saw the birth of what later became widely known as the “*wantok* system”, that is, the development of networks of rural-urban support based on shared language (i.e., “one talk”) and also on perceived customary similarities.

Pangia men, from many different villages, brought together as workers in plantations and faced with others who might come into conflict with them, tended to band together and fight against these others. The same was universally true of all other groups. Among these workers themselves, and among the plantation owners, some groups gained reputations as more truculent than others. Tari men, of the Huli language group next to the Duna, became known as tough and aggressive fighters. Duna were known as “Lake Kopiahos”, from the lake where the government airstrip and station were built in the early 1960s. They were not classified in with the “Taris” in this regard. One plantation owner in the southern Nebilyer Valley in between Pangia and Hagen in the 1970s remarked on the industriousness of the “Wiris” (Wiru), as he called them: “they would come

through and said they would take care of everything”, he noted. This reflects the early optimistic stages of their work experience outside of their own living areas at the time.

At this time also in Pangia, songs were composed, by these workers, discussing how the people living in the more remote settlements wanted to follow the footsteps of others northward past Mount Ialibu up to Mount Hagen. These songs had lines in them such as, “like black ants following in a line [they came]”. This indicated that they were seeking the perceived centers of development where money could be obtained. Migrant workers coming back from the coast brought back red wooden boxes filled with goods, and ceremoniously opened these, distributing the goods to kin and using any money that they had saved to help them pay bride price, thus placing themselves back into the local networks of power relations. Older men regained some control over money in this way, but the dependence on money in turn fueled further social changes.

In the Duna area people gave similar accounts of what happened. One extremely detailed narrative from a young man described how he had been on a number of work projects in coastal areas, making his way over to the island of Bougainville and filling various jobs that brought him into contact with Australian employers as well as many other categories of people. Such a work history sometimes leads people to enter into an extended mobile life as migrants without returning home. Others may stay in one place for a long time, such as one man who had lived in a settlement in Port Moresby, the capital city, as a laborer, for many years, only rarely returning for visits, while his wife and children always remained at home, sharing their lives with close kin.

The particular Duna man who had worked on the island of Bougainville and elsewhere and then returned still aimed to re-establish himself at home, and by 1999 he was busy learning whatever he could of the old origin stories or *malu* that were now being used as a basis for making claims for monetary compensation in relation to the activities of oil prospectors in the Strickland



area west of his own settlement. Extended migration tours of the kind this man made are more rare nowadays, since they are no longer sponsored by government schemes, towns are more hostile and dangerous places to be in, and gang activities are much more marked. As some opportunities in life open up, others close. People seek new opportunities; they also have to recreate local social capital when they return. Even in the towns they still tend to think about things in their own terms, as they come into contact with new urban legends, like the Duna man who was afraid in Mount Hagen town of hostile others injecting people with the HIV virus by syringes while standing in queues in stores. Rumors of this kind have become urban legends in different parts of Papua New Guinea recently (see Stewart and Strathern 2004). (Related issues that arise have to do with the spread of prostitution and the pressures caused by gambling, mostly through card games played for money.) A death in town may trigger a particular local response, or like the case of the man from the Hagen area who died by the roadside in Port Moresby in the 1970s and his clans-folk drove out at midnight to the spot where he had fallen and called out to his spirit to get in their van and be driven to the hospital morgue so that it could rejoin his body before this was flown back home: another example of how people relate body and mind on the move together.

In the times of independence (after 1975) people have increasingly relocated to urban centers within the Highlands area, especially Mount Hagen, and formed networks of relationships that facilitate visits and short-term work possibilities, or access to schooling and health care. All of these trans-placements produce transformations in their lives, both while they are relocated and when they return to the village context. New collective projects co-exist with individual ones in a continued dialectic of change, energized both by people=s movements and their wishes to create and recreate senses of identity in the places they occupy and make their own.

## Conclusion

We have used the term trans-placement rather than the more frequently used term “migration” for several theoretical reasons. People have a feeling of belonging to particular places. This is what anthropologists have called emplacement. Place is a social concept, having to do with social relations, historical memory, and senses of dwelling. When people migrate, there is a sense that this entails displacement or the loss, temporary or long-term, of their emplaced identities. Adaptation to a new environment, however, often leads them at least partly to re-shape their new locales in ways that recall their former emplacements. They carry their places with them, as well as acquiring a new sense of emplacement elsewhere. We call this entire process *trans-placements*; people, ideas, and practices that move between, and recreate, places in time and space. Migration is not just physical mobility, but, as we put it, “body and mind on the move”, whether the distances involved are great or small, and whether the migrants return home or not.

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