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## **The Unbounded Space and Moral Transgression: Capitalist Expansion in West New Britain**

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**Abstract:** Capitalist transformations in West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, have focused on setting boundaries on land and social relations as an efficient way to generate productive relations. But for the Maututu around Biella town where the palm oil industry has been established the perception of productivity rests not on establishing boundaries but on exploring horizons. Recent dramatic changes to the economy and demography of this area have introduced moral conflict into Maututu endeavours to generate wellbeing. Maututu have responded to these conflicts in ways that continue to bring their indigenous morality to bear on the moral strategies pursued by state and capitalist forces.

**Keywords:** Moral tension; capitalist expansion; Landscape; Oil palm; Christian revivalism

A common mytheme in Maututu oral literature is of a young man who is shamed and silenced in his own community (for example, because he has an ulcer that stinks repulsively). He flees to escape community derision, particularly of young women. He travels into the forest, where he meets a benevolent spirit (sometimes ancestral) who supplies him with provisions, weapons and sweet-smelling plants that cure his stink and nurture him into an outstanding warrior. He comes to the edge of the gardens of an unknown hamlet on the horizon of his own world where by singing his distinctive name he draws the attention of a young woman gardening there. She elopes with him and through his newly acquired magical skills and spirit partners they escape her wrathful kin and return to his home hamlet where they are extravagantly welcomed and an exchange of bridewealth is arranged.

The Maututu Nakanai number about two thousand Austronesian-speaking matrilineal people living in eight villages around the former Biälla plantation and the fast-expanding Biälla town, in West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG). They practice swidden agriculture of the prized food of taro and the staple foods of sweet potatoes and cassava. Their western kin in the Hoskins Peninsular are the Lakalai or Bileki (West Nakanai) (Chowning 1966, 1989; Chowning and Goodenough 1965-6; Jebens 2004; Valentine 1963, 1966), their eastern kin, the Meramera around Lolobau Island, and their trading partners to the east, the Kuanua-speaking Tolai of the Gazelle Peninsular. Maututu recognise common clans with the Bileki and Meramera, and if needed can also establish clan links beyond the Nakanai among other New Britain people based on the recognition of common totems. As people from beyond New Britain settle in the Biälla area, even those horizons are being extended, a point to which I will return.

I first lived in the Biälla area in 1968-1975, during which I was employed by the local Airmen's Memorial Primary School and then by the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries. I have returned there a number of times in recent years to explore the ways in which Maututu Nakanai have engaged with an oil palm industry, the establishment of which I witnessed in the 1970s. My data are the result of conversations and interaction with residents of the eight Maututu villages, one of which has remained my base since 1968 and where I acknowledge many as my kin. It is through kinship networks that my own network of interlocutors has spread throughout the area, providing me with places to stay and people with which to engage.

### **The Indigenous Moral World**

In Maututu perspectives the landscape is a locale in which people engage with the productivity of the forest and its spiritual and material resources. The forest is seen as the domain where males extract value in terms of knowledge and food from the forces of the forest, while the gardens are where male and female energies combine in production and reproduction. While the plantings on the land are the property of the couple who clear and plant the soil, the land itself on which the plantings are sited is not property and is not subject to ownership. People, through lineages, are affiliated with specific lands where they recognise former hamlets and grave sites, as well as the betel and coconut palms their ancestors planted. Ancestral and forest spirits who reside there continue to intercede with

living descendants, particularly in relation to moral issues, as illustrated in the mytheme above. The land, as Marisol de la Cadena (2010) suggests for Andean peasants, does not belong to them as property but is part of their being, because humans and ‘earth beings’ are bound in a relationship of mutual reciprocity and nurture. Maututu recognition of species of flora and fauna as lineage totems is a further indication of this interdependence.

This landscape is not marked by boundaries, either of blocks of land or of the groups affiliated to particular sites. The past and present settlement sites are marked by their signs of human occupation, but these mark the centre of lineage attention and such lineage interest in the landscape radiates out from that domestic centre over present and past garden sites. Further afield a wild almond tree or breadfruit tree may also have been claimed by the ancestor or contemporary hunter who discovered it. In a similar way, Maututu recognise close connection centrally to their lineage mates, but extend that recognition to outliers such as lineages within the same clan, or with whom they share a common totem, or to whom they are linked in exchange relationships formed through marriage or other significant event. So lineages are themselves unbounded, defined by their centre in an ancestral pioneer or group of ancestors, yet radiate outward in a boundless way. For example, when the colonial Australian government distributed a payment for a large expanse of land they acquired for logging and commercial agriculture in the 1960s, they delivered the money to the village heads. These heads divided the money to the elders of lineages considered to have affiliation to that land, and these elders, rather than restricting the distribution to those of the same lineage name instead recognised lineage affiliates, affines and exchange partners in how they compensated those affected by this loss of access to the land. According to present Maututu, such exchanges of cash for land were not understood as sales of land but as allowing access to productive use of the land.

The landscape in Maututu myths represents a moral tension between the values of the hamlet and those of the forest. In the stories, these alternate moral realms of the wild forest and the domestic hamlet become associated with particular behaviours and personality types. Charles Valentine (1963) writes of the Lakalai contrast between wild, angry, licentious individuals who take to the forest on the one extreme, and on the other, men of silence or of shame who are threatened by relations with others and remain stranded inside the hamlet, or even the house. Neither extreme is seen as morally desirable. Instead the hero of the story finds a way to bring the wildness of the forest into renewing the domestic hamlet. In the Lakalai depiction of the ‘man of resource’ or the ‘big man’ leader (Valentine 1963) he successfully tempers anger and impetuosity with concern for the hamlet community. Lakalai prefer their leaders to possess ‘balanced temperaments, who combine a tendency to angry responses, verbal expressiveness, physical mobility and uninhibited sexuality with care in observing customary proprieties, a high degree of concentrated attention and achievement in certain traditional skills’ (1963, 448). And among Maututu such an assessment is made of both men and women, as both genders are likely to assume leadership roles within the hamlet.

In Maututu stories and in life, a key focus of fruitful engagement between the wild and the domestic is the garden, cut out of the forest and nurtured by the ash of the burnt vegetation, but eventually returning in fallow to forest. The gardens thus constitute a mediating space

between the wild and the domestic, the amoral/ asocial abandon of the forest and the moral containment of the hamlet, and yet they are also the site where social relations are produced. A big man aiming to recognise his first-born at various stages of the life cycle requisitions his male and female lineage mates, affines and hamlet neighbours to fell the forest and plant gardens, from which he distributes food to exchange partners of nearby hamlets whom he invites to his *mage* feast. His own social status is enhanced by the links he establishes with insiders and outsiders extended across the landscape. The gardens are also where one encounters bush spirits and sorcerers who have strayed from the forest, and where adulterous sexual relations are usually consummated. They thus comprise a zone where both moral excellence and moral turpitude are negotiated. Maututu consider morality a zone of negotiation rather than a bounded set of rules. Married men and women, for example, are known to have sex with other partners and these tend to be tolerated. However when such relations are brought before the village moot by an offended party, a high sense of morality is invoked, frequently in Christian terms, which quickly dissipates once the moot disperses.

Joel Robbins (2007b) points out that anthropologists have in the main ignored ‘morality’ in deference to ‘culture’ in assuming with Durkheim that culture is synonymous with morality. He concurs with James Laidlaw’s proposition (2002) that ‘everything people do is not undertaken as a moral action, but only those things they do with reflective consciousness of having chosen to act in the way they have’ (Robbins 2007b, 293). For Robbins ‘the anthropology of morality needs to develop an understanding of the origins and nature of unresolved value conflicts’ (2007b, 300), because it is most clearly in such conflicts that people make moral choices. Robbins describes how a revivalist Christianity among the Urapmin in PNG’s Sandaun Province brought a rigid definition to morality and to its confession in the church, and thus generated the demand for moral choices. The Maututu have experienced their own Christian revival, which I shall return to later, where morality similarly becomes a matter of public interest.

I argue that Maututu morality is conceptualised in terms of a landscape of expanding and contracting horizons that contrasts with the efforts of state capitalism and Christian revivalism to define morality in rules of membership and behaviours. Tim Ingold (2008, 1797) suggests that ‘Horizons do not contain or enclose. Nor can they ever be reached or crossed since, like the rainbow's end, they move as you do.’ He cites Heidegger who suggests that horizons constitute ‘not that at which something stops but ... that from which something begins its presencing’ (Heidegger 1971,154). Ingold contrasts the boundedness of some conceptions of the world with the open world in which only horizons constitute our awareness. ‘The open world, however, has no such boundaries, no insides or outsides, only comings and goings. Such productive movements may generate formations, swellings, growths, protuberances, and occurrences, but not objects’ (2008,1801). Ingold continues that in such an open world perspective ‘Every line - every relation - in fluid space is a path of flow, like the riverbed or the veins and capillaries of the body’ (2008, 1806). I suggest that for the Maututu moralities are not fixed codes of behaviours and ethics but processes of negotiation that ebb and flow in response to the outside injection of ideas, persons and objects into an expanding Maututu world. With some tension therefore they engage with a capitalist morality that seeks to bound entities with clear lines. I present such moral interfaces not in

terms of the replacement of a discrete customary thinking with a codified and reformed modernity, but in terms of ‘awkward engagement’ (Tsing 2005, xi), encompassments (LiPuma 2000), or ‘entanglements’ of different ontologies of being in the world which are negotiating new patterns of social relations (Stead 2017).

Arturo Escobar (2001, 146) notes

the extent to which local people’s engagement with the landscape, in some Andean communities for instance, reveals that the landscape is endowed with agency and personhood. The enduring connectedness of people with the land results from an active engagement with it; rather than a reflection of “tradition”, it is an integral part of the contemporary modern life of these communities, even in cases in which such connectedness might be a vehicle for the exercise of power over them. Persons and their environments, places and identities, are thus mutually constituted.

The links of convergence among biophysical, human and supernatural worlds, problematic as they may be, are embedded in social relations different from the modern capitalist type. For de la Cadena (2010), this indicates the existence of a pluriverse of socionatural formations. She writes that a pluriversal politics recognises and seeks to interconnect such plurality without making the diverse worlds commensurable within a single universe.

The moral ontology of the Maututu marked by relationalism (*cf.* Robbins 2007a) is most particularly expressed in lineage. Hamlets are linked to their original lineage founders, and members of other lineages live there as guests on lineage land, with all the social relations that implies. Kin relations are ever expanding through marriage and through affiliation with those other lineages with whom some affiliation can be drawn. Productive social relations between agnatic and affinal kin, between men and women, between the living and their ancestors, and between hamlet residents and the diverse earth beings who inhabit the place, are the key extensions of these moral horizons. The wider world constantly entices the bold to explore it and as a result the core community is ever expanding and contracting as these horizons are tested. Yet what anchors this fluidity is that progress and productivity are not marked by replacement of the customary but by its entanglement and interlinking with the ways and values of the wider world. This conceptualisation becomes central to understanding Maututu engagement with the worlds of the colonial administrators and subsequently the oil palm industry.

### **Colonial Transgressions**

Both the German and Australian administrations established spasmodic contact with the Maututu during the first half of the twentieth century but it was not until after the Second World War that the Australian colonial administration congregated the scattered Maututu hamlets into villages along a coastal road under the eye of *luluai* headmen. Then in the mid 1960s the Australian patrol officers established the Maututu Council to unite the seven

Maututu and one Pelevavu villages under one administration. In 1968 Mapulo Gaa, cocoa pioneer and chairman of the Maututu Council, returned from a tour by local government council chairmen to Australia and expressed his scorn of the millenarian Kivung movement in the villages of the Lakalai. The leaders of the Kivung movement advocated ‘no local government council, no government school, no Administration-supported co-operative and no Christianity’ and instructed followers to await their ancestral spirits to deliver them the goods that Europeans so selfishly enjoyed (Jebens 2004). Mapulo on transit through the Hoskins Peninsula told the Lakalai leaders that in Sydney he had witnessed white men working hard to produce the ‘cargo’ that was transported to Papua New Guinea. He dismissed the Kivung reliance on the ancestors and extolled instead the adoption of cocoa, cooperatives and local councils.

As Jebens (2004) notes, there was considerable ambivalence in the Kivung moral formulations. For the Kivung enthusiasts, progress meant simultaneously to step back to the moral rightness of the ancestors in order to access the ‘cargo’, yet they associated that cargo with the ‘moral and biological degeneration of European ways’. Such ambivalence is characteristic of entanglements between the very different modern and customary valuations or goods and interpretations of land and its social relations (Stead 2017, 84-6). Mapulo’s call to ‘progress’ was not a defence of the greed and selfishness of the white men’s ways but an incorporation of new means of social production into Maututu moral frames. In both formulations material prosperity resulted from moral choices. For Mapulo, morality was the exercise of freedom to incorporate new means of livelihood and administrative organisation without abandoning social networks with living and ancestral kin (cf. Laidlaw 2002).

However Mapulo did not envisage that the land itself might be commodified and divested of its social relations under the capitalist system. He and his fellow proponents of cash crops in the Maututu Cooperative encouraged neighbours to plant cocoa on their old gardens, irrespective of what lineage might be affiliated with that land, for their use of the land merely strengthened such lineage affiliations. Yet at the same time, the colonial administration was directing that land become bounded and commodified as an asset in cash crop production. Such entanglements thus risked moral tensions. When the Bialla plantation was first established in 1912 under the German Administration it was formally ‘purchased’ with steel axes, bush knives and tobacco, and when in the 1960s the Australian administration acquired vast lands with cash payments, in Maututu moral terms such commodities could only be interpreted as compensatory gifts in exchange for the use of the lands. Similarly, in recent times, oil palm migrant smallholders who access village land through ‘purchase’ to sustain their expanding households are rather perceived by village hosts to incur ongoing exchange obligations with the host lineage. Koczberski, Curry and Bue (2012) report that in nearby West Nakanai outside settlers who ‘purchase’ land for oil palm from Nakanai are still expected by the ‘sellers’ to share their oil palm income with them and contribute to lineage and Nakanai village events as fictive kin. The authors conclude that ‘from the perspective of most customary landowners, land rights granted to settlers are never permanent and exclusive’ (2012, 296).

Today Maututu continue to dispute that their ancestors ‘sold’ the land as though it was a commodity. For Maututu the vast stretch of land now under oil palm continues to be marked by the gravesites and garden sites of their ancestors and continues in this sense to be a landscape enlivened by such relationships. They are pursuing legal action to have their prior right to the land recognised in ongoing ‘lease’ payments until the land is returned and for undeveloped sections of the land to be returned to them for their garden use. Their moral foundation is that land cannot be estranged from the people and spirits emplaced in it.

### **Capitalist Expansion and its Moral Underpinnings**

Maututu aspirations of wellbeing question the state development model in which customary ways are replaced by modern efficiencies of capitalist production. Curry and Koczberski (2013, 340) make the general comment that for many smallholders in PNG ‘the transition (to capitalist economic practices) is from a moral economy to an amoral one in which indigenous economic and social values are debased and social relationships are undermined’. They note the moral tensions between ‘conflicting regimes of value’, and the anxieties that emerge over this clash between individual autonomy and social obligations. While capitalist practices may appear ‘amoral’ or ‘wild’ to the Maututu villagers, the adoption of cash crops is also a desirable means to material comforts, requiring them to negotiate between values at this moral horizon. In respect of such moral tensions in Oceania Fiona McCormack and Kate Barclay note that the ‘coexistence of capitalism and noncapitalism...involves constant negotiation’ (2013, 12). Filer (2007, 141) suggests that in PNG, moral balance has to be negotiated over a ‘landscape’. In reviewing the formulations of Papua New Guinea land law he concludes that ‘the social dynamics of the ‘customary’ landscape are not determined by the capacity of customary landowners to resist or roll back the process of (land) alienation, but rather by their capacity to enter into, and benefit from, the social relations of compensation’ offered in the expansion of commercial agriculture (Filer 2007: 145). Such social relations are formed within a reformulation of morals. As Curry (2012, 118) concludes about many Pacific people:

Excursions into capitalisms, in whatever variant, have increasingly been seen as cautious essays in economic hybridity that did not, however, contest or reject the renewed expansion of capitalism.... but simply sought more successful and more culturally sensitive forms of accommodation to it.

Jan van der Ploeg (2010, 4) claims that at the beginning of the twenty-first century ‘farming is again being understood, and practiced, as co-production: the interaction and mutual transformation of human actors and living nature’. Escobar (2001, 149) citing Kuletz (1998, 239) remarks how local groups develop ‘strategic countermeasure[s] to the deterritorialized space’ represented by global forces.

However oil palm production in PNG creates formidable challenges to the persistence of such social values in these Maututu negotiations. At times the encompassment of villagers in the

dominating capitalist expansion has seemingly left them with little room to negotiate. For example the Japanese palm oil company that first established the nuclear plantation at Bialla sought to diversify its operations into fishing by presenting lavish presents and offers to village ‘big men’ to win their favour. These approaches were without the knowledge of either the PNG government or clan members, and were judged by both to be amoral, neither keeping to the rules for foreign investment nor recognising the stake of all clan members in the marine resources. The PNG government tore up the company’s contract. Recently Maututu villagers have condemned the moral practices of the present oil palm company when it (inadvertently) expanded its plantings onto village lands, or when it continued to extract the same charges for transportation, milling and other costs from village smallholders even though the price it paid for bunches had dropped drastically. The company in these instances insisted on setting these costs as an average cost per tonne of produce, while the smallholders saw them as a growing percentage of their gross earnings. The morality they expected from the company was one that put social obligations to the smallholders before capitalist production efficiencies.

As settler-farmers and workers flooded into the area, the town of Bialla was developed to service them. For the Maututu the town became known for its wildness as people of varied ethnic identities, particularly mainland groups, were involved in drunken brawls, road accidents, and theft, and *raskol* gangs robbed public transport vehicles or, on one occasion, the local branch of Bank South Pacific, bringing the economy of the area to a standstill. The town was a domain into which Maututu ventured with caution and only a few Maututu have chosen to live there. I was regularly warned that to walk alone into the town or mill area was to enter a domain where sorcerers or *raskol* gangs from the town or the oil palm settlements would endanger me. Most recently in 2015, fights broke out between Maututu and town groups during which village houses were set on fire. Notwithstanding this, Maututu do not avoid the town, but their use of town services such as high school, hospital and tradestores is on the whole cautious and conducted from the security of kin and other relations they forge there.

Similarly, living on the horizon of Maututu lands on the settler blocks was full of tension. Most Maututu who took up blocks beside migrant settlers abandoned these blocks due to the discomfort they felt there. One of these reported fighting a huge python-like spirit snake that invaded his home at night, endangering his wife and children. Others who married settlers preferred to bring them to the village to live where they could be incorporated into lineage social relations. This is symptomatic of both Maututu willingness to engage with the stranger ‘forest’ population but to incorporate them within domestic terms. Intermarriage has become so common in one Maututu village that Tok Pisin rather than Maututu has become the everyday language. Yet it is considered crucial to accommodate these marriages within the wider kin circles. Where such marriages involve a Maututu woman, there is no ambiguity to the matrilineal identity of the children, but where a stranger woman has married a Maututu man, the social identity of the children is ambivalent, demanding new constructions of kinship. Women from adjacent cultural, usually matrilineal, groups can be included in Maututu lineages by establishing lineage identity through, for example, their common totem, thus ensuring their children are absorbed into those lineages. Women from the mainland, and



generally of patrilineal descent groups, still remain with their children in an ambivalent position outside the matrilineal system, but it seems only a matter of time before they too are incorporated.

Maututu have adjusted to the forces of capital expansion. They have planted village oil palm on former gardens. Yet while these blocks are formally allocated to individual families under Clan Land Usage Agreements, enabling the individual planters to access seed plants and fertilisers on credit against their harvested palm oil bunches, there is an ambivalence and compromise in this arrangement. This is because to the Maututu such formal blocks indicate ownership of palms but not land, but to the state and the company they demonstrate that the land has become individual property. The tension becomes clear when the block becomes due for replanting (after about twenty years) because the new generation of lineage members may no longer acknowledge the claims of the original farmer to replant the land.

At the same time as the land is being identified by some parties as bounded property, lineages themselves are being reconstituted by the state as Incorporated Land Groups (ILG) with the aim of making it easier for capital investors to negotiate access to the customary land of the lineage (Weiner 2013). Those lineages incorporated as ILGs must submit a list of their members in order to transact their land and its timber with foreign companies. This has resulted in excluding from benefits those affiliated lineages and exchange partners who, in the past, would have been acknowledged to have an interest in lineage affairs and territory.

Although the ILG legislation recognises for the first time the centrality of lineages in land matters, it seriously undermines local understandings of such landscapes as shared spaces by constituting them as bounded entities. Thus whereas in earlier times neither land nor lineage membership had defined boundaries the State requirements have fixed such boundaries as a means to capitalist expansion. But this boundedness is not without challenge from the point of view of Maututu morality. In a recent incident an ILG commissioned a sawmill to process logs on its land, but their exclusive rights to the timber was challenged by another lineage of the same clan resident in an adjacent village. Although not listed as members of the ILG, the group contested their access to the timber by claiming genealogical links to the ancestors of the land, links that might in the past have gained them access to the timber.

Lineage ILGs have developed into corporate commercial bodies, owning public transport vehicles, trade stores, and mobile sawmills, as well as contracting with outside companies to exploit timber resources or river flow for electricity production. They have thus expanded to engage with capitalist interests, but not without some danger. The move has facilitated the emergence of 'wild' amoral behavior by giving unprecedented powers to the persons nominated as executives of the ILG to transact on behalf of members. In several cases these office-holders have disposed of timber and land and water rights in a 'selfish' manner that ignored the social relations embedded in the land and resources. One or two lineage leaders have become manager-'owners' of mini-estates of oil palm, allowing them to accumulate wealth without distributing it to lineage members. Some ILG leaders have even 'sold' lineage land to settlers. These willful behaviours have instigated calls for a restitution of Maututu values with kin challenging in public the morality of the ILG executives.

It is in the everyday that these moral ambivalences are being experienced. In one such case an oil palm block lies abandoned under dispute because the farmer assumed he could pass it on to his children against the claims of the affiliated lineage. The transformations brought by cash crop production and government registration have heightened a sense of moral contestation among Maututu, and they are responding by negotiating new moral terms that to varying degrees recognise the moralities of both capitalist and lineage systems. In these situations, as Robbins (2007) suggests, morality has taken on a heightened visibility. Against the boundedness of government delineations of land and lineage Maututu morality has retained a porous horizon where land continues to supply subsistence through gardens and forest and cash needs through cocoa and oil palm, and where lineage affiliation is both formalised in ILGs but is open to the claims of wider networks. Maututu and government-capitalist moralities may seem in tension or even incommensurable, but over time Maututu are endeavouring to sustain the integrity of their kin networks on the horizons of domestic practices.

### **The Moral Frame of Maututu Christianity**

We can understand these moral tensions at the horizons in yet another context by examining how Maututu engaged with Christian practices. Villagers tell of the advent of Pacific Island Methodist Christianity to Maututu hamlets not as a foreign invasion but as a Maututu engagement on their own ontological terms. Tolai trading partners in the 1920s invited two Maututu men to the Gazelle Peninsular where they heard the singing of Christian hymns and saw the reverence in which the Kuanua-language scriptures and service books were held. On their departure for home, these two Maututu men exchanged a leg of pork for the 'holy books', recognising in those books a power of protection. Returning home they placed the books at the door of their homes to protect them from physical and sorcery attacks.

As Maututu negotiated their understandings of Christian practices the church building and its worship services became powerful symbols of the village community gathered together from scattered hamlets by the colonial administration. The church embodied the new set of social relations that bound these lineages together in the new villages, restricting population movement and enhancing the colonial management of their labour. The importance of Christianity in these first decades was demonstrated not so much in the declaration of creeds but in the presence of every man, woman and child in the communal church on Sunday morning. Christian activities reworked the morality of social relations, which to that time had been expressed in the land and its lineages and the big men's *mage*, into the terms of resettled village congregations in their neat Sunday clothes and disciplined hymn singing.

Robbins (2004) suggests, however, that Christianity in PNG constituted a deeper challenge to local moral understandings. He noted among the Urapmin an ontological discontinuity when the new charismatic Christian revival focused on the individualism of personal sin, repentance and forgiveness. Their insistence on personal confession was in tension with the villagers' ontology of relationalism, and in Robbins' account of the Urapmin displaced it. Such was not the case for the Maututu, for whom confession became part of their Christian practices not as individual moral torment but as a consolidation of community relations.

During the 1960-70s Maututu performed confession only on New Year's Eve when the congregation gathered for a midnight service, and as part of that service most worshipers walked to the front of the church to confess their sins of the previous year. The named 'sins' of adultery, sorcery, drunken violence and theft that had disrupted social relations during the year were reviewed, although they had already been dealt with at village trials during the year. These New Year's Eve confessions were not focused on individual reform but as a ritual cleansing of the community before the New Year. Although the sins were of an individual 'wildness', these church confessions were focused on a restatement of relational values within the expanded social networks of the village community.

However this practice was revised in the 1990s when Maututu experienced their own charismatic 'Revival' of the Holy Spirit. It spread from village to village as lay people ran 'missions' to bring the Revival to other congregations. Village congregations were labelled as stultified in their village ways and as launching into the Revival that brought new energy from the outside. The movement gained such momentum that the local United Church hierarchy of ministers and the Assistant Bishop adopted its approach. The movement was marked by new styles of worship, including guitar band music with lyrics in the local language, spontaneous congregational prayer at Sunday services, subsidiary prayer meetings during the week, faith healings, and a lively acknowledgement by many villagers of the presence of the Holy Spirit in congregational and personal life. It has become a graphic demonstration of Maututu willingness to engage with the power of the outside, the Holy Spirit available to them not only through the study of imported books and DVDs but through embodiment in their ritual worship.

Significantly under the Revival, the confession has become part of the weekly congregational worship, yet they are different from the Urapmin confessions made in private to the priest. Maututu confession of sins has become a matter of public performance at every Sunday service. In these services, confessions are made from the front of the church during the sermon when they are largely drowned out by the amplified words of the preacher and the simultaneous congregational singing of hymns. The confessions, often delivered in tears, only add to the cacophony and are largely ignored by and inaudible to the congregation. Only when the confessor has finished and turned to the preacher does the momentum of the service briefly slow as the preacher blesses the confessor who then returns to their seat. The whole confluence of sermon, confessions, singing and praying energise the congregation in this 'movement of the Spirit'.

Associated with the performance of this new morality is the near-disappearance from village life of beer drinking, which in the early days of cocoa income devastated social relations and which Maututu continue to associate with the 'wildness' of the town. The moral rejection of alcohol consumption further demonstrates the productive engagement of Maututu with powers of Revival from the horizons of their world. Their confidence in this power is shown in the outdoor Revival meetings that village youth now hold in the town for the benefit of 'wild' groups there.

Christian Revival practices have also restored an emphasis on lineage solidarity. Increasingly in contemporary Maututu villages lineages find definition in distinct named hamlets, and it is

in these hamlets that kin conduct their own ‘family’ Christian worship services. Burial practices also reflect a new understanding of lineage. In earlier days the dead were buried outside the village in graves located in abandoned gardens in the forest, but since the Revival most ancestors have been buried within or adjacent to the hamlet, and their graves marked by a gravestone inscribed with their name, and years of birth and death. The ‘cementing’ of the gravestone has become the most prestigious of the funeral rites, for which a lineage may plan for years. The ancestral spirits have thus become incorporated as named spirits into the domestic community rather than dismissed into the garden site to be eventually absorbed into ancestral forest sites. This is a powerful demonstration of the power of the Revival to facilitate the renegotiation of relations within the lineage and with outsiders.

## Conclusion

Paolo Heywood writes, in his analysis of Italian Bolognese *doppia morale* ‘double morality’, of the ‘capacity of human beings to consider and weigh ethical alternatives’ (2015: 201). He suggests that the Bolognese accommodate opposing ethical behaviors as long as they do not pose a threat to community propriety. In this way tension between moral alternatives can be resolved through reaffirmation of a foundational ethical code, even as unethical behavior is entertained. In contrast to Robbins (2007) who describes moral life among the Urapmin as ‘composed of two ‘spheres’, defined by sets of rules and obligations, Heywood (2015, 214) comments:

Bolognese culture does not circumscribe spaces in which rules do or do not apply; *doppia morale* does not involve a negation of the universal applicability of moral conventions. What it does is provide for certain ways of relating to such conventions in which the possibility of their betrayal – in a certain form – is already allowed for.

My focus in this paper has been with the entanglements of ontologies and moralities that are produced by colonial, capitalist and Christian encompassments and the often chaotic set of ambivalences and tensions that such engagements generate (Stead 2013), and with how people deal with these in moral terms. The entanglements surface not only in disputes or even violence but also in creative debate and social accommodations. I have examined how Maututu sense of the foundational ethics of kin relations determines people’s affirmation or anxiety about such entanglements.

In doing so I also face my own quandary in regards to such entanglements. I bring my own ethnographic understandings of how oil palm has been developed in Indonesia and Malaysia, often with harmful ecological and social consequences, yet with Maututu have come to appreciate the material benefits they have gained from its cultivation. Likewise, in regards to Christianity, I have experienced with Maututu friends the freedoms that their worship brings as well as the boundaries laid down by strict doctrinal insistence. I am not the agent of an encompassing enlightenment in regard to either of these, but a fellow journeyer keen to

negotiate with them the benefits that lie on the horizon through accommodations with cash crops and the Holy Spirit. There will be different Maututu responses and I no doubt will feel more sympathetic with some than with others, but together with my Maututu friends I would hope through all these transformations that the foundational importance of social relations and garden production can be protected.

For Maututu, local ontologies exist alongside external state and capitalist ontologies, not within one system where we might dispute whether there has been continuity or discontinuity with local tradition, but rather in a pluriverse where entanglements happen at particular times and situations as sites of ontological difference (Stead 2017). The pre-capitalist world of the Maututu, as idealised in myths, was one such contested realm of centred domesticity and outward expansion, the hamlet relations ever expanding into and then retracting from the wild of the forest, but in the process realising new moral and material transformations of their community. Maututu response to later capitalist expansion and Christian Revival has largely retained this moral engagement by reaching new accommodations rather than having local moralities suppressed.

What seems clear in the Maututu view of things is that individuals are free to make moral choices that either further their own self-interested ambitions or contribute to community continuity. Capitalist, state and Christian transformations of the West New Britain area have added to the range of choices and to the opportunities for individualistic endeavours that may be seen as selfish and sinful. Yet Maututu construe these individualist tendencies mostly as alternative moralities, associated with greed, anger, adultery, sorcery, inebriated violence, corruption of lineage position, and the like, wild behaviours associated with the forest rather than the hamlet. In Maututu moral landscapes such behaviours are as expected as their moral opposites, and moral solutions lie in the healthy engagement of the domestic with the challenge of those wild behaviours. I underline in this article that such codes of morality, like the forest spaces and kinship groupings they identify with, are not marked by boundaries that emphasise their incompatibility but by expansive horizons on a landscape in which mediations are always the moral ideal.

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