



Disasters in Popular Cultures

Giovanni Gugg, Elisabetta Dall'Ò, Domenica Borriello (Eds.)

The Papua New Guinea Liquefied Natural Gas project and the moral decay of the universe

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Abstract

Ten years ago one of the world's largest resource extraction projects, the Papua New Guinea Liquefied Natural Gas (PNG LNG) project, began construction in the highlands of PNG. This project was established in a social setting of great cultural complexity, and a geological setting of great instability. The Huli landowners of the gas resource viewed the project as the realisation of a prophecy that promised an era of great wealth and abundance. This expectation is linked with the cultural memory of a 17th century volcanic eruption and the resulting fallout of volcanic ash that greatly increased the fertility of the land. Subsequent efforts to bring upon another fertility event through ritual were linked to correct moral behaviour and the observance of moral codes. In February 2018 a magnitude 7.5 earthquake struck the PNG highlands near the gas resource. The project was already understood as a development failure, and this failure was now revealed in stark relief in light of the devastating effects of the earthquake. The development disaster of the PNG LNG project is understood to be related to the immoral behaviour of both the state and the resource developer, ExxonMobil.

Keywords: PNG LNG, Development, Earthquake, Huli, Hela Province

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