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Land, Trees and History Disputes Involving Boundaries and Identities in the Context of Development

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This chapter sets out two disputes over a single piece of land.¹ These disputes, between two separate Negini villages on the Rai Coast in Madang Province, occurred because of the heightened interest in the piece of land due to a perceived connection with ‘development’.² The land was seen as facilitating one set of people’s access to the world of development and money, instead of another’s. This incited the descendants of previous owners, who otherwise had been unconcerned to regain the land, to make claims over it and its products.

It appears that land is a disputed resource here. However, I will argue that it is land involved in particular relationships which is perceived as a resource, and thus the land itself *refers to* the site of real valuation – generative or productive relations between persons. This links the case with the approach of the chapters in this volume. That is, the authors of the chapters contained here take the claims people make, rather than the objects claimed, as the starting point for analysis. This means attention is given to the transactions in which such claims are embedded. Presuming transactions as a starting point allows freedom to describe in detail how specific transactions, and peoples’ concerns within them, generate value.