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Mining Boundaries and Local Land Narratives (*tidibe*) in the Udabe Valley, Central Province

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When was entification?

Papua New Guineans are currently experiencing, either directly or indirectly, widespread operations of resource extraction from their lands. In places throughout the country we find entities such as ‘clans’ or ‘councils of chiefs’ adopted as part of the process of people becoming ‘landowners’ and receiving various forms of ‘compensation’ or rent. Before the extensive advent of resource extraction, these entities – clans or councils of chiefs – often did not locally exist (see Filer 1997, 1998; Jorgensen n.d.a., n.d.b.; Sturzenhofecker 1994). Recently, Ernst (1999) has discussed these matters among the Onabasulu. He refers to the local adoption of ‘clans’ as a process of ‘entification’: ‘the process of making “entities” or things from what have been contingent categories’ (Ernst 1999: 89). Ernst suggests this is a new process, one initiated by mining companies and other resource extractors, whereby local people are required to transform themselves into (landowning) entities.

There is an important question, though, as to whether entification is ‘new’? Is the process, as Ernst describes it, ‘new’, or rather are the circumstances in which it occurs ‘new’ and striking? As is well documented in