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An Absent Presence: Encountering the State Through Natural Resource Extraction in Papua New Guinea and Australia

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Vladimir: We have to come back tomorrow.
Estragon: What for?
Vladimir: To wait for Godot.
Estragon: Ah! (Silence) He didn't come?
Vladimir: No.

Waiting for Godot (Samuel Beckett 1956)

Introduction

In Samuel Beckett's famous 'tragicomedy in two acts', the tragic tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, spend a good deal of time waiting for Godot and discussing their desire to see him. Godot never arrives, but he figures as potentially present. The absence of Godot is also about his presence and, at one level, the entire play can be read as a meditation on absence and presence. We only know of Godot's intimation, and there is little by way of actualisation; however, the promise of his presence provides

the backdrop against which all other activities occur. In this respect, he is a totalising influence whose presence is everywhere and nowhere—he exerts an 'absent presence'.

The absurdity at the centre of this play reminds us that we can think of absence and presence as mutually constitutive phenomena rather than simple binary opposites, or logical antonyms of each other. Taking 'absent presence' as our point of departure, this volume focuses on the unstable and even dialectical relationship between the presence and the absence of the state in the context of natural resource extraction, and the effects this creates. This is the first volume that brings together a sustained focus on the absent presence of the state in resource extraction settings—placing this phenomenon at the very centre of analysis. The volume also provides a timely contribution to the ethnography of the state and state administration, which historically has received comparatively less attention in the Oceanic region. It details different experiences of the state in extractive settings at a time when we are witnessing increased tensions in many countries around the role of the state in managing resource extraction and the shift towards a low-carbon future. The state duty to protect the rights of citizens is matched by the corporate responsibility to respect these human rights (UN 2011). Malfunctioning or missing state-systems exacerbate the burdens of extraction on project area communities, and increase the likelihood that corporations may infringe upon the rights of these communities. This takes place amid local demands that governments enact their state responsibilities to protect the interests of the people and find more responsible and less destructive ways to harness natural resources for the benefit of society. In these contentious contexts, the absence of the state, or its particular bureaucratic functions and representatives, often creates a heightened sense of the state, with the presence of the state felt through its absence—a peculiar and paradoxical absent presence that thoroughly shapes the nature of these sites of extraction. These experienced absences tend to reinforce particular ideas of the state, signalling the interplay between the ideological and the material qualities of the state, as we shall discuss below.

The geographical focus of this volume encompasses Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Australia, with a final chapter that compares PNG and Australia with the French territory of New Caledonia—testing and demonstrating a wider application of the absent presence concept. PNG and Australia are deeply invested in the extraction and exploitation of their natural resources, and the extractive industries play an important role in

national and regional economies in both. Until 1975, PNG was a colony of Australia, administered under a mandate from the United Nations. Historically and today, the relationship between these countries can be characterised as simultaneously asymmetrical and mutually dependent, entangled in a range of political and economic interdependencies, in which the industrialised extraction of natural resources plays a significant part. In both nations, the state plays a similar role in relation to the extractive industries, with responsibility for permitting and regulation, and distribution of resource-related benefits, vested in specific government agencies. While the Australian state is commonly regarded as 'mature' and 'stable', the state of PNG is more often described as 'weak' and 'ineffectual' (Dinnen 2001). The rich ethnographic material presented in this volume challenges this simple point of comparison as it applies in resource 'arenas' (Bainton and Owen 2019), demonstrating that in both jurisdictions the state is often perceived to be an absent or incomplete institution, producing common and divergent 'state effects' (Trouillot 2001). In both nations, local landowners and custodians of the land have similar expectations to benefit from extractive activities taking place on their lands, but they also experience comparable forms of depredation and dispossession, directly linked to the operation of extractive projects and the concurrent presence and absence of the state.

In this introductory chapter, we develop the idea of the absent presence of the state. We then sketch some of the main points of commonality and difference between PNG and Australia. These form the basis for comparison in this volume, including the role of the extractive industries in the development of these nation states and their identity; state sovereignty over mineral resources; and the experiences and expectations of customary landowners. In the final section, we chart the different ways in which the state is experienced in these resource settings and the various contributions of the authors. An overarching intention of this volume is to advance our understanding of the ways in which the state is experienced and instantiated through these resource 'encounters' (Pijpers and Eriksen 2018). As a whole, this volume illustrates how the concept of absent presence can be brought to life, enhancing our understanding of the state from the vantage point of resource extraction, and thus providing a specific contribution to the anthropology of the state and the anthropology of extraction.

Absence, Presence and the Absent Presence of the State

How do we study something that is absent or only partially present? How much do we need to know about a specific thing to understand the effects of its absence? More specifically, to what extent do we need to define the state before it can be studied or before we can even begin to comprehend its effects? Beckett tells us almost nothing about Godot, but the effect of his absence places him at the centre of the script—and for some readers, he is *the* central character. Conventional wisdom holds that either a thing is here or it is not, whereas we more often find that absent things leave 'traces' of their presence, so that a thing can be present in some ways while being absent in others. Philosophers and other scholars have been trying to make sense of the idea of absence, and the relationship between notions of absence and presence, for a very long time (for example, Sartre 1957; Kierkegaard 1971 [1843]; Deleuze 1990; Fuery 1995). The work of theorists such as Jacques Derrida (1976) has been instrumental in helping us to think beyond the simple static binary distinction between absence and presence, challenging conventional assumptions about 'presence', and attacking a particular view that assumes an absolute presence and an absolute absence.[1] Likewise, anthropologists and sociologists have long recognised that social relations are often performed around what is there and the *presence* of what is not (Hetherington 2004). In this regard, absence often serves as a kind of ordering device.[2] In their work on the anthropology of absence, Mikkel Bille and his co-authors emphasise the mutual interdependence between the materially present and the materially absent, suggesting that the presence or absence of phenomena—persons, things, events or places—may not necessarily depend on absolute, positive occurrences or the absolute lack thereof, but instead resides in the way

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1   For structuralists, the concept of 'absent/presence' denotes the notion of (present) signifiers that refer to (absent) signifieds, which is a critical feature of language and representation. These ideas were especially important for media and communication theorists because they helped to emphasise the ways that 'representational absence' can become a form of presence (Bell n.d.). We also come to appreciate how certain terms, concepts, factors, questions or issues are rendered 'conspicuous by their absence', and the symbolic erasure of specific sociocultural groups in text and other mediums or in particular social contexts. A focus on absences allows us to grasp the significance of silences and how they are actively created, and pay attention to things that have been suppressed or not even allowed to exist in the first place.

2   Perhaps the most explicit examples can be drawn from the body of work on mortuary rituals and the myriad ways that people attempt to manage absences and the traces that departed kin leave on landscapes and the social realm (Hertz 1960 [1907]; Bloch and Parry 1982; Lipset and Silverman 2016).

that the experience of certain phenomena differs from expectations and preconceptions (Bille et al. 2010: 5). As such, we find a paradox in the very nature of presence and absence, where their significance is only fully realised through their mutuality.

These ideas about the relationship between absence and presence inform our approach to the ways that states are encountered through the processes of extraction. From this perspective, states can be understood as incomplete projects, which reminds us that in many settings the state cannot be taken for granted and must be actively reproduced. For example, it has been argued that in PNG the state 'is not something that has been around in the past, nor is it expected to be automatically present in the future' (Dalsgaard 2013: 36). In such contexts, the presence of the state is uncertain and incomplete. The state must be made present, and conceptualisation of state presence cannot be separated from its absence (ibid.).[3] By focusing on the absent presence of the state in resource extraction settings, we come to see the incompleteness and uncertainty that constitutes the contemporary capitalist state—as the contributors to this volume show, from the vantage point of resource extraction projects, states appear very partial. This helps us to think about the proximity of people and processes in relation to these projects and the state, and the spatial and temporal dimensions that shape these encounters. The notion of absent presence also enables us to move beyond ideas about the total absence or total presence of the state and, instead, grasp the ways that things, like states, can be simultaneously present and absent. In this respect, our approach provides a critical counterpoint to the simplistic 'big-picture' framework of the state developed by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2020) in their popular political science work *The Narrow Corridor*. According to their model, states (which they prefer to call 'Leviathans') can be charted on an evolutionary scale comprising 'absent', 'despotic' and 'shackled' Leviathans, the latter representing the balance between the power of the state and society's capacity to control it. Their primary purpose is to demonstrate the range of factors that influence the trajectory of different states and how societies have failed or managed to achieve 'liberty'. But for our purposes, their model locks us into the idea

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3   In his more recent work Dalsgaard describes how the government as a facet of the state in Melanesia 'has become locally adopted and institutionalised in multiple and sometimes contrasting ways that speak to both the varied colonial history and the cultural diversity of the region' (2019: 255).

of categorical absence, which leaves very little room for thinking about how states may be absent in some ways and present in others, at different moments in time, and for different sections of society.

In thinking about the relative absence or presence of the state in the processes of extraction, it is useful to consider the material and non-material dimensions of the state. Philip Abrams (1988) has suggested that we should distinguish between the 'state-system' and the 'state-idea'. The former refers to the palpable nexus of institutional arrangements and apparatuses centred in government, while the latter refers to the reification of this system as a substantial and totalising entity, or a thing, that is separate from society. Thus, if we think of the state as both a material force and an ideological power—as twin aspects of the same process—then it follows that we should also attend to the senses in which the state does not exist, as well as those in which it does, and the relationship between them. In other words, how the everyday materiality of the state, through its routines, rituals, representatives, activities and policies, constitutes and regulates modern subjects and shapes how people come to believe in the idea of the state and how this in turn effects everyday practice. Several contributors to this volume locate the absent presence of the state precisely in the localised interplay between state-systems and the state-idea—the way in which the state is imagined, anticipated and experienced in extractive contexts.

A decade after Abrams laid out his formula for comprehending the contemporary capitalist state, Michel-Rolph Trouillot made a similar argument. He observed that in different times and places the power of the state can seem more or less evident and encroaching. This observation is echoed in a number of chapters in this volume that reflect on spatial as well as temporal dimensions of the state: the sense of distance between the state, resource projects and impacted communities, and changing experiences of state presence at different points in time throughout the project life cycle. Trouillot reasoned that ethnographic analysis of the state must recognise that state power has 'no institutional fixity', and that 'state effects never obtain solely through national institutions or in governmental sites' (Trouillot 2001: 126). These two features, he said, are inherent in the capitalist state, and have been exacerbated by globalising processes. If the state is not limited in terms of institutions or geography, then its *presence* becomes somewhat more deceptive, and there is a 'need to theorise the state beyond the empirically obvious'. Trouillot's suggested

strategy was to 'focus on the multiple sites in which state processes are recognisable through their effects'. That is, if the state is not reducible to government or a set of apparatuses, and instead can be understood as an enlarged set of practices and processes and their effects, then we need to pay attention to these practices and processes and the effects they produce (ibid.: 131).

Trouillot identified four state effects, which we regularly encounter in resource extraction settings. First, as James Scott once observed, state power relies on legibility: an illegible society is a hindrance to effective interference by the state (1998: 78). Many anthropologists have observed these legibility effects, where local communities attempt to make themselves legible to companies or the state in order to be recognised as project beneficiaries. State actors or representatives are also engaged in the project of enhancing the legibility of local communities or assigning identities to individual subjects. In the same way, companies engage in processes of 'simplification' as part of the ongoing, and always incomplete, project of legibility. Second, we also witness the so-called 'isolation effect' as community members are converted into atomised individual subjects, achieved by means of company-supplied identification numbers for its local workers or through company-sponsored census lists, the identification of 'project stakeholders', and so on. Third, the delineation of customary landowners and traditional owners who are beneficiaries of these projects resembles the 'identification effect', which leads to Trouillot's fourth and final state effect—'spatialisation', or the creation and maintenance of jurisdictions and boundaries. As governments establish lease areas and 'zones of entitlement' for resource extraction projects, this creates new forms of governance within and across these boundaries. We see an equivalence between this final effect and Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Lee Peluso's concept of 'territorialization' (1995). Such spatial strategies bring the state into being by controlling people and access to natural resources. In regards to resource extraction, territorialisation entails: 'the creation and mapping of land boundaries, the allocation of land rights to so-called private actors, and the designation of specific resource (including land) uses by both state and "private" actors according to territorial criteria' (ibid.: 415). But as the contributors to this collection show, territorialisation is often unstable or uncertain, and the people most affected by the state's resource territorialisation often undermine,

disrupt or resist the state's goals and private actor interests—processes which can understood as a type of 'double movement' in property rights (Filer et al. 2020).

The contributions to this volume add several other state effects to this list, including 'order effects', 'enactment effects', 'responsibilisation effects' and 'material effects', where companies provide the services and infrastructure that states ordinarily provide to legitimise themselves. They also illustrate a 'corporate' or 'contractual' effect where neoliberal states are increasingly run like (poorly managed) companies, while multinational corporations and multilateral institutions (like the World Bank or the United Nations) can assume more state-like powers in resource extraction contexts and produce various state effects. This resembles Christian Lund's observations on the 'state-quality' of non-state institutions, where private actors 'strut in borrowed plumes' (2006: 677). As resource companies use the language of the state and its props—including deeds and contracts, stationery and stamps—this challenges the idea that states have a singular hold on the exercise of power and authority, and in some cases blurs the lines between 'state effects' and 'company effects', which often demonstrate themselves in terms of simplification, spatialisation, isolation and identification. When extractive companies use these strategies to assert exclusive claims over lease land areas, this also serves to uphold or reinforce the internal territorial strategies of the state. We might then ask whether these private sector actions constitute 'state effects' that demonstrate the presence of the state, or whether they are better conceptualised as 'company effects' that bear the hallmark of state authority but confirm private interests according to territorial criteria and signal the absence of the state.

All of this allows us to think about the state, or to recognise the presence and the influence or the effects of the state, precisely in those places that appear peripheral—like remote resource extraction enclaves in Australia and PNG.

Two States and their Resource Journeys

In most respects, PNG and Australia are profoundly different. Australia can be classified as a developed settler nation whose 'development' was based on the dispossession of its Indigenous population, and it is the

dominant political and economic nation state in the Pacific region.[4] PNG is a relatively young nation. Its Indigenous population has acquired control of state institutions, and retained ownership and control of their land and resources, but the majority of the population live comparatively less developed rural lives. The country remains heavily reliant upon Australian aid and it is often described by outside commentators as a 'struggling' or 'developing' nation state that exerts limited influence beyond its shores. While the differences are significant, and we could easily expand this list, the two nation states have at least one major thing in common beyond their shared colonial history: an extraordinary commitment to resource-driven economic development, underpinned by favourable geological factors and an abundance of mineral resources in their territories. In both countries the government has strenuously advocated for extractive capitalism, or what the captains of these industries prefer to call 'resource development'.

Large-scale resource extraction looms large in PNG and Australia and both countries can be described as 'resource-dependent nations'. Resource extraction has had a profound effect on their enmeshed histories and continues to be an important part of their national identities. Mining activities shadowed the birth of these two nation states and provided the economic base to support a transition away from their respective colonial masters—although in the case of PNG, resource extraction has provided Australia with new pathways to exert power over this sovereign nation. The expansion of the resources sector in PNG provides important economic opportunities for many of its citizens and is a primary source of revenue for the state, as well as thousands of Australian businesses and skilled workers who capitalise on these opportunities. Despite these asymmetries, their economies are mutually entwined in a history of extractive ventures—through investments, trade and business opportunities, and employment—and for the foreseeable future the extractive industries will dominate the economic, political and physical landscape across these two countries.

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4   Although in recent years the influence and authority of Australia across the Pacific region has been challenged by the growing presence of China. See, for example, Crocombe (2007) and McDougall (2019).
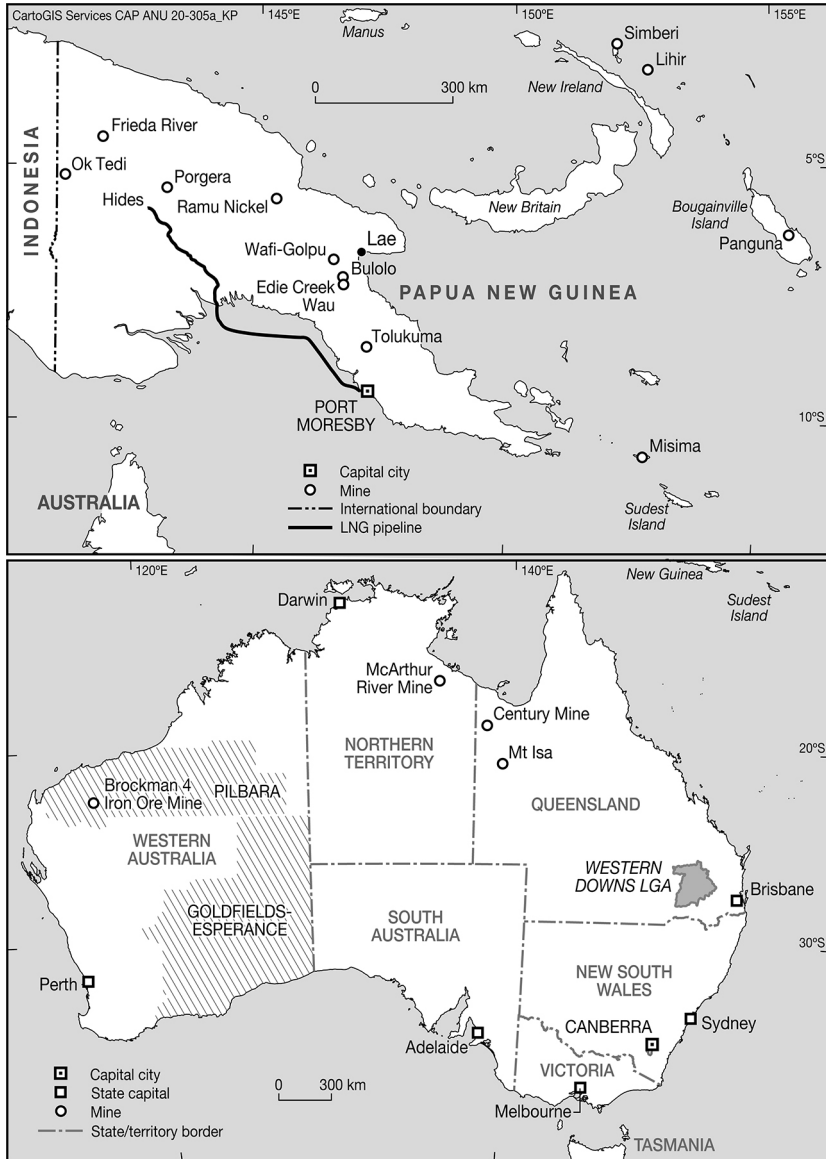
Figure 1.1 Map of Australia and Papua New Guinea with resource extraction projects and sites noted in this volume

Source: ANU Cartography

Australia

The extraction of mineral resources has long been part of the culture and development of Australia, and it has shaped the country as we now know it. It could be said that the first mining phase began some 60,000 years ago, with the first Aboriginal Australians who utilised resources of the earth for cultural and technological reasons and various forms of trade. Following European invasion in 1788, coal was soon being extracted to provide fuel for heating and cooking, and later steam locomotion. The first gold rush began in earnest in 1851 in the state of New South Wales and within three months had spread to the state of Victoria (Macintyre 2009: 87). These rushes quickly transformed the Australian colonies and fuelled the dynamic growth of towns and cities. Within just two years the number of free migrants arriving in Australia was greater than the number of convicts who had arrived in the past 70 years (ibid.). Many of these hopeful migrants, known as 'diggers', brought new skills and professions, and contributed to a burgeoning economy. The population boomed and Australia became a 'multicultural' society, of sorts. Migrants of non-European descent, especially Chinese immigrants who were particularly industrious on the goldfields, were unwelcome, signalling the xenophobic tensions that would continue to shape Australian society.[5] It is often claimed that the 'mateship' that developed between these diggers (of predominantly European descent) and their collective resistance to authority laid the foundation for a unified and unique national identity independent of British colonial rule.[6] In short, the early gold rushes transformed the colonies and helped precipitate settler Australia into nationhood.

The young colonies were quick to begin exporting minerals. During the 1850s, Victoria contributed more than one third of the world's gold output, and by the 1860s exports of copper and lead earned more than exports from wool and wheat. Following Federation in 1901, the role of mining in the economic development of Australia gradually increased. In the first half of the twentieth century, lead, zinc and copper deposits

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5   The presence of thousands of Chinese immigrants, many of whom existed under forms of labour bondage, gave birth to the early expressions of anti-Chinese sentiment and the nation's first race-based migration restrictions, which later coalesced in the White Australia policy.
6   In 1854, 1,000 diggers assembled at Eureka in Victoria to protest against the imposition of mining licence fees. The Eureka rebellion has since become a favourite event in the national mythology of Australia.

were discovered in Queensland at Mt Isa, although their full potential was not realised until the 1950s. In the 1960s, following the Australian government's changes to the restrictions on iron ore exports, exploration commenced across the Pilbara region in Western Australia leading to the development of numerous large-scale mining operations. By the end of the twentieth century, Australia was one of the world's leading resource nations, processing and exporting huge amounts of iron ore and coal, and other valued minerals. In the early years of the twenty-first century, the industry continued to grow in size and significance. The post-2001 resources boom was unprecedented in its scope, scale and economic significance (Cleary 2011). By 2014 mining contributed almost 60 per cent of Australia's exports as resource companies scaled up their investments and their operations. What counted as a mega mine in the 1980s was just a 'normal' mine by the 2010s, and resource towns were flush with prosperity and opportunity. But, as Thomas Hyland Eriksen observed in his ethnography of a Queensland 'boomtown', the downside of such accelerated change is the rise of 'treadmill capitalism' where growth is placed ahead of other considerations (like sustainability), constant change is necessary in order to stay in the same place within the system, and, more importantly, where uncontrolled 'runaway processes' preclude political or popular governance of the system (Eriksen 2018: 104).

In recent years, the petroleum industries, comprising the extraction and processing of oil and gas, have played an equally important role in Australia. The first oil well was drilled in Western Australia in 1907, but the industry was not developed in a major way until the 1970s when massive gas and condensate discoveries (light crude oil) were made off the northwest coast of Western Australia. Over the last decade the Australian natural gas industry has grown rapidly, as part of 'global gas revolution'. Converted into liquefied natural gas (LNG), this new resource capacity primarily supplies international energy markets. In order to meet this demand, unconventional coal seam gas reserves have been rapidly developed, especially in the eastern states of Queensland and New South Wales, which has included controversial extraction techniques such as hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking' as it is commonly known (de Rijke 2018). Fracking introduced new types of extractive infrastructure into the industrial landscape thus far dominated by large-scale projects typically centralised in single locations. Given that this gas is not located in easily accessible reservoirs, this usually results in numerous wells being drilled over large areas. Along with all of the other infrastructure that is required

to transport and process coal seam gas—including gathering lines, compressor stations, well pad access tracks, and LNG processing and export plants—this means that the collective footprint of this industry is much larger and more reticular compared to other extractive industries, such as mining, which generally produces enclave spaces.

Papua New Guinea

PNG's resource journey has been somewhat similar to Australia's. Like Aboriginal people in Australia, Papua New Guineans had been extracting and utilising mineral resources for ceremonial and practical purposes for thousands of years. In the 1800s, the scale of extraction increased with European presence. When Captain John Moresby surveyed the southern coast of New Guinea in the early 1870s, he judged it was highly likely that the country contained an abundance of mineral resources. It was only a matter of years before a gold rush began, setting the future nation of PNG on a course towards resource dependency. By 1884 Britain had established a protectorate over the southeast portion of the country, which it called British New Guinea, but was later known as Papua, while the Germans claimed the northeast portion, which they called German New Guinea. Some 400 white miners had made their way from Port Moresby and north Australia to Sudest Island off the southern tip of Papua where gold was discovered in 1888, and then on to Misima Island in 1889 (Nelson 1976). In 1926 gold was found at Edie Creek in Morobe Province on the mainland, which led to the first major investment in the development of alluvial gold mining operations around Wau-Bululo in the 1930s (Waterhouse 2010).

The territories of Papua and New Guinea were combined under a single administration (or mandate) after the Second World War. In the following decades, the Australian administration came to the conclusion that the decolonisation of the territories could certainly be managed or even delayed, but definitely not prevented. Mindful that the future nation would need a stable economic base to support its independence, the administration set about mapping the natural resources of the country. In 1964 copper and gold deposits were discovered at Panguna on the island of Bougainville, and by 1967 an agreement to develop a mine had been reached and enacted by the House of Assembly. The mine was fully operational in 1972, just in time to help fund the territories' transition to independence in 1975, but not without some last-minute

concessions to avert Bougainville's secession from the nation (Denoon 2000). The Panguna mine was operated by Bougainville Copper Limited Pty Ltd, which was a subsidiary of Conzinc Riotinto of Australia. The mine mobilised the largest investment in any Australian territory at the time and was therefore pivotal to the decolonisation process.

The new independent state set about growing the economy and over the following decades several large-scale gold and copper mining operations were established for this purpose. The giant Ok Tedi mine was opened on the opposite side of the country in 1984, followed by the Misima gold mine in 1989, the Porgera gold mine in 1991, the Lihir gold mine in 1997, and later the Ramu nickel mine in 2012, along with various smaller operations. The growth of this sector played out against the backdrop of the crisis that was unfolding back on Bougainville where the social and environmental impacts of the Panguna mine sparked a full-scale civil war in 1989, which forced the closure of the mine and ultimately cost some 20,000 lives (Regan 2017). Panguna represents a very special case of state presence and abandonment. The loss of revenue from Panguna increased the urgency and necessity to open new mines to make up for the shortfall—and rather than reassess the role of resource extraction, the state renewed its commitment to extractive capitalism. For example, the closure of Panguna led to a series of decisions regarding Ok Tedi's continued operations, ultimately triggering what Stuart Kirsch (2014: 133) described as 'a slow motion environmental disaster' as a result of riverine tailings disposal.[7]

As in Australia, while mineral extraction continues to play an important role in the extractive sector in PNG, the petroleum industry is growing in scale and influence, having established itself in PNG shortly after it had developed in Australia, with the first oil exports from the Southern Highlands occurring in 1992. The most significant development to date has been the massive PNG LNG project that pipes gas extracted from Hela Province in the highlands down to the huge processing facilities on the outskirts of Port Moresby, where it is then shipped to international markets (see Main, Chapter 5, this volume).

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7   At other mines, like Misima and Lihir, deep sea tailings placement, or DSTP, has been regarded as an alternative, because tailings dams are vulnerable to earthquakes. Both riverine disposal and deep sea tailings placement practices are banned in Australia, but tailings dams are favoured because the country is much less prone to earthquakes.

Regimes of Resource Ownership

Looking at legal and policy frameworks in PNG and Australia, it would appear that Papua New Guineans are better placed to benefit from resource extraction than their Aboriginal Australian counterparts. This conventional wisdom is mostly based upon the differences between the legal regimes that operate in these countries in relation the customary ownership of land. In both countries, sovereignty over all minerals is vested in the state. In Australia landowners are the owners of the surface of the land and have no automatic right to the minerals that may be found underneath the surface.[8] While surface minerals are not mentioned in Australian legislation, in PNG customary landowners have an automatic legal right to harvest minerals *on* the surface of the land or in streams and rivers and many communities, including near large-scale resource extraction projects, engage in alluvial gold mining activities (Bainton et al. 2020).[9] In PNG the state grants leases to private companies to extract and develop these mineral resources, whereas in Australia this responsibility sits with the relevant subnational territories and state governments. In both jurisdictions access agreements must be negotiated with landowners, and compensation paid for disturbances. The major point of difference can be found in the legal recognition of customary interests in the land and the right to benefit from resource extraction. In PNG customary land rights are enshrined in the Constitution, which means that under the terms of the *Oil and Gas Act 1998* and the *Mining Act 1992*, the primary legislation governing resource extraction, customary landowners have a more direct stake in the development of any resources located within their ancestral territories. Resource companies are required to compensate the landowners for disturbance or damage to their land. They are also required to enter into benefit-sharing negotiations with landowner communities, and these communities can then expect to receive a range

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8   In Australia, petroleum and mineral resources are generally the property of the Crown. There was a time when the common law position stated that the minerals belonged to the landowner, and that the minerals were regarded as an inherent product of the land itself. Common law assumed that whoever owned the land also owed the soil below and the space above the surface. The qualification was the right of the Crown to extract gold and silver, characterised as 'royal minerals'. This common law position was circumscribed with the passing of specific legislation that vested the ownership of minerals contained within the soil of private landholdings in the Crown (Hepburn 2011).

9   Section 9(2) of the *Mining Act 1992* says that: 'Any natural person who is a citizen may carry out non-mechanized mining of alluvial minerals on land owned by that natural person, provided that the mining is carried out safely and in accordance with the *Mining (Safety) Act 1977* and that the land is not the subject of a tenement (other than an exploration licence).'

of benefits from these projects (Filer 2012; Bainton and Jackson 2020). This is not to dismiss the tensions which arise between different groups with competing claims to the same areas of land, or the problems associated with 'mobilising' customary land for development (Filer 2019). However, the legal recognition of customary land rights in PNG shifts the question from recognition of those rights, to identifying specific groups in possession of those rights and the subsequent capture of benefits.

In the Australian context, the *Native Title Act 1993* dictates that Aboriginal people must prove a connection to their ancestral lands in order to exercise their interests, which is a rather difficult task for many groups given the onerous legal hurdles associated with native title (Weiner and Glaskin 2007; Glaskin 2017). This situation is compounded by the history of Aboriginal dispossession, including the founding fiction of terra nullius, which essentially held that the continent was 'no man's land', and the fact that so many groups were forcibly removed from their land to reserves and missions. Other groups were massacred en masse in the frontier wars, which makes it doubly difficult for their descendants to demonstrate lines of ancestral continuity. As Sarah Holcombe and Gareth Lewis discuss in their chapters for this volume, this early history of violence and dispossession set the tone for the relationship between Aboriginal communities, resource companies and the Australian state, and continues to impact the ways that some Aboriginal groups in Australia relate to the state both as an idea and as a system. Aboriginal groups who are granted recognition of their traditional ownership of specific areas are entitled to the right to negotiate with any entities seeking to develop the minerals resources on their land, but it doesn't grant them veto rights. The exception to this rule can be found in the earlier *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976*, which grants veto rights to owners of 'Aboriginal Land' in the Northern Territory. Similar to PNG, in some cases this can result in negotiated agreements for the provision of specific benefits and payments (O'Faircheallaigh 2016).

The question of ownership extends beyond land and resources. Following global neoliberal trends, the Australian government has steadily reduced its stock of state-owned enterprises, which are sometimes termed 'government business enterprises'. While the government has retained ownership of various energy and infrastructure companies, there are no state-owned extractive companies operating in Australia. In PNG, the processes of privatisation have been less extensive. The state has maintained

ownership of companies providing essential services and established several enterprises to consolidate and manage its interests in the business of hard rock mining and petroleum development.[10] Among other things, this has enabled the state to become a major partner in the PNG LNG project, and to assume ownership of the Ok Tedi and Tolukuma mines. However, the acquisition of these mines took place in rather special circumstances and should not be confused with the government's statutory right to acquire a minority stake in joint ventures with foreign investors. While the latter may sometimes appear to outside observers as a 'commitment to nationalisation', it is better interpreted as a commitment to an option for 'participation'. The growing public and political discourse about the need to actually nationalise the resource sector is partly influenced by ideas about resource dependency that were prominent in the early independence period (Amarshi et al. 1979), and continuing concerns about the ways that powerful foreign states and companies maintain their economic and political advantage by exploiting the raw materials of less developed countries. There is a popular expectation (in some quarters at least) that the state should acquire ownership of all resource projects so that PNG can reverse these trends and reap a greater share of the financial benefits derived from the exploitation of its natural resources. But this pathway to development also entails a fundamental conflict of interest as the state becomes both a shareholder and a regulator of these projects. In the case of the Ok Tedi Mine, the state made regulatory decisions that sought to minimise operational expenditures and maximise economic returns as both a shareholder and a tax collector. Many of these decisions were made at the expense of people living downstream from the mine. This kind of situation emphasises the very selective presence of the state and embeds the state in a web of conflicting interests. This includes conflicts emerging from the state's dual role as a regulator and an investor, and extends to internal conflicts between different state functions and institutions.

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10   In 1975 the Mineral Resources Development Company (MRDC) was established as a 100 per cent state-owned company. Originally established to acquire and manage state and landowner interests in mining and petroleum projects, including management of equity funds for landowner companies, in 2007 the state's equity interests were then transferred to Petromin Holdings Limited, and the focus of MRDC was limited to landowner interests. In 2015, the government passed the Kumul Minerals Act, consolidating the state's oil, gas and mining interests, and Petromin was restructured into two companies—Kumul Mineral Holdings Limited and Kumul Petroleum Holdings Limited.

Resource Development

While both countries can be considered resource-rich nations, PNG is often described as suffering from the so-called 'resource curse' or the 'paradox of plenty', which generally holds that countries with an abundance of natural resources tend to experience less economic growth and worse development outcomes (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017).[11] This term is less often used to describe the Australian experience of extractive-led development, although some commentators would certainly not agree that Australia has avoided the resource curse (i.e. Cleary 2011). In PNG, the curse is often thought to be linked to faulty and ineffective governance, or 'maladministration' (Burton 1998), where the state is unable to curb the excesses of the extractive industries or convert natural resources into sustainable forms of development. Anthropologists and other social scientists working in the country who have written about the 'resource curse' have generally focused on the ways in which it is manifest through increased social conflicts and environmental impacts and the forms of structural violence that are created and intensified by large-scale resource extraction projects (see Filer 1990; Haley and May 2007; Banks 2008; Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017; Allen 2018). In Australia, on the other hand, analytical focus is usually directed at the macro-scale, which might go some way towards explaining why the country is not generally thought to be afflicted by this curse. But when we shift our focus to the local scale, especially to the Indigenous estate, the picture begins to look rather different and in many cases pre-existing forms of discrimination and structurally unjust forms of political economy have been exacerbated by resource extraction (Langton and Mazel 2008; Altman and Martin 2009). It now becomes clear that the negative force of the resource curse should not be understood as a purely economic issue, but it can 'also be portrayed in political, cultural, or environmental terms, which means that the resource curse may have several dimensions in the same country or region' (Filer and Macintyre 2006: 217).

The presence of the resource curse can be reconceptualised in terms of the absence of development that resource extraction promises to deliver—yet another demonstration of the absent presence of the state. Continuing with the metaphor of Godot is apposite, as some communities have

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11   The concept of the resource curse was first elaborated by British economist Richard Auty (1993). See also Karl (1997) and Ross (2003). See also Ross' (2015) examination of a relationship between 'resource curse' and state governance.

maintained their enthusiasm for extractive-led development despite the known impacts of extraction and the fact that the anticipated benefits, or the government and the developers, have simply never arrived. Many of these communities find themselves anxiously 'waiting for company' (Dwyer and Minnegal 1998). Several authors in this volume describe situations where communities are waiting for certain forms of development, which, like Godot, ultimately remain unknown and uncertain. In both national settings this absence can be partly understood as result of the failure of the state to bring 'development' (economic opportunities and services) to many rural areas. In the Australian context this reflects the extent to which most Aboriginal people have been marginalised from the mainstream economy and the opportunities enjoyed by the majority of the population and the desire for self-determination (and the ways in which resource extraction is imagined as a possible pathway to such ends). In PNG this enthusiasm is expressed through a particular set of beliefs, which Colin Filer has called 'the ideology of landownership'. This ideology generally holds that the road to development can be found in the compensation and benefits that are provided by resource companies to customary landowners in return for the extraction of the natural resources located within their ancestral lands (Filer 1997). Of course, commitment to this ideology does not mean that people are not wary of the impacts of extraction, but it does highlight a particular expression of local sovereignty and understanding of development. In both settings the prospect of resource extraction has generated strong contestation between groups who want these activities to proceed in the hope that this will improve their circumstances and enhance their autonomy, and those who remain unconvinced by the 'value proposition' of extractive capitalism.

In Australia this resistance is often connected to the broader Aboriginal land rights movement, but it also finds expression among a coalition of environmental activists and pastoralists in, for example, the 'Lock the Gate Alliance' that seeks to prevent further fracking operations (de Rijke 2013; and Espig, Chapter 6, this volume). Enthusiasm and resistance at the local level are also mirrored at the national level. Back in 2017 when he was still the Treasurer of Australia, Scott Morrison, who is now the country's prime minister, brought a lump of coal into the House of Representatives as a political stunt to indicate the government's support for the coal industry, coal-fired power stations and a carbon-intensive economy (Murphy 2017). Morrison's support for the extractive industries reached new heights in 2019 when he signalled his intent to clamp

down on individuals and organisations that protest against the impacts of extraction.[12] The government's position has generated much unrest, and in the wake of the 2019 and 2020 mega fires across large parts of Australia, there have been increased calls to stop all new coal mining developments to help prevent further overheating of the globe. The sense of the failure of the state to respond to the emergency caused by the fires was made worse by the prime minister's initial absence, and then his widely debated 'inappropriate' and 'inadequate' presence in the affected areas (Brett 2020). While the current conservative government in Australia wants to remove the barriers to expand global extractive investment in Australia, and has proposed a 'gas-fired recovery' to lift Australia out its COVID-19 induced economic recession, the PNG government has sent a more nationalistic message about containing mineral wealth within the country. In his 2019 'manifesto' to the nation, the current prime minister of PNG, James Marape, pledged that he would 'take back PNG' and turn the country into the 'richest black Christian nation on earth'. While these political slogans encapsulated a very broad agenda for reform (and represent a direct response to past government failings), his manifesto contained specific commitments to ensure that Papua New Guineans will obtain a much larger share of the benefits arising from exploitation of the nation's natural resources, positioning extraction at the forefront of the future prosperity of the nation. These sentiments are best encapsulated in the tagline used by the government regulator of the industry, the Mineral Resources Authority: 'minerals for life'. However, in the event, the reality of extractive capitalism frequently belies the promises of 'resource development'. At this point, the experiences of customary landowners in PNG begin to converge with the experiences of traditional owners in Australia.

Implicating the State in the Extraction of Resources

The state is often perceived by different groups as habitually failing to be present in meaningful ways in resource extraction contexts. Of course, it can also be argued that this failure has occurred in many 'remote' areas

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12   In a press release titled 'Australian mining: Building a better future', the Minerals Council of Australia (the peak representative body of the Australian mining industry) welcomed this political support (MCA 2019).

where resource projects are not present. And, in the PNG context, the state's absence is just as marked in areas where logging companies or palm oil companies have large-scale operations as it is in areas where mining or petroleum companies operate (e.g. Tammisto 2016). Nevertheless, in many cases, including a number of examples presented in this volume, the state is perceived as being more present for some groups and less present for others, raising questions about the state's complex and multifaceted obligations towards local communities, foreign investors and broadly conceived goals of national development. In both PNG and Australia it is common to hear complaints from different quarters that the state has abandoned its responsibilities in relation to resource extraction; overlooked or overridden its primary duties to its citizens; forgotten that some portions of the population even exist; left corporate entities and local communities to their own devices; that it is working against the growth of the resources sector and blocking industrial progress or, on the other hand, that it is too closely aligned with the interests of multinational capital, or has outsourced its responsibilities to the private sector, and so on.

Rather than trying to unpack all these conflicting expectations and critiques, it is useful to first consider what is significant and unique about resource extraction and how the state is implicated, experienced and brought into being through these activities. Several structural features of resource extraction are important in this regard. First of all, states reinforce the primacy of their sovereign authority through their exclusive claim over the mineral resources in the land. The state's supreme authority is symbolically upheld through formal legislative frameworks that govern the ownership and extraction of these resources. States open up land to facilitate development, and in some contexts, where states are struggling under macroeconomic constraints, the revenues generated by resource extraction allow states to continue functioning as states. Perversely, in countries like PNG, economic dependence upon extraction, inaction and limited capacity also weaken the ability of the state to exercise its sovereign power, contributing to the experience of a 'resource curse'. Similar charges have been made against the Australian state, which remains heavily dependent on mineral exports and has been captured by the interests of the industry at all jurisdictional levels. Second, large-scale resource extraction generates profound transformations. It extends capitalist development into places where the capitalist economy is not institutionalised or places where it is characterised by petty commodity production or agrarian

capitalism, such as the development of large-scale mines in frontier zones in PNG. In these instances, it introduces a form of capitalism that is characterised by accumulation on a large scale combined with significant forms of dispossession and disruption. It is not uncommon for conflicts between local and national interests to play out in those arenas, and for national political leaders to invoke the 'greater national good' to justify locally experienced impacts of extraction and the creation of 'sacrifice zones'. Third, large-scale resource extraction also changes the dynamics of existing capitalist arrangements by introducing new forms of capitalism into areas that are already incorporated into the global capitalist economy, such as the development of coal seam gas operations in the pastoral regions of Australia. It ultimately affects the geography of capitalist development and accumulation in ways that are related to the nature and geography of natural resources, and the geography of prior political and economic arrangements. And as we discuss below, these structural features point to a temporal dimension as the state's presence or absence alternates through different phases of the resource project cycle. As the authors in this volume show, presence often turns to absence once approvals and licences have been granted.

The rapid and unruly socioeconomic change generated by these projects constitute forms of immanent development in the sense conveyed by Cowen and Shenton (1996). Under these conditions, there is a heightened need for state-systems to manage or offset the effects of these transformations—and it is here that we frequently encounter the absence of the state. Indeed, local communities often demand an increase in the presence of the state and regard resource extraction as a way of securing state services, including law and order, health and education services, and public infrastructure. But in lieu of a more active role, states have tended to delegate greater regulatory responsibility and discretion to resource companies—which may constitute a form of 'indirect rule', where the state is anchored in project locations through the delegation of its functions to extractive corporations.

Large-scale resource extraction is also implicated in a range of intentional interventions that are geared towards particular ends. These interventions are mainly directed towards the management or governance of people, policies, landscapes and resources in ways that secure resource investments and extend extractive capitalism, as well as other sociopolitical projects. Some of these interventions are designed to secure local support for these ventures, which can take the form of community development programs

and investment in other forms of 'intentional development' that are designed to mitigate the immanent processes associated with resource extraction (Banks et al. 2017). Here we begin to see a convergence of interest between states and private companies, both in terms of function (as companies assume state responsibilities) and style (creeping bureaucratisation and managerialism). In this respect, extractive companies are involved in a form of 'trusteeship' that is more typically associated with the state (Cowan and Shenton 1996). By assuming some responsibilities for the local population, resource companies also play a role in defining aspects of a desirable future for that population. More importantly, evidence from both countries suggests that resource companies invest considerable energy and resources into steering populations towards that future, framing it in terms of 'progress' and enhanced personal and communal opportunities.

States also seek specific goals through resource extraction. In most jurisdictions, including PNG and Australia, the state holds sovereignty over mineral resources and notionally claims that these resources will be used for the collective benefit of the population. It is important to recall that states are not passive custodians of the common wealth. They may intervene through policies and legislation that enable the expansion of extractive capitalism within their national territory, or they may seek to constrain extractive activities in certain areas, such as conservation zones. The state issues permits to companies to develop these resources, and it is expected to perform a regulatory function to ensure that these activities occur within prescribed parameters. The state may be a direct financier or shareholder in some resource operations, meaning that in addition to its regulatory role it has a direct stake in the commercial success of individual ventures (which can constitute a contradictory role). And in many instances the state—through the relevant branches of government—will enter into various agreements with the parties to these projects and make specific commitments as part of the overall compensation and benefits sharing process.

There can also be an inter-state dimension to resource extraction, both in terms of international trade in resources, and attracting and managing foreign direct investment, as well as using extraction and trade in resources to achieve economic and political aims in international arenas as well as domestically. For example, the complete absence of the PNG state at the Ramu nickel mine in PNG has opened up a space for the Chinese state (as the owner of the company developing this resource)

to exercise forms of 'soft power' within this sovereign state as part of its (somewhat unsuccessful) attempt to retrofit this project into its Belt and Road Initiative (Smith 2018). Although states pursue a range of political and economic goals through resource extraction, these may not always align with corporate interests, and it is for this reason that states sometimes grant tax holidays, stabilisation agreements, and subsidies, or provide supporting infrastructure to reduce these differences and make certain investments more attractive, allowing capital to accumulate in some areas and not others. The general point is that in the context of resource extraction we find that the state is thoroughly implicated, but it is also selectively present—at different times, and in different places, it will be more or less present and more or less aligned with the interests of different groups. Depending upon the vantage point, the state will cast a longer or shorter shadow and its presence or its absence will be felt in different ways.

Encountering the Absent Present State

For ease of navigation we have organised the chapters in this volume in terms of regional focus, connected via the two chapters concerned with gas extraction in PNG and Australia. The final chapter by John Burton and Claire Levacher introduces New Caledonia as a point of comparison to PNG and Australia. They explore whether the notion of 'absent presence' can be applied to a national context where the state is of a different kind to that in PNG and Australia, and most notably, as they argue, where it cannot absent itself. The volume concludes with a short afterword reflecting on the uncertainty of the state.

Between them, the contributing authors discuss cases of proposed mining ventures, existing large-scale mining operations and the extraction of natural gas (both coal seam gas and LNG). While these two national settings are distinctive in their own right, several interconnecting themes can be found, including particular types of engagement with the state, and specific experiences of the absence, the presence and the absent presence of the state in extractive contexts. Although these three phenomena are found in each, they have different weight in every chapter.

The most prominent theme running through the volume, and the most common way in which the absence of the state is manifest, is the failure of the state to fulfil its responsibilities (both stated and perceived). These

specific failures, silences and expressions of unreliability create a range of effects that evidence the presence of an absent state. Although the details of these effects differ between the cases, state effects are nevertheless present in all the chapters and constitute a second core interconnecting theme. These two themes speak to spatial and temporal dimensions of the absent presence of the state, and the materiality and morality of this absence—all of which are explored in the remainder of this introductory chapter, and in the chapters that follow.

Failure as Presence

In one way or another, each chapter speaks to the responsibilities of the state in extractive contexts, and the state's performance against those obligations. In democratic theory, the modern state legitimates itself through a simple bargain: citizens pay tax and agree to obey its laws, and in return, the state protects its people and keeps them safe. The inability of states to keep that pact in respect of resource extraction appears to be increasing, especially in Australia where commitment to the coal industry will exacerbate climate change and constitutes an existential threat to the security of the nation (Brett 2020). Among other things, state responsibilities encompass regulatory oversight of extractive processes; protection from human rights abuses and other forms of harm; the monitoring and management of the social and environmental risks and impacts of extraction; implementation of agreements and other commitments including the distribution of benefits to project area landowners, and the delivery of services and programs or the construction of public infrastructure; participation in governance processes surrounding resource extraction including involvement in forums, working groups and reporting initiatives; the general maintenance of 'order' in these extractive sites; and so on. These and others are intertwined and actively negotiated in the context of resource extraction.

While failures of the state can be taken as a demonstration of state absence or impotence, they can also be reconceptualised and experienced as a form of presence, what we term an absent presence. Such failure often informs experiences and engagement with the state, and these failures are often revealed through a series of state effects. Each of the contributing authors observes moments where the state is encountered through a series of lacks

and problems, unreliability, ineffectiveness or deception. These encounters are neither straightforward nor uniform, and paradoxically, these failures and absences often lead to an enhanced sense of state presence.

Locating the state in contemporary resource extraction contexts is not always a simple task. A number of contributors describe instances of what David Szablowski (2007) calls the 'selective absence of the state', or what others in this volume have inversely termed a 'selective' or a 'strategic presence'. For example, both Gareth Lewis and Sarah Holcombe explain how the legal environment in Australia's Northern Territory allows companies to operate with minimum regulatory oversight. Lewis describes the systematic marginalisation of Aboriginal people around the McArthur River Mine and argues that, from a local Aboriginal perspective, the state has essentially absented itself from the project, failing to enforce existing legislation designed to protect the rights and interests of Aboriginal people. Holcombe uses a case study of a junior mining company seeking to operate on Aboriginal lands to show how the state has strategically acted to pursue extractive capitalism, and how the state has been significantly more present in its role as an enabler for the industry than a protector for local Aboriginal communities and environments. In a similar vein, Martin Espig describes a 'partially absent' state in the context of coal seam gas developments in western Queensland, where the rapid development of multiple gas projects outpaced the regulating departments of the state and pushed them beyond their capacity once developments fully commenced. These 'runaway processes' (Eriksen 2018) reveal the contradictions at the heart of contemporary extractive capitalism, and the double bind that encompasses the state, suspended between short-term growth imperatives and long-term goals of stability and sustainability.

When PNG gained independence from Australia, 'many of the new state's claims to legitimacy were based on the promise that all Papua New Guineans could expect development to come their way' (Jorgensen 2007: 58). The inability to deliver upon this promise has seriously eroded the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of many citizens, which partly explains why so many rural communities hope that extractive companies might come along and fill this gap, and the willingness of the government to allow this to happen. In PNG and Australia, the state habitually reduces delivery of services around mining projects. As resource companies 'have become increasingly involved in "community development" roles, often promoting the newly acquired corporate language of "sustainability" and "partnerships"' (Banks 2008: 24), this extended corporate role often results in the withdrawal

of the state from some of its functions and responsibilities, in what is effectively a privatisation of state functions. For instance, in the Lihir islands, Nicholas Bainton and Martha Macintyre have observed how the state has consistently failed to fulfil its commitments under the terms of the agreements that it has signed for the development and operation of the gold mine. The gap created by absent state actors has produced a far more intense relationship between the community and the company characterised by 'mutual incomprehension' and antagonism, and a very high degree of local dependency (Bainton 2021). In the absence of the state, the community have 'manoeuvred' the company into the space ordinarily occupied by the state, forcing the company to provide social services and infrastructure that are the responsibility of the government.

Alex Golub's historical anthropology of the Porgera mine reminds us that we cannot take collective actors like 'the mine', 'the state' or 'the landowners' for granted, and that an accurate account of history must also focus on networks of people who appear in different times and different situations as personating one or the other of these entities. From this vantage point, we can begin to really grasp the interpenetration between collective actors and how the absence or the presence of the state is experienced over time.

In her work on kinship and law, Marilyn Strathern theorised the differences between 'categorical' and 'interpersonal' relations, demonstrating that while these different relations animate each other, these types of relationships are not always present at the same time (Strathern 2005). In PNG, the state exercises a substantial categorical presence through its legislative and permitting powers, but this may not equate to a relationship. Emilia Skrzypek describes how the absence of an interpersonal relationship between community members and state actors at the Frieda River Project in the remote Sepik region led local landowners to feel like they could never really get to know the state. Instead, they invested their hopes and energy in the relationships they developed with company personnel, which they came to consider as more important, more consequential and more effective in pursuit of their development aspirations. Not enacted through relations, and not made visible through delivery of services, the state constitutes an ambiguous, uncertain and absent presence at Frieda River where local communities look to the company to fulfil what would traditionally be considered roles and responsibilities of the state, and to facilitate the missing relationship with state representatives. Across the mountain range, at the PNG LNG project, local landowners staged an

attack on project facilities in an attempt to use the company as a proxy to get the attention of the government and voice their anger over unpaid royalties and unfulfilled promises of development. Michael Main argues that their anger was really directed at the state and not the company, who they regarded as 'a pawn in a larger game of corruption that was being played out by various levels of government and the judiciary'. Other chapters also speak to the lack of interaction between communities and state representatives and the effects of these non-existent relationships.

While the chapters by Skrzypek and Main describe instances where the state fails to assert effective presence, Jo-Anne Everingham and her co-authors describe an instance where the state did assert a presence but failed to maintain it. Their chapter documents the changing presence of the state at the large Century zinc mine in the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Queensland since the negotiation of the Gulf Communities Agreement began in 1992. Like many resource extraction projects in Australia, the Century Mine evidences the tensions between the state's responsibilities to ensure economic development on the one hand, and the well-being of regional populations, especially Aboriginal communities, on the other hand. The negotiation of the Gulf Communities Agreement was the high point of the mine; it set out a development vision that aimed to reduce welfare dependency among Aboriginal people in the region. A range of state actors engaged intensively with Aboriginal groups at the outset of the project to help establish the various representative committees and bodies that would form the institutional framework of the agreement and play a central role in implementing its objectives. But as priorities changed within the Government of Queensland, combined with considerable turnover in government personnel during the operational years of the mine, the state's actions were often at a remove from the region, important commitments were not fulfilled and local dependency upon the mine increased. The authors of this chapter argue that rather than seeing such resource contexts as 'stateless spaces', where the state plays a limited role, they can be understood as spaces where the state takes 'action at a distance' to pursue its ends indirectly, through the actions of others, in this case the mining company.

State Effects

In mapping the effects and the presence of the state, anthropologists have generally looked for signs of administrative bureaucracies, regulation, service provision and other technologies of governance that support larger order-making agendas. Thinking of the state in terms of these order-making functions leads us to consider those places where the state has been unable to impose its order. Golub's historical account of law and order in Enga Province, provides a case in point. The presence of gold, and in later years the development of the Porgera mine, altered the history of policing in the Porgera valley, challenging the state's monopoly over violence, and law and order. The understaffed and under-resourced police force contrasts with the company's well-resourced private security force. However, as Golub explains, the picture is more complicated as many police officers were also members of the mine's security team, and the latter often supplied resources to the former. As a result, law and order has gradually been recast in terms of 'security', as order is upheld by privately contracted security firms.

The limited presence of the state in those rural areas where mines are often located has turned these projects into new sites of 'governmentality', which can be defined as the ensemble of disciplining processes, institutions and tactics that attempt to shape human conduct—or how conduct is governed (Dean 1999). As companies are forced into closer contact with surrounding communities they often assume some of the responsibilities of the state including the provision of social services and infrastructure, development and implementation of programs, and greater levels of monitoring and self-regulation. In assuming some degree of responsibility for classic state functions, resource companies shape local desires and configure habits, aspirations and beliefs. They may act with a notional 'will to improve' (Li 2007) the local population, but they do so in ways that are rationally calculated towards the larger goals of extractive capitalism. In doing so, the actions of resource companies constitute these locales as authoritative and powerful, as different agents are assembled with specific powers, and particular domains—like lease land areas, group identification or the receipt of benefits—are constituted as governable and administrable (Dean 1999: 29). As sites of governmentality, extractive projects produce 'extractive subjectivities'. This occurs by reworking forms of exclusion and inclusion in ways that serve the interests of extractive companies, by reshaping lifeworlds in areas targeted for investment, and

by transforming state–society–market relations, with companies assuming state-like functions and subjecting them to capitalist logics (Fredricksen and Himley 2019: 59). This ultimately results in new 'extractive subjects' coming into being.

These new forms of governmentality often expose the shortcomings of the state, and the inability of companies to meet local expectations for development. In Australia, Espig describes instances where, let down by the state and increasingly distrustful of its ability to regulate and monitor the industry and associated risks, citizens stepped in and took it upon themselves to hold companies accountable for their actions. This is representative of a process addressed by several other authors in this volume, where the absence of the state incentivises people to deal directly with the company, facilitating new forms of relations, interdependencies and interactions. As the state retreats from certain spaces, companies and community members can become 'responsiblised' as they assume greater levels of responsibility for managing various health and social risks related to these developments. Drawing from the work of Ulrich Beck (2009: 193), Espig argues that these runaway developments have resulted in a situation where 'no individual or institution seems to be held specifically accountable for anything'. This resonates with a point made elsewhere by Filer and his co-authors that in PNG, and from the perspective of the mining industry, the resource curse takes the form of a 'responsibility vacuum', which makes partnerships with host governments and local communities 'difficult, dangerous or downright impossible' (2008: 175).

State effects also assume a material form. For example, the original agreements for the Lihir gold mine contained a commitment by the state and the company to build and maintain a road around the main island where the mine is located. After some 20 years of mining operations, the road remained unsealed. While the company eventually took steps to seal half of the road (fulfilling part of its original commitment), the state has not fulfilled its part. The materiality of the road, and indeed the mine itself and the various other pieces of public infrastructure that are promised as benefits of extraction, invokes the dynamic relationship between the presence and absence of the state. Penny Harvey makes a similar observation in her ethnography of roads in the Peruvian Andes. She engages the state ethnographically through the material 'traces' and 'effects' which open out, rather than close down, further perspectives on the structures and practices through which specific modes of state power

are effected and reproduced (Harvey 2005: 131). Like the Andean roads, the local Lihir ring road produces numerous state effects. The road is a contested space. It has become the site of political struggle between the company and the state as they both shift the responsibility for completion. It is a point of conflict between the various levels of government who are signatories to the original agreement, and it is a source of acrimony as the community demand that the company fill the gap left by the state and the potholes left by its trucks. As 'state effect', the road provides a complex material site through which people experience and negotiate their relationships with power (ibid.: 134). Standing on the incomplete road, the state then appears in a multivalent form—as the object of people's desire, and the source of bitterness and the feeling of abandonment.

A Multivalent Presence

Anthropologists often study states from the 'margins' (Das and Poole 2004), or indirectly through the prism of nation and nationalism and related discourses (e.g. Herzfeld 1987; Handler 1988). Ethnographers tend to conduct much less fieldwork in the 'halls of power', where state political power is articulated and directly wielded.[13] In a geographical sense, resource extraction sites are often peripheral places, distant from metropolitan centres where state power is concentrated, adding to the complex task of locating the state in extractive contexts. However, the processes of resource extraction occur both at the points of extraction as well as in major capital cities and industrial hubs, where companies are headquartered in close proximity to financial markets and the functions of the state that enable extractive capitalism. The various processes and effects of extraction also take place between these spaces, and beyond.

Many of the communities who reside around resource extraction projects, or who desire or fear them, inhabit 'marginal spaces' characterised by an absence of roads, schools, hospitals and other services that are signs of the presence of the state. Thus, the geographical distance often translates into physical and moral absence of the state and can be used to contextualise specific kinds of state behaviour, such as the withdrawal of government functions. As the contributing authors show, the state as a macro-actor is rarely held responsible for its promises and commitments in extractive contexts, which is partly due to the combination of physical distance and

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13   Exceptions from the region include Santos da Costa (2018).

ideas that circulate about the 'natural' marginality of these places and the people who inhabit them, especially Indigenous people. This also reinforces the value of thinking about the nature of the state as a conglomerate of actors and institutions, rather than a collective actor. Skrzypek recalls a government representative explicitly telling community members at the Frieda River Project: 'Before, you all lived in the bush and you had nothing. The government is too far away, it will not help you. If it was not for the company you would still be in the bush with no development, nothing. If you don't support the company, you will go back'.

The geographic distance between centres of national and regional governance and the often-remote sites of extraction means that communities in those locations find themselves subjected to decisions and policies made away from local contexts. Lewis describes the experience of those communities affected by the McArthur River Mine who live a long way from centres of state power. 'Absent decision makers' have long 'wielded power from afar', which has contributed to their experience of the state as a distant and disinterested institution on the one hand, and as a powerful and malevolent presence on the other hand. He adds the neoliberal state to a long list of 'broken promise men' who have altered the course of the mining project and Aboriginal people's lives over time. An even more extreme case of wielding power from afar is described by Burton and Levacher in the context of New Caledonia where the industry was directly impacted by events and policy changes decided in France, literally halfway around the world. The task of locating the state in resource extraction contexts gets even more complicated if we consider other kinds of peripheralities at play, particularly those associated with asymmetries of power, representation and decision making experienced by Indigenous people. Taking stock of legislative systems, procedures and effects, both Lewis and Holcombe locate Australia's Aboriginal communities on a kind of political periphery, drawing links between geographic remoteness and a history of violence and political and socioeconomic peripheralisation which combine to push Aboriginal communities to marginalised and compromised positions vis-à-vis the state and multinational corporations.

The temporal dimensions of absent presence also emerge across the chapters. Writing about the temporality of the government in PNG, Dalsgaard (2013) describes how the state is made present in time, for example through rhythms, schedules and engagements. In both national contexts discussed here, the state as a regulator influences temporalities of resource extraction projects and is present in time through, for example,

specific initiatives and interventions (as discussed by Golub), negotiated agreements (as illustrated by Everingham et al. and Bainton and Macintyre); and changes in the regulatory and governance environment, including those related to the critical question of national sovereignty, within which the industry operates (Burton and Levacher). The presence of the state in time can also be experienced through its failure to be present at a time when this presence is expected. For example by delaying the distribution of royalties to affected communities (as discussed by Main), or where sluggish state processes are outpaced by a fast-moving industry, increasing potentially risky gaps in industry permitting and oversight (as elaborated by Espig).

While these examples show how the state can be made present in time, it is also present (or absent) over time. Most of the chapters in this volume take a broader historical view to show how the state was present (and absent) prior to extraction, and how and if this changed, or remained the same, in the context of extraction. Thus the presence and the absence of the state should be considered across the entire mine life cycle. For example, Everingham and her co-authors also trace the government's receding involvement over time at the Century Mine. And at the contentious PNG LNG project, Main locates experiences of the state in a local ontology that interprets the state's action and inaction in terms of ancestral prophecies of abundance and a historical trajectory of decline. The spatial and temporal configuration and experience of such encounters with the state, and its arbitrary exercise of power, can also be thought of as maps of frustration or horizons of disillusioned expectations. These are spaces where the legal claims and commitments of the state—and the assurances of the state—become unsettled by the practices of state representatives and government departments and their emissaries. Where state-systems and the actions of its representatives and agencies fail to dissolve the tension, people may take it upon themselves to address the dissonance.

Lewis provides one of the most 'colourful' examples of local protest over the failure of the government to make itself present in meaningful ways. In order to voice their opposition to the McArthur River Mine and gain support for their cause, community members launched an emotive exhibition of photographs and artwork in Darwin. The exhibition drew attention to the intrinsic cultural and spiritual value of their land, seemingly disregarded by the state in its ardent support for the mine. Their artwork stood as a moral critique of the state's absence, or its uneven presence, and the effects of state sponsored extractive capitalism. In a similar vein, Main

shows how Huli landowners attempted to hold the government responsible for unfulfilled promises of benefits and development at the PNG LNG project. He argues that local landowners have interpreted a range of events and processes, including natural phenomena such as a recent devastating earthquake, as a direct effect of what they regard as the 'immoral absence of the state'. He writes that Huli people saw the immorality of the state as a 'material threat to the future aspirations of Huli' and their prophetic entitlement to benefit from their resources.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter we have claimed that resource extraction provides a useful starting point for studying the state and its effects. To paraphrase Clifford Geertz (1973: 22) who once argued that anthropologists don't simply study villages, 'they study *in* villages', anthropologists do well to not only study resource projects, but can also study the state from the particular vantage point of resource extraction. The ethnographic examples from PNG and Australia offered here illustrate the illegibility and obscurity of the state. From the perspective of these resource extraction sites, the state is often barely perceptible. It is bamboozling, deceptive, dangerous and two-faced, self-interested and sometimes completely unknowable. Material and ideological aspects of the state are mutually reinforcing in these resource domains, where the state looms as an eternally incomplete and uncertain project having to constantly reproduce itself.

The chapters in this volume show that although states might be imagined, or contested, they have real effects in people's lives, especially in the settings described here. Where gaps emerge as a result of the failure of the state to enact its responsibilities or, to paraphrase Skrzypek, where dissonance appears in the networks which inevitably emerge around resource extraction projects, something or someone will either choose or be persuaded to fill this space. An anthropology of absent presence which we propose here offers a unique perspective on the state in relation to resource extraction. Not just because it captures the gaps and unruliness that is thought to reside in resource frontier zones, but because it suggests that incompleteness, partial presence, and frustrated forms of order-making are a necessary entailment of the state and the way it is experienced and encountered in the context of resource extraction.

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