

## Global and Local Contexts

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In 1997 two striking disputes concerning property relations and human rights preoccupied the Papua New Guinea press. They would appear to have little in common. The ‘Hagahai blood saga’, widely reported in the international press and debated on the internet, pointed to global interests in Papua New Guinea’s resources created (in this instance) by medical technology. The second case,<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, concerned a revival of local practices in exchange and marriage arrangements, and the relevance of traditional values in a modern world. However, much is to be gained from taking the two together. Each throws light on questions about ownership and how people construct rationales for their claims. And together they raise questions about the contexts we create for understanding – whether as contestants, adjudicators or observers. What I emphasise here are contexts created out of what we choose to make of general or universal as opposed to particular or local relevance. The one case attracted international attention, while the other appeared of local (national) concern; but does this mean that the former is of more *general* interest than the latter?

The cases differ in an important respect. Information about the first comes from numerous published reports and papers, anthropological and otherwise; reference to the Hagahai may be longer or shorter, but frequently they are cited in the context of discussion explicitly aimed at issues which arise from other concerns as well. The story ‘belongs’, we could say, to an international