

Review: Alex Golub: *Leviathans at the Gold Mine. Creating Indigenous and Corporate Actors in Papua New Guinea*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014, 247 pages, US\$ 23.95.

According to the state-run Mineral Resources Authority (MRA) Papua New Guinea is “undoubtedly (...) a mining state, with mineral export revenues driving the economy and services in the country” (MRA website, December 28, 2016). This is reason enough to subject the present study of the Porgera Mine by the author, who teaches at the University of Hawaii, to a critical review. Golub examines the complex relationship among the Canadian mining company Placer Dome, the indigenous landowners, the Ipili and the state of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the highland province of Enga. For his theoretical foundation the author draws upon the book “Leviathan,” published in 1651 by the philosopher and political philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Leviathan refers to the Biblical mythological sea monster, whose omnipotent power overcomes all human resistance. The goal of the all-powerful state rule Hobbes advocates is safe coexistence of human beings and with it an end to the pre-political state of war and lack of civilization. Here, Leviathan is “any sort of black boxed corporate entity” (xi). The question is how gatherings of “separate and single individuals” are transformed into “abstract things” (2), in other words how the multiple actors of corporations and landowners develop as social totalities – together with the state and its institutions – into leviathans.

The monograph is divided into four chapters: After the introduction, chapter 1 forms the main portion of the book. The so-called Yakatabari Negotiations on the creation of a new waste dump are sketched out in detail. The author attributes the failure of the 18-month discussions to group dynamics, which resulted in polarization within and between participating landowners. Already at this time a background factor was the massive environmental pollution, land shortages, overpopulation and crisis in subsistence farming caused by the mining. Higher compensation payments and resettlement away from the area – perspectives for the future the landowners had been hoping to realize in response to the pollution – did not materialize. At the same time, landowners were already expressing their frustration with the performance of the mine operators at that time. Finally, different groups among the landowners were competing with the mine in order to maximize their own profits.

Chapter 2 discusses “the birth of leviathans.” The historical interactions are depicted among the Ipili, colonial officials and Australian gold prospectors between the first contact in 1938 through the patrol under kiap James Taylor until the Porgera Agreement in 1989, which legalized the mine. The area between Waghi Valley and the Fly River was one of the last regions explored by the Australian colonial administration. From 1948 until 1962 Porgera was a “restricted” area, which meant that access was forbidden to whites. The opening of the region came in 1961/1962 with the first air strip and a permanently staffed patrol station. Although there had already been small-scale mining of gold since the 1950s, the geographically impenetrable terrain prevented production at an industrial level. Not until the discovery of larger gold deposits by Placer Dome in 1986 did the history of the valley change, as large-scale production now became realistic. Associated with this were quasi-religious expectations of the landowners that there would be a total transformation of their lives in the direction of well-being and affluence. In the conflict at that time over the Panguna Mine on the island of Bougainville, a best possible deal was reached with the mine operators, which served as a precedent for future negotiations in connection with mining.

Chapter 3 analyses the language group of the Ipili in Porgera, which was unknown until the 1950s, in the ethnographic present of the year 2000. The author investigates the way land ownership and family relationships in the area turned into “landowning clans” among the Ipili. Linguistically and culturally the Ipili are part of the broader ethnic galaxy, which also includes members of the Huli and Enga language groups that settled among the Ipili. Seven landowning clans or 23 subclans are the traditional titleholders listed in the “special mining lease” as stakeholders in the mine. It is a fact that the immense benefits of the mine are unequally distributed. The winners are a small elite of big men, who control seats on committees and lucrative contracts. Landowners are depicted as “large, well-fed men with reputations for prodigality who drive Toyota Land Cruisers with windows tinted to make them opaque” (12). They live in the capital Port Moresby, where “the Travelodge (the finest hotel in Papua New Guinea) has become their men's house” (59).

Finally, chapter 4 reflects upon the “Melanesian way” and thus upon national discourses on development and modernity. Regardless of the difference between the actual stark reality of life in rural PNG and the urban fantasies of the grassroots, it is emphasized that the Ipili want development, well-being and modernity, for which for example the natural environment is being sacrificed. Despite this, in the course of globalization the indigenous culture is not being replaced but revitalized, which corresponds to an indigenization of modernity. The brief epilogue describes later social change processes since the turn of the millennium. High migration (the Ipili have long since become a minority in their own country), everyday violence, killings, rapes, destruction of the environment and other undesirable social developments cause the author to draw the conclusion that the “Porgera experiment is over, and the Ipili are the losers” (213). Even though not one of the actors involved is ready to shut down the mine, for Golup the time has come “for everyone involved to realize that a postmine valley is now the only scenario in which the Ipili have a chance, in the long run, to be feasible” (ibid). A bibliography and an index end the book.

The monograph, which was published in 2014, is unconvincing. The analysis neither satisfies the author's own aim of sketching out Porgera as a story which comprehensively depicts the complex reality of the mining project, nor is the theoretical approach, which goes back to Hobbes or at least draws upon him, consistent. Golub himself emphasizes that in Porgera “models of pervasive governmentality are inadequate because they overestimate the power of these regimes” (115). The book closes with the conclusion of the two-years' field research by the anthropologist in 2001, a period in time lying in the distant past. It does not take into account the takeover of the majority holding of Placer Dome in 2006 by the Canadian firm Barrick Gold, the world's largest gold producer, which was followed in May 2015 by a further phase of a new strategic partnership with Chinese participation. The Zijin Mining Group acquired 50 per cent of the total 95 per cent of the mining operations owned by Barrick Niugini Limited in Porgera for a price of US\$298 million (903 million Kina). Finally, terminology and use of language are irritating. An example is the use of the term “Eurochristians” for expatriates.

Last but not least, attention should be drawn to the reference in the postscript to the 2011 article by Catherine Couman, which the author correctly identifies as the best overview of the Porgera Mine in recent decades (“Occupying Spaces Created by Conflict: Anthropologists, Development NGOs, Responsible Investment, and Mining”; in *Current Anthropology*). Golup's book reviewed here can be added to this as supplementary material.