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“Feeding the Caregiver”: Internal and External Relations in a Matrilineal Life-cycle Ritual, West Gao

Johanna Louise Whiteley¹

Independent Scholar

Abstract: Due to the rule of matrilineal exogamy, a West Gao father belongs to a different matrilineal clan to that of his wife and children. During a feast known as fangamu taego, children present their father with gifts to acknowledge his care. Acting as a pivot within the sequence of life-cycle rituals in West Gao, fangamu taego provides a ritual space in which two opposed modes of relationality are brought together. During the exchanges that constitute the feast, relationships flowing internally to each matrilineal clan are weighed against external relationships forged between matrilineal clans. The relational interplay elaborated during fangamu taego is predicated upon ancestrally mediated relationships of emplacement with regard to a specific territory. This comes into focus during a further set of transactions instigated by the feast involving use rights in land and its organic products. The ‘matter’ of these exchanges participate in two distinct relational modes simultaneously: they both activate pre-existing

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internal relationships and figure as ‘terms’ in the temporary construction of external relationships. Ultimately, *fangamu taego* captures an interplay between the relative permanence and impermanence of different relational configurations in the West Gao lived world.

Keywords: Life-cycle rituals; Relationality; Emplacement; Organic products; Exchange.

Joselin, Divided

In December 2012 I was reaching the midpoint of my doctoral fieldwork in West Gao, a region located on the south eastern peninsular of Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands. The week before Christmas I received news that the husband of my close friend Joselin had died in a canoe accident. Six months earlier, Joselin had revealed to me that she and her children were planning to present her husband with a *fangamu taego* (‘feeding the caregiver’) feast. During this feast a mother and her children present gifts to the father of their household to acknowledge the care he has delivered over his lifetime. In return, the father may choose to transfer use rights in plots of land and/or in the organic products that grow upon such land to his children.

The feast was particularly significant for this family because Joselin was not originally from West Gao. She had been ‘brought’ from Kia (a district located in the north of Santa Isabel) as a young girl by her ‘grandfather’ (MMB). Aware that he was nearing the end of his life, this man sought to situate one of his matrilineal relatives so as to ‘replace’ him upon his death. In order to consolidate Joselin’s position, her grandfather had subsequently arranged her marriage to a prominent member of a landholding matriclan (*kokolo*) in West Gao.

As I sat in her house on the day after her husband’s burial, Joselin had looked at me tearfully. She commented that perhaps she should go ‘home’ to her matrilineal relatives in Kia because it was only through her husband that she had the ‘right’ to stay in West Gao. The inability to perform *fangamu taego* extended Joselin’s anguish beyond her immediate bereavement. Whilst her own status on the land seemed secure during fieldwork that of her children was not so certain. This was because their placement on their father’s territory might be contested in the future by persons who held inalienable rights in that territory (the children of his sisters). Such fears lay behind Joselin raising the possibility of returning to Kia, where her children were guaranteed rights in the matrilineal territory of her birthplace.

Audrey Richards would have been sympathetic to Joselin’s predicament. As a result of the political manoeuvring of a senior male in her descent group, Joselin felt the pull of her birth place and her place of marriage simultaneously. Robbed of the chance to ‘solve’ her problem due to the premature death of her husband she appeared to be poised at the apex of the matrilineal puzzle as Richards (1950) conceived it. In such a reading, Joselin is divided by the conflicting demands of interpersonal kin relationships and the politically infused relations of descent.

Since the 1970s, anthropologists working in Melanesia have questioned whether the language of division is the most appropriate to capture the relations in which Joselin is enmeshed. The past four decades have witnessed a rise to ascendancy of a paradigm of ‘relationality’ in ethnography of the region (Wagner 1977; Strathern 1988; Foster 1995; Scott 2007a; Leach 2015). Writing from within this paradigm, Battaglia (1985, 427) asserts that the conception of the matrilineal puzzle and its solutions in purely ‘functionalist terms’ should be replaced with a ‘broader’ comparative frame that explores cultural variation in ‘the reproductive value attributed to masculine and feminine labour’. Among the matrilineal Sabarl of Papua New Guinea the ‘central problem’ to be addressed is ‘the termination of paternal substance within a matrilineal social system, and the attendant need to construct continuity’ (Battaglia 1985, 428). This way of conceiving of the problem offers a matrilineal slant on a much deeper anthropological puzzle, namely the interplay between relationships that are given and those that are constructed. It is in reference to this particular division that Joselin’s dilemma, and *fangamu taego* as an institution, should be understood.

In my doctoral thesis I have argued that West Gao is an instantiation of a ‘pluralist cosmology’ (Rio and Eriksen 2014, 67) predicated on the existence of three ontologically discrete categories known as *kokolo*. As White (1991, 33) has argued for the adjacent district of Maringe, *kokolo* means, ‘literally “type” or “kind” connoting common origins or substance’. In West Gao, *kokolo* identity is received from the mother at birth, remains unaltered through life, and is carried forward into post-mortem existence. Whilst the simplest translation of *kokolo* is ‘matriclan’, this purely sociological definition fails to capture the complex relational architecture implied when Gao speakers enact and perpetuate their *kokolo* identities. Each *kokolo* consists of various elements such as origin stories, ritual techniques, human persons and ancestral beings. By virtue of a shared, inherent connection to a discrete territory, these elements are instantiations of the same ‘substantive essence’ (Descola 2013, 163). Each element comprises an integral aspect of an ontologically unified entity, a *kokolo*, which, whilst originating in primordial conditions, is nevertheless an animating feature of action in the present.

In a context in which the universe is already divided by the existence of a plurality of discrete ontological categories, relationality cannot be taken as the *a priori* condition out of which, and against which, *all* effective social action occurs. Rather, the existence of what Descola (2013, 297) terms ‘ontological gap[s]’ between different categories of being, ensure that in certain cases relationships must be actively constructed. In order to account for this fact, the paradigm of relationality in Melanesian anthropology should be extended. In a recent analysis of the relational transformations effected by a sequence of life cycle rituals among the Ankave-Anga of Papua New Guinea, Bonnemère (2014, 729) seeks to ‘go beyond’ the relational model of personhood and social action developed by Marilyn Strathern. Bonnemère (2014, 740) suggests that the transformative capacity of relationships is only fully grasped if an analytical space is opened up in Strathern’s model for relationships that exist externally to persons, rather than simply being contained within them. This paper builds upon Bonnemère’s insights by exploring a life cycle ritual whose effects depend upon relations that exist *both* internally *and* externally to persons.

The first section situates *fangamu taego* within the emergent ‘topogonic’ processes by which Gao speakers balance the necessity of exogamous marriage against pre-existing relationships that render them organically fused with particular matrilineal territories. In the second section, I analyse the different transactional moments of the feast as instantiating relational flow along two different axes: those flowing internally to a *kokolo*; and those forged between different *kokolo*. This part of the analysis focuses on the exchanges as they occur with the ritual space of the feasting ground. However, the real significance of *fangamu taego* can only be grasped when it is seen as a part of the wider sequence of life-cycle rituals in West Gao.

Fangamu taego brings into focus the father’s death as the inescapable next stage of a West Gao family’s life history. The exchanges that occur during the *fangamu taego* both extend and transform the external relationships forged between matriclans through marriage into a further relational veneer that has the capacity to overlay, if not overcome, the severance of cross-matriclan relations that occurs at death. This aspect of *fangamu taego*, explored in the third section, involves a transfer of use rights in certain areas of his matrilineal territory, from the father to his children.² These areas may be specific plots of garden land, or demarcated areas of the products that grow upon it such as a small coconut plantation or an areca nut grove. Through these transactions a West Gao father seeks to overcome the temporary nature of his embodied relationship with his children by transposing these into external relations of use rights in his planted properties. However, because these properties are an integral part of the wider territory of his matrilineage, and by extension his matriclan, this transaction brings into focus the pre-existing relationships that bind members of the *kokolo* of the father to this territory.

Whilst the analysis in the first section presents the exchanges as a performative commentary on a relational opposition, during the property transactions the feast emerges as a context in which the very substrate of this relational opposition is perpetuated across generations. Viewed from this angle, the feast provides a public forum in which ongoing acts of topogonic emplacement can be performed and evaluated. In conclusion I suggest that *fangamu taego* illuminates a fundamental paradox in the socio-spatial order in West Gao. This paradox turns upon the relative permanence and impermanence of different relational configurations in the West Gao lived world.

On the Spatio-temporal Reach of Relations

West Gao is home to approximately 1,000 people, dispersed between nine communities of varying sizes and located predominantly on the coast.³ During my fieldwork, West Gao’s residents were well connected to the provincial capital (Buala) and the national capital (Honiara) through the use of outboard motor boats and weekly shipping schedules. This relatively reliable infrastructure facilitated the sale of copra, timber and increasingly, areca nut and kava for cash, whilst also ensuring that the numerous family-run trade stores were

² In the example used in this paper, the transaction occurs between a father and daughter. However this is simply because she is an only child. In other feasts the transactions are between the father and all of his children, who then obtain equal rights in the plots of land or trees transferred.

³ According to the 2009 census the population of *Kaloka Ward* was 962 (Solomon Islands Government, 2014).

well stocked with imported products. Despite the centrality of cash income to the daily concerns of West Gao families, subsistence agriculture remained central to the domestic functioning of households. By virtue of the organic products that grow upon and within it, land in West Gao, as elsewhere in the Solomon Islands, is the most highly valued resource.⁴

Rights to live, work and garden on land are driven by the logics of matrilineal descent. Between 2010 and 2012 the principle of exogamous marriage at the level of matriclan (*kokolo*) was strongly upheld. In line with colonial agent Sir Colin Allan's (1988, 13) report on land tenure for Santa Isabel as a whole, a West Gao child belongs to the matriclan or *kokolo* of his or her mother and inherits rights in the land belonging to his or her mother's matrilineage, or *t'hi'a*.⁵ It is certainly necessary to acknowledge the influence of British colonialism, in particular its adoption of 'African' models of unilineal descent in its administration (Tiffany 1983), upon the reification of descent-based categories of identity throughout the Solomon Islands. However, the propensity for anthropologists concerned with unilineal identities in this part of Melanesia to approach genealogically-based thinking as an index of contact with the 'West' and therefore as somehow inauthentic, introduces its own analytical blind-spots (Thomas 2009, Scott 2007a). As the work of Scott (2007b) has illustrated, it is possible to explore the salience of descent-based identities in the Solomon Islands through a focus on the dialectic relationship between colonial transformations and longstanding cosmogonic dynamics.

As I have described in more detail elsewhere, cosmogony in West Gao is characterised by two distinct, yet interrelated, modes of primordiality (see also Scott 2007b). During the utopic mode, isolated groups of apical ancestors reproduced either asexually or incestuously. These modes of reproduction were typified by spatio-temporal stasis; the resulting offspring were either born as nonhuman beings, or were quickly transformed into nonhuman aspects of the lived world. The three *kokolo* undergo a transition from this initial potent state as geographically isolated 'proto' matriclans, to a state of inter-category relationship and exchange in which the three matriclans are consolidated as fully human, descent-based categories. Only after the institution of exogamy, then, were the boundaries of these categories firmly established and their transgenerational continuity assured. The establishment of *kokolo* exogamy marks the onset of a second period of primordiality. In this 'topogonic' (Scott 2007b, 202, 214—215) period, fully human descendants of the apical *kokolo* ancestors give shape to particular territories.

Narratives told by Gao speakers regarding their apical ancestors relate how such beings became fused with particular areas of the land and, in some cases, even became aspects of the land themselves (Whiteley 2015, *chap.* 4). Through clearing gardens, planting food trees, naming sites, and burying their dead, more recent human forbears transformed uninhabited forest (*naguta*) into territorial places. By narrating these topogonic activities, descendants of these ancestors enact their inherent relationships to their matrilineal territories.

⁴ Land is also necessary for the development of small businesses such as trade stores and, increasingly, homestays or rest houses for visitors and tourists.

⁵ Sir Colin Allan was District Officer for Santa Isabel in 1948 and in the 1950s was commissioned by the British government to produce reports on local land tenure. Allan (1988) uses the term 'sub-clan' to refer to what I term matrilineages.

Gao speakers employ the word *posa*, meaning ‘to move downward from a higher elevation,’ to describe not only the physical movement of early ancestors between places, but also to capture the process of what anthropologists term genealogical ‘descent’. The concept of *posa* captures the co-emergence of persons and places, occurring simultaneously in time and through space. This spatio-temporal quality of transgenerational relationships is also reflected in the widely heard description of a man as a ‘dead tree/branch’. Just like a dead branch falls off the body of a living tree, so too do the children of brothers become detached from the body of extending connections traced through their sisters (see also White 1991, 33). Gao speakers’ description of a man as a ‘dead tree’ highlights a key difference between the spatio-temporal expansiveness of relatedness traced through females and males. This was expressed by one research participant in the following way: ‘If a man dies nothing changes, if a woman dies the matriclan dies too’.

The differing spatio-temporal capacity of gendered intergenerational relationships is further reflected in the Gao term for matrilineage, *t’hi’a* literally meaning ‘belly’, but ‘connoting shared uterine origins’ (White 1991, 33; see also Eves 2011, 353). The continuity of matrilineal identity is conceived as a series of successive womb-to-womb ‘containments’ stretching backwards in time to an originating womb of an apical ancestress. At the same time, however, the blood of the father who belongs to a different *kokolo* to that of his wife is necessary for the ‘growth’ of the family (Whiteley 2015, 184). Thus, whilst Gao speakers acknowledge that the connection between children and both their parents is one of ‘blood’ (*dadara*), the mixing of the blood of the mother and the blood of the father that occurs in pregnancy does nothing to undercut the fundamental point that only women regenerate *kokolo* identity by way of their possession of a womb.

As suggested above, attention to cosmogony in West Gao reveals that exogamous marriage was a necessary condition for the establishment of fully-human persons and the consolidation of the three *kokolo* as distinct decent-based categories. However, marrying outside of the matriclan introduces new set of problems for the maintenance of matrilineal continuity. Elsewhere, I have analysed the institution of cross cousin marriage as a process of re-containment, by which blood transmitted by males to their children that would otherwise become increasingly dispersed over the passage of generations is brought back. Such transgenerational recouping of blood simultaneously effects a return of persons to their matrilineal land, thereby counteracting the outward movements triggered by exogamic unions occurring in previous generations (see also Eves 2011, 362).

Retaining a tight unity between lineage and territory is also the principle which directs the movements of persons in one generation. During fieldwork I was told that it was not advisable for a woman to ‘follow’ her husband to his home place (*nau*) permanently, for fear that his sisters would later drive the in-married woman and her children off the land. However, the absence of sisters on matrilineal land can move residence patterns in the opposite direction. In short, post-marital residence patterns in West Gao are driven by the necessity to ensure that land remains inhabited by persons, either male or female, belonging to the owning matrilineage. This is because neglecting to interact with a given territory raises the spectre that such land may revert to a previous condition as uninhabited land, which in

turn could become the focus of the transformative activities of other persons (see also Scott 2007b, 227).

The practices surrounding death and burial provide a further opportunity to ensure that the organic unity of a matrilineage and territory is maintained. Crucial to understanding the mortuary sequence is the fact that *kokolo* identity is carried forward into post-mortem existence. The first stages of the mortuary ceremony ‘work’ to encourage the deceased to undergo a transformation into a *kokolo* ancestor. The reduction of the deceased’s identity that occurs at death entails a severance of the deceased from his or her non-*kokolo* relatives. Tracing a relationship to a matrilineal ancestor (male or female) buried on an area of land Gao speakers enact and perpetuate their inherent relationship to a given territory. This remains so even as ancestral shrines have been replaced by cemented stone graves, the blessing of which by an ordained priest (*fablahi*) comprises the climax of the mortuary sequence in West Gao (Whiteley 2015, *chap.* 7; see also McDougall 2016, *chap.* 4).

To summarise, the two modes of primordality engendered, on the one hand, a dispersed territory held at the encompassing level of a given matriclan, or *kokolo*, and on the other, the existence of smaller territories controlled by particular matrilineages, (sng. *thi’a*). As exogamous marriage triggers the spatio-temporal dispersal of both people and the substances that constitute them, through instituted forms of marriage and the practices surrounding death and burial, an organic unity of persons, substances, and matrilineal territory is retained in subsequent generations. This amounts to a recouping of the intrinsic relationships that constitute the coherence of each *kokolo* as a discrete category, which in turn allows further dispersal to occur without threatening that relational coherence. It is from within these shifting genealogical and geographical coordinates of ongoing topogonic emplacement that *fangamu taego* assumes its significance for Gao speakers.⁶

Two Modes of Relationality, Performed

Fangamu taego can only happen when the children are old enough to orchestrate the huge amount of productive labour and financial resources necessary to undertake the presentation. As a result, the father has usually reached the later years of his life. The feast, therefore, looks in two directions simultaneously: backwards to the marriage ceremony that facilitated the birth and rearing of children; and forwards to the death of the aging father. Destined to become a *kokolo* ancestor at death and passing no matrilineal identity to his offspring, the connection between a West Gao father and his children threatens to last only as long as his lifetime. This impermanent relation is imagined in contradistinction to the conception of a matriclan (*kokolo*) as immortal. In comparison to living people and the sub linages (*thi’a*) that they constitute, the three *kokolo* I was told, simply cannot die. From the perspective of mortality then, the man and the *kokolo* appear irreconcilable opposites. Turning completely upon the ‘presence’ of the father, *fangamu taego* offers an opportunity to overlay, if not reconcile, this opposition.

⁶ Whilst undeniably a longstanding institution, the *fangamu taego* was also a site of innovation and contestation. Indeed, oral histories collected during fieldwork point to significant changes in the structure of the event (Whiteley 2015, 207—211).

Plans to undertake a *fangamu taego* begin approximately seven months prior to the event. At this stage only the closest *kokolo* relatives of the wife and children are notified. Some of these persons begin to sell copra and timber to purchase trade-store goods, whilst others instigate the planting of large gardens for sweet potato and taro. Once these preparations are underway, the husband is informed and his close relatives belonging to his *kokolo* will begin similar activities. The division between husband and wife that emerges as the organising household prepares for the feast is replicated in other households throughout the community as they offer assistance to either of the pair in the form of store-bought goods. This gradual emergence of descent-based categories from the mesh of cross-matrilan relationships upon which community life depends (Whiteley 2015, 83—94), is fully realised on the day of the feast. The two participating *kokolo* quite literally appear as two distinct unities through the construction of two symmetrical piles of food at the centre of the feasting ground.



Figure 1: The participating matrilans appear as distinct unities, Lagheba January 2011 (copyright by author)

The father assumes his seat in a decorated chair placed at the centre of the feasting area. The echoing cry of a conch shell (*kufli*) is heard as a further food structure called *siakakae* is placed in front of the father by members of the *kokolo* of the mother and children. Unlike the

static towers of food that are constructed from the ground up during the feast, this food structure is always built upon a portable bamboo stretcher (Fig. 2). As the *siakakae* is moved into position, the wife, children, and members of their *kokolo* move solemnly towards the father, placing further items in front of him. The first of these is always the *kastom* pudding *malahu* (see below), usually carried by the wife, and the children then follow on in birth order. As he sits in his central position, his family members radiate out on either side according to their distinct matrilineal affiliation: sisters on one side, wife and children on the other.



Figure 2: *Siakakae*, Poro February 2012 (copyright by author).

Like the other gifts presented by his children, the food included in the *siakakae* is the sole property of the father for his own consumption and use. The private trajectory of the *siakakae* stands in stark opposition to the very public construction and redistribution of the immobile matrilineal presentations. At the end of the feast the pile amassed by the mother's *kokolo* is distributed to the members of the father's *kokolo*, whilst the pile amassed by the father's *kokolo* is distributed to the members of the mother's *kokolo*. During this distribution, the two large piles are deconstructed into smaller piles in a manner that replicates exactly the 'layering' of the original structure.

The deconstruction into smaller piles which recapture the layered structure of the original ‘whole’ is facilitated by the fact that the exchange items are themselves divisible into smaller units. Baskets of sweet potato are broken apart and divided to form the new smaller base, whilst individual packets of noodles, biscuits and cans of tuna are extracted from boxes and arrayed to ‘decorate’ the cultigen base (see also Bashkow 2007, 189—193). The smaller piles are labelled with nametags written on pieces of bamboo. When the large pile has been fully ‘deconstructed’ into the multiple smaller, yet equivalent piles, these names are called out by the leading men of the *kokolo* and their recipients come forward to collect their goods. This internal differentiation of the *kokolo* into its constituent persons, registered in the particular constellation of goods they receive (see also Foster 1995, 216), is possible at this moment of the feast because the cross-category relation between the two participating *kokolo* is rendered momentarily invisible. Both *kokolo* orchestrate their respective distributions in isolation from each other, limiting their activities to particular areas of the feasting ground.



Figure 3 Deconstruction into smaller layered piles, Poro February 2011 (copyright by author).

The construction of each pile and its deconstruction into smaller units that replicate the original whole, captures the nature of the *kokolo* as a unitary entity of the type that Robert Foster (1995, 216) has termed (following Dumont) a ‘collective individual’ (see also Strathern 1988, 14). The static nature of the two piles of *kokolo* goods, coupled with their

visible deconstruction during this stage of *fangamu taego*, realise materially the fundamental point that the relationships constituting this ‘composite’ entity (a single *kokolo*) are of the same essential substrate. That the distributional activities of the two participating *kokolo* occur in different areas of the feasting ground captures, in a spatial register, the difference between the two units and their categorical independence from each other. This transactional moment thus appears in stark contrast to the spatial ‘overlapping’ that occurs during the presentation of the *siakakae*, when the centrally-located father sits as an axis of connection between his siblings and his wife and children, i.e. persons belonging to the two different participating *kokolo*.

In exchanging their goods before distributing them, it could equally be argued that the two participating *kokolo* are enacting their mutual dependence rather than independence. However, this is indeed the case given the emphasis on the inter-*kokolo* connections embodied in the relationship between the father and children that lies at the centre of the feast. In contrast to the feasts surrounding death in which deceased persons are key participants, during *fangamu taego*, exchanges occur only between living members of a *kokolo*. Such living members are (unlike ancestral beings) spatially and temporally bound actors, themselves constituted by cross-category relations. Because birth is only possible due to the mixing of blood from both the mother and the father (persons of different *kokolo* identity) living persons are themselves the embodiment of inter-*kokolo* relationships. This recalls Strathern’s (1988, 189) argument that, according to the logics of ‘Melanesian’ gift exchange, a ‘matrilineally composed [clan] ... appears either collectively as “one breast”, “one womb”, with its own land, its own magic, or else as a matrix of particular exchanges that unite and divide brothers and sisters, husbands and wives’. In the case of *fangamu taego* it is certainly a matter of eliminating one of the forms to make the other present. Crucially, however, this kind of figure/ground reversal occurs at different transactional moments within the same exchange event.

Fangamu taego does more than simply achieve a performative balance between two forms of relationality. It also provides an exchange-based mechanism by which the substrate of the opposition is perpetuated. This occurs during the transfer of land use rights from the father to his children. Crucially, the transfer depends upon intra-category relationships that pre-exist the exchanges undertaken during *fangamu taego*. Here my argument departs from Foster and Strathern, both of whom claim that the autonomy of a collective (in our case a matriclan) depends upon the eliciting presence of an equivalent, or analogous, collective (Foster 1995, 218; Strathern 1988, 257—259; Crook 2007, 83). As we shall now see, the specific format of *fangamu taego* depends upon the ‘autonomous’ existence of discrete categories (*kokolo*) outside of any performance of the event itself.

Achieving Relational Transformations, Perpetuating Essential Unities

Immediately following the presentation of *siakakae*, the father makes a speech during which any properties that he is choosing to transfer to his children are demarcated. Consider the following excerpt taken from the speech of an ageing father during a *fangamu taego* event:

‘You all know the things that I have put down before you all today, a small area of coconut palms and other food trees. Work! Brush and clean them so they remain alive. ... You all know I have suffered in the past to tend them ... I am going to die. ... The food [properties] I have laid down before you all today, you will all know today, my daughter will tend them.’

In this oratory the old man uses his own frailty to emphasise the importance of looking after the properties that he has cared for his whole life. He implies that if this work is not undertaken the trees will, like his own body, become sick. The trees that the daughter cares for become an extension of the organic nature of her relationship with her father, which as we have seen is based on blood. The transfer in use rights ensures the extension of this inter-generational relationship through a further organic medium (coconut palms and other food trees) beyond the interior spaces of their bodies and into the landscape. The trees, although at risk of entropy that is not held at bay by hard work and care, have an existential resilience unachievable by humans. In transferring these crops (planted and tended by his hands) to his child, the father ensures a continuing connection to his children after his death (see also Battaglia 1985, 433; Weiner 1988, 94).

The mnemonic function of the landscape with regard to deceased persons was not unique to the transfers occurring within *fangamu taego*. As documented elsewhere in the Solomon Islands (Hviding 1996, 262; Scott 2007b, 224), in West Gao, comments about who planted certain groves in a cultivated area of the forest, or a particular food tree in the centre of a village, would frequently elicit narratives about the deceased person who planted them. Transforming the landscape by processes of cultivation and planting is therefore not restricted to fathers, or for that matter, even males. Rather, such transformations are part of a repertoire of topogonic practices performed by matrilineal ancestors and their descendants in order to consolidate their inherent relationships to a given territory. In such a context, planted properties remain a locus of connectivity with ancestors in general rather than with fathers in particular (Whiteley 2015, 247—248). Thus, the use rights in land and its organic products articulated by the father during *fangamu taego* are encompassed by the larger territorial system introduced in the first section of this paper. This system posits persons (both living and dead) and particular territories as an organic unity (see also McDougall 2016, *chap.* 5).

It is only when viewed against this backdrop of relations that constitute the organic unity of a *kokolo* and its territory that the father/child transactions undertaken during *fangamu taego* can be fully understood. Through the feast, males can temporarily transform the land-person relationships existing internally to their matrilineage, into external relations between persons belonging to different matrilineages. To achieve this semblance of intergenerational continuity, they employ the same materials that constitute the permanence of inter-*kokolo* relationships, namely land and its organic products. In light of the difference highlighted above between the spatio-temporal expansiveness of relatedness traced through females and males, this should come as no surprise. In using the living landscape to extend his relationships to his children, a West Gao father achieves what his own body cannot. After all, men are in themselves simply dead trees. During *fangamu taego* the organic products exchanged participate in two kinds of relationships simultaneously: they both contain the

relationships that constitute a matrilineal unit and its territory as an organic unity and are used to forge an external cross-matriclan relationship between the father and his children (see also Bonnemère 2014). Crucially, these two forms of relations remain different in kind by virtue of their spatial and temporal capacity.

To elaborate, during one *fangamu taego* a chief exhorted the children making the presentation to their father ‘not to forget’ their father’s *kokolo*. The necessity to ‘not forget’ the father’s *kokolo* lies in the fact that the land (on which the trees grow or garden sites are located) remains securely in the hands of the father’s *kokolo* (see also Macintyre 1989, 149). However, after the transfer of use rights to his children these landowners must ask the permission (*tore*) of the children before they can use the stated properties. Throughout the Solomon Islands, asking permission to use certain properties is a prime expression of the hierarchical relations that obtain between different persons with regard to a given area of land. Those who ask permission recognise and therefore subordinate themselves to the ultimate ownership status of those persons or groups asked (Hviding 1996, 297; McDougall 2004, 460; 2016, *chap.* 5). As a result of *fangamu taego* this relation is turned on its head. The owners of the land rhetorically subordinate their ultimate ownership status to their affinal relatives whom have been granted use rights.

In the final analysis, however, these transfers are an instantiation of the kind of exchange in West Gao that derives its value from the antithetical condition of ‘keeping’ (Weiner 1992) or, in our particular case, retaining the organic unity of persons-land upon which *kokolo* identity is predicated. This is true on two levels. Firstly the transfer lasts for one generation only: without further exchanges by the grandchildren any use rights are dissolved and the father’s *kokolo* regains complete control of the land concerned.⁷ Secondly, in transferring use-rights, the father’s *kokolo* gains public recognition of their ability to do so and thus reinforce their status as having ultimate precedence over the territory in question (see also Curry and Koczberski 2009, 104). This latter point renders the element of *fangamu taego* concerned with the transfer in use rights as a form of emplacement. To evidence this claim, I now consider the mechanics by which the ‘memory’ of the transaction is consolidated.

Once the various speakers have resumed their seats, the spectators prepare for the cutting and communal consumption of the *kastom* pudding *malahu*. Celebrated for its status as an ‘ancestral food’, this pudding (made from flame-toasted canarium nuts and pounded taro) was, during my fieldwork, one of the most highly valued foods a West Gao family could produce. I was told that in the case of *fangamu taego*, if the wife and children failed to present *malahu* the feast would be described by the phrase *te’o nafugna*, meaning without foundation or underlying origin. The root of the word (*nafu*) means the base of a tree (*nafu gazu*). Like a tree severed from its base, without *malahu* the exchanges occurring during the feast are robbed of any spatio-temporal capacity and are, therefore, unable to produce any (meaningful) relational effects. As we shall now see, *malahu* is indeed the source of the most significant relational transformation to occur during *fangamu taego*.

⁷ Use rights can be maintained over generations if the children concerned initiate their own presentation of food to their father, as he did for his father. However, this does not happen in every case, nor should it need to. Space restrictions dictate that I cannot explore this issue further here.



Figure 4: A Chief cuts *malahu* as the father (garlanded) looks on, Heuheu May 2012 (copyright by author).

Once the pudding has been cut, everybody in attendance must come forward and eat a piece. The consumption of *malahu* was described as a process of ‘witnessing.’ I was told that the *malahu* was consumed because ‘hearing stories about an event was not enough.’ In short, these multisensory engagements with the pudding better achieves the desired relational transformation. As edible objects, foodstuffs that are exchanged with the view to their consumption achieve particular effects upon the bodies of persons, which in turn, induces a change in their capacity to act in the world (Bonnemère 2014; Whiteley 2009).

I was struck by the importance of this observation during a land dispute case held in Poro in the first months of fieldwork. The disputing party, Agnes, sought to undercut her opponent’s claim of ownership in the contested territory by underlining her lack of attendance at a *fangamu taego* feast. She had been advised by a relative not to attend the feast because eating at the event would have signalled her agreement with the transactions undertaken during the

feast and, more importantly, literally silence her by removing her capacity to ‘talk about’ those transactions in the future (see also McDougall 2004, 447; 2016, *chap.* 5). Feast-goers are therefore participating in two kinds of land-person relationships simultaneously: the emergent and temporally bound rights of use; and the relationship of precedence to the land that makes possible the granting of use-rights in the first place. In such a context, the consumption of the pudding effects a bodily transformation that removes a person’s ability to dispute both kinds of land-person relationships in the future. Furthermore, as the bodies of younger consumers grow and mature, this transformation is extended beyond the context of the feast into the next generation.

When viewed from this angle, *fangamu taego* must be understood as a contemporary topogonic act by which inherent relationships to a territory are enacted and, more crucially (as such relationships are extended forward in time through the embodied memories of the feast-goers), perpetuated. However, as Agnes’s case illustrates, this topogonic assertion of precedence in a given territory by the *kokolo* of the father can be rejected. By refusing to eat, Agnus rejects the bodily transformation triggered by the consumption of the pudding and as a result, retains her embodied capacity to speak about and thereby perpetuate her own relationships to the territory in question in the future. Therefore, whilst *fangamu taego* is ostensibly a celebration of cooperative relationships between members of different *kokolo*, it brings into equal focus underlying differences between participants. Such differences are based in intra-*kokolo* relationships that enable people to either welcome others to live and work in their territories, or to contest people’s presence in those territories. As stated above, it is these very relationships that that father is deploying during *fangamu taego* to extend his organic relationship to his most intimate ‘others’ (his children) beyond his death.

In his efforts to overcome the temporary nature of his embodied relationship with his children by transposing these into external relations of use rights, the father ultimately acts to reinforce the permanence of the inter-*kokolo* relationships within which he is already enmeshed. That this is the case rests upon the fact that the ‘matter’ of each relational construction is the same. Coconut palms and other food trees are, by their very nature, both permanent (their presence in the landscape can extend far beyond that possible for human beings), and temporary (they require ongoing nurture and care), simultaneously (see also Rival 1998). As such, they capture succinctly the paradoxical interplay between the different spatio-temporal capacity of relations, between the given and the constructed, that comprises the animating feature the West Gao lived world.

Conclusion

Gao speakers point to a difference in the spatio-temporal expansiveness of relatedness traced through females and males. The internal relational permanence of womb to womb containment, which forms the backbone of matrilineal continuity traced through females, can only be sustained through the provision of growth-inducing blood provided by a relation forged with an external other, the father. *Fangamu taego* is, therefore, a commentary upon the necessary relation between matrilineality and affinity (see also Weiner 1988, 161). These dynamics, well established in the existing literature on matrilineality in the Massim region of

Papua New Guinea (Battaglia 1985; Fortune 1963; Foster 1995; Macintyre 1989; Thune 1989; Weiner 1988) take on particular salience when analysed in reference to the ontological plurality of West Gao cosmology.

In tracing the necessary relations between affinity and consanguinity in the particular manner that it does, *fangamu taego* provides a ritual context in which the relational predicament dictated by the poly-ontological structure of the West Gao lived-world is momentarily 'solved'. This predicament involves forging external inter-category connections whilst maintaining the coherence of internal intra-category relations. During *fangamu taego* both sides of the 'problem' are momentarily satisfied through exchanges that occur in distinct transactional moments.

Nevertheless, further transactions occurring during *fangamu taego* allow the predicament to resurface. Whilst the father may activate internal relations of identity within a matriline other than his own, he cannot himself reproduce that identity. His only hope of achieving a semblance of intergenerational continuity is through forging external relations through transactions in organic products, which possesses a spatio-temporal expansiveness that is lacking in himself (see Moisseff this volume for a discussion of transactions in hair among the Arrernte that also operate to overcome relational limitations of male bodies). Such transactions, however, bring back into focus the permanence of pre-existing, internal relationships that constitute the organic unity of matrilineal persons and their territories.

It is now apposite to return to Joselin's dilemma. Six days after the death of her husband a memorial feast was performed. After the guests had been fed, one of Joselin's neighbours (a member of her deceased husband's *kokolo*) made a tearful speech. She explained that in the past she had responded to a request Joselin had made regarding an area of land behind the village by encouraging her to 'go ahead and plant there.' She ended by reminding the audience that Joselin was 'a woman of this place.' This assertion exemplifies how incoming persons can *become* part of a place under the auspices of invitation by landowners. Illustrating the historical force of such principles, when I returned to West Gao in August 2016 I discovered that two of Joselin's children continued to reside comfortably in Poro village. Nevertheless, by operating to shore up such discursive acts of inclusion, and to actively silence any voices of dissent, *fangamu taego* is a mechanism by which rights to live and garden in a territory can be consolidated across generational time.

In August 2016 I was also saddened to learn that Joselin and I would not be reunited. Leaving her two children in West Gao, she had departed to reside permanently at her birthplace in Kia. Perhaps Joselin's tears on that afternoon in 2012 had anticipated her departure in a way that I, who had come to know her only as a prominent member of my host community rather than an in-married woman of a different place, was unable to do. In the final analysis, however, Joselin's dilemma reached even further than the immediacy of her bereavement, concerns over the future of her children's emplacement, or even the inevitability of her final relocation. Confronted simultaneously by the fixity of those relationships that connected her to her seldom visited birthplace, and the fragility of the hard-won relationships through which she and her children had come to call West Gao home, she caught a glimpse of an irresolvable paradox lying at the heart of the socio-spatial order in which she was enmeshed.

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