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Mixed Grammars and Tangled Hierarchies: An Austronesian-Papuan Contact Zone in Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

The article is divided into two parts. In the first, I explore what is known about the precontact history of Collingwood Bay based on archaeological, linguistic, and oral evidence. While much must be left to speculation, the evidence strongly suggests that the Bay has long been a meeting point between Austronesian and Papuan peoples. The second and longer part of the paper attends to the political system found in most Collingwood Bay communities. I focus here primarily on the Maisin-speaking people residing in the southern part of the Bay with whom I've worked since 1981. More specifically, I describe how this system incorporates both hierarchical and egalitarian aspects and has proven remarkably adaptable to social changes from the time of European first contact in the 1890s.

KEYWORDS

Collingwood Bay;
Austronesian; Maisin;
chieftainship; contact zones

Collingwood Bay is an in between place.¹ The Bay lies on the western side of the dividing line between the Northern and Milne Bay Provinces of Papua New Guinea (PNG). By happenchance, the provincial border falls nearly precisely at the spot where female fashion diverges from tattooed to unadorned faces and tapa cloth to fibre skirts, and where Papuan (Non-Austronesian) languages give way to Austronesian dialects. Equally by happenchance, it falls neatly in between two of the most intensely studied cultural groups in Melanesia: the Binanderean-speakers including the Orokaiva to the northwest and the many Austronesian Massim societies to the southeast. Archaeological and ethnographic evidence suggests that the Bay has long been a contact zone between Papuan and Austronesian peoples, particularly along its western shores. This has had interesting consequences, not least in the ways, the local communities conceive of egalitarian and hierarchical relationships.

Approximately 15,000 people reside in beach villages along the 90 km of coastline from the tip of Cape Nelson to the Milne Bay border in the south with an unknown but large number of 'Tufi people' living elsewhere in PNG and beyond – Tufi being the old subdistrict headquarters on Cape Nelson and today the site of the only operating airstrip in the region. Five distinct language groups occupy the Bay, yet their distribution is complex and confusing, suggesting considerable movements of migrants and war refugees in the late pre-contact period. Collingwood Bay people have multiple lines of relationship based

on histories of migration, warfare, trade, schooling and so forth that cross linguistic and residential lines. While locals often point to cultural distinctions between language groups, the communities share much in common, notably a distinctive system of political organisation which forms the subject of the latter part of this paper.

Fox (2006) observes that Austronesian-speaking societies commonly define present social differentiation in terms of multiple origins. One well-studied version, particularly in Oceanic societies, is the 'stranger king' – late arrivals who come to dominate the 'people of the land' (Sahlins 1985). Collingwood Bay people exhibit a second common pattern, one of autonomous 'clans' distinguished in terms of separate origins and particular rights and obligations associated with them. In this essay, I suggest that this mode of organisation has facilitated the evolution of a nascent form of chieftainship.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I explore the precontract history of Collingwood Bay based on archaeological, linguistic, and oral evidence. The second and longer part of the paper attends to the regional political system. Focusing primarily on the Maisin-speaking people residing in the southern part of the Bay, I describe how this system incorporates both hierarchical and egalitarian aspects and has proven remarkably adaptable to social changes from the time of European first contact in the 1890s.

Collingwood Bay as a Contact Zone

With a small scattered population and far from roads or regular shipping routes, Collingwood Bay has received relatively little attention from anthropologists until recently, particularly compared to the much studied Massim to the east and the Orokaiva to the northwest. While Collingwood Bay societies should be assessed in their own terms, it is hard not to note common elements found in the better studied neighbouring groups, evidence of a long period of contact, borrowing and mixing. I thus begin by reviewing evidence concerning the precontract history of the Bay as suggested by archaeology, oral histories, linguistics, and expressive culture and ritual.

Archaeological Evidence

Collingwood Bay is home to perhaps the earliest archaeological excavation in PNG. In 1898, Anglican missionaries set up a district station at Wanigela, near the centre of the Bay. The original inland site proved unhealthy, so two years later they elected to shift to the beach. The best spot was located at Rainu, one of several beach hamlets sheltered by several mounds from high seas. When villagers hired by the mission began levelling the largest mound, they uncovered an abundance of pottery shards and shell fragments. The missionary, Percy John Money, was joined by the Resident Magistrate, C.A.W. Monkton in digging deeper into the mound, eventually sending their collections to museums in Australia and England. In 1905, the Austrian ethnologist, Rudolf Pöch, conducted a one-day dig on a different mound, depositing his collection at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna (Pöch 1907). Sixty-two years later, Brian Egloff carried out a much more systematic excavation of three smaller mounds that had survived reuse as cemeteries and erosion from the encroaching sea.

Egloff's excavation established that the Wanigela pottery industry, which continues to this day, dates back at least 500 years. The most arresting finds from the early excavation,

however, were thirteen *conus* shells whose carvings ‘exhibit an elaborate artistry using flamboyant curvilinear motifs in which scroll forms dominate the pattern’ (Egloff 1979, 2). These have remained the subject of sometimes intense speculation for a century (Spriggs 2012). It was soon noted that the patterns resembled those found on megalithic stones located in Massim villages along the New Guinea mainland and nearby islands. Golson (1972) saw resemblances with Chinese-Dongson bronze artefacts of 2000 BP, suggesting a deep history of Asian diffusion. Specht (1979) identified an Austronesian engraved style that he speculates spread from New Britain and New Ireland around the same time. The discovery of some 19 additional decorated shells originating in Budibudi atoll in the northern Massim area has renewed interest, not least following the radiocarbon dating of four shells. In the most recent assessment, Beran states that the decoration on the shells ‘is comparable to that produced by Milne Bay Province wood carvers in historic times. This continuity makes them the oldest radiocarbon dated artifacts decorated in the Massim style’ (Ambrose et al. 2012, 113).

Archaeologists divide the Austronesian prehistory of the southern tip and offshore islands of PNG into three phases, each lasting approximately 500 years. In the earliest period, approximately 1500 years ago, Austronesian-speakers settled in southeastern PNG establishing a broad network of trading links between the northern Massim islands and the mainland. During this period, megaliths are associated with graves. During the next phase, between 1000 and 500 BP, mortuary behaviour shifted to secondary burials of bones while the regional network of trade remained in place. During the most recent phase, up to the time of European contact, long distant trade networks became reoriented to the islands and away from the mainland. The carbon dates for the inscribed shells suggest that they were first made in the northern Massim islands, appearing in Rainu towards the end of the middle ‘Expansion Phase,’ around 1400 CE. This dating is tentative, given that only one of the *conus* shells from Rainu has so far been tested (Ambrose et al. 2012).

Collingwood Bay thus appears to lie on the northwesternmost point of the Austronesian expansion on the southern tip of PNG. Designs on early pottery found in the Trobriands and elsewhere suggest that Wanigela pots and/or designs spread widely through the area from an early date following the discovery of rich sources of clay on the slopes of Mount Victory (Kerorova) on Cape Nelson. It seems likely that after this trade ended, carved *conus* shells were preserved as heirloom valuables before being discarded or buried with their owners. By the time of European contact in the 1890s, the trading links outside the Bay were limited to greenstone axes quarried inland from Uiaku, Wanigela pots, and obsidian and shell valuables from Goodenough Island (Seligman and Joyce 1907). Since contact, trade in traditional items has continued but has become more localised. The Wanigelans continue to produce fired clay cooking pots, while Maisin make tapa cloth, and Miniafia people construct large outrigger canoes.

Linguistic Evidence

In his linguistic survey of southeastern PNG, Dutton (1971) identifies five distinct languages spoken by Collingwood Bay peoples, noting that all can be further broken down into local dialects.² Two are Papuan (non-Austronesian): Korafe, which belongs to the large Binanderean family, by far the largest and most widespread language group

in Oro Province, and Onjob, which is distantly related to the Dagan family of languages in the interior of southeastern PNG. Arifama-Miniafia and Ubir bear close relationships to each other and with other Austronesian languages of the PNG southern tip.

While the genetic affinities for these languages are clear, the fifth language – Maisin – has long presented a linguistic puzzle. Drawing upon missionary notes, William Strong (1911, 381), then the Resident Magistrate for the district, published a brief description of Maisin, observing that ‘the language is remarkable in that it really appears to be one of the rare instances of a language with a grammar derived from two distinct sources’. He thought that the language was likely Austronesian in origin. Drawing upon the same materials, Ray (1911) insisted that Maisin was far more likely to be Papuan, pointing to various Non-Austronesian features and noting that while Papuan and Austronesian language speakers shared much vocabulary and idioms in contact areas, there were no known instances of Austronesian-speakers adopting Papuan grammatical features. Capell initially agreed with Ray, but in a major survey of languages in the region declared that Maisin should be regarded as a legitimately ‘mixed’ language, one of only two in Melanesia (1976, 1943). There matters stood until more detailed studies of Maisin were produced by Lynch (1977), Ross (1984), and Frampton (2014), all concluding that the language had an Austronesian foundation to which a number of Papuan grammatical features along with an unusually large assortment of Papuan words and idioms had been added, several of which cannot yet be traced to regional Papuan languages.

Ross (1996) suggests that the different conclusions linguists have drawn about Maisin over the years have less to do with the language materials available to them than differing methodologies and assumptions about the nature of Austronesian versus Papuan languages and the implications of language contact (cf. Dutton 2006). Summing up recent thought on the subject, Ross points out that during the pre-modern era and still today in many areas most adults are multilingual, knowing at least one neighbouring language which serves as a *lingua franca* in relationships outside the local community. In effect, most children grow up learning two native languages: an ‘emblematic language’ spoken at home and an ‘intergroup’ language connecting them to outsiders. Over time, some blending and borrowing occurs: usually phonology gets shaped by the emblematic language which in turn takes on semantic and morphological features of the intergroup dialect. Ross labels this largely unconscious process as ‘metatypy’ and notes that contemporary Austronesian languages belonging to the Papuan Tip family show this effect to a marked degree, reflecting a long period of language interaction along the coastal areas of southeastern PNG (cf. Capell 1976).

Maisin is unusual, however, in the degree of grammatical mixing, large number of synonyms, and syntactic and phonological quirks. When I struggled to learn the language, I joked that the Maisin seem to have deliberately selected the most difficult features of both Austronesian and Papuan languages. To my surprise (and to be honest, relief) I learned that their neighbours felt the same. While most Maisin adults understand at least one other Collingwood Bay language, Korafe, Ubir and Miniafia speakers affirmed that they found Maisin very difficult to master. Ross (1996) argues that Maisin exemplifies a secondary process building upon metatypy that Thurston (1989) calls ‘esoterogeny’ – a deliberate modification of the emblematic language that makes it too esoteric for outsiders to understand. An additional feature of Maisin culture adding to linguistic complexity is a strict prohibition on speaking the names of in-laws. Given that Maisin personal names often

reference common items, such as coconuts or facial features, the prohibition generates an abundance of synonyms.

While all of the language groups have points of concentration along the Bay, only the smallest – Onjob – is entirely contiguous, occupying two villages inland from Wanigela.³ Miniafia-Arafama and Korafe villages are interspersed on Cape Nelson, while both Ubir and Maisin have outlying communities. The complicated linguistic map of Collingwood Bay suggests considerable movement in the late contact period, more or less frozen in place with the establishment of the government base at Tufi in 1900 and the ending of local warfare. This is a picture largely confirmed by oral histories.

Oral Histories

One can distinguish two types of contemporary narratives concerning the pre-contact past: clan migration stories and tales of culture heroes. Both are considered true, although in differing senses. Clan histories retrospectively trace the movements of named groups from their origin to current locations. Stories of culture heroes, on the other hand, are timeless, not associated with particular clans, and refer to the creation of widely shared cultural traits and geographical features. I'll return to them below in the context of expressive culture and ritual.

Taken collectively, the clan histories suggest different origins for the five language groups. Onjob and Miniafia-Arafama peoples trace their origins to the slopes of Mount Victory (Kerorova), having moved to their present locations following an eruption in the nineteenth century. Ubir-speakers migrated from the southeast, with some speculating that they share common ancestry with people in the village of Wanigela located near Port Moresby (Kamit 1975). Korafe and Maisin, on the other hand, relate that their ancestors emerged from underground near the village of Bedaide on the western edge of the Musa River basin, where a remnant group of Maisin continues to live. Notably, all Binanderean-speaking groups across the Northern Province trace their origins to the same location (Waiko 1982; Williams 1930).

Writing of the movement of language groups is somewhat misleading, however. Collingwood Bay people instead relate stories of 'clans', their common translation of terms referring to named patrilineal descent groups.⁴ In principle, each clan has its own story as implied by their name, which usually refers to a founding ancestor, as well as a collection of emblems and competencies. In practice, senior members of a much smaller number of preeminent clans relate detailed migration stories and these histories in turn work to link together the stories of lesser clans into narratives of collective movements. Maisin, for instance, group clans into two larger confederacies based upon the routes they took to arrive in Collingwood Bay from the origin place: Mera ari Kawo by sea and Wo ari Kawo over land. There is little to suggest, however, that these two groupings, let alone the Maisin as a whole, formed stable polities in the past. Instead, the primary emphasis upon individual clan origins appears to have allowed a considerable degree of flexibility for leaders building alliances (Barker 1996). Such groupings often included people from different language groups, as evidenced by the presence of clans living today in Maisin villages that trace their roots to Onjob and Korafe speakers.

In my research with the Maisin, I found that senior members of individual clans further associated themselves with clans in other language groups by pointing to historical

encounters, marriage alliances, and symbolic properties such as common types of owned tapa designs. While oral traditions are replete with accounts of warfare, one finds an assumption that groups across the Bay, regardless of language or origins, are organised in much the same way. As Fox (2006, 233) has suggested of Austronesian groups elsewhere, '[a] diversity of origins with the same society creates a diversity of possibilities'. In the case of Collingwood Bay, this diversity of possibilities ranged beyond the boundaries of local villages or language groups.

The Maisin provide the most striking example. Their migration stories should place them solidly among Binanderean speakers, such as the Korafe. Yet linguists have concluded is that Maisin is genetically an Austronesian language. Ross (1996, 202) speculates that the ancestors of the Maisin were once an isolate of Austronesian speakers residing in the fastness of the Musa swamps, surrounded by larger Papuan-speaking groups. Their esoteric dialect may have initially developed as a defensive response. If that is the case, what began as a defence over time transformed into an effective basis for aggression. As they moved by land and sea to Collingwood Bay, Maisin leaders formed alliances with foreign clans who migrated with them. By the time of European contact in 1890, Maisin war leaders were considered the strongest and most dangerous in the region, raiding villages as far away as the tip of Cape Vogel. Maisin continued to raid neighbouring groups and European traders who ventured into the Bay during the next decade.⁵ In early 1901, the newly established Resident Magistrate, C.A.W. Monckton, responded to a foiled ambush by unleashing his police on the two largest Maisin villages, destroying canoes, killing six men and wounding an unknown number of others. Now 'pacified', the Maisin maintained a reputation for recalcitrance well into the colonial era, but the days of warfare were over (Barker 1987; Monckton 1922).

Expressive Culture and Ritual

By far the best known of culture hero narratives related by Collingwood Bay people concerns the exploits of a beautiful youth known as Keva to the Maisin and Dararuk to the Ubir (Asor 1974; Benson 1956). Particulars vary, but the core story tells of an orphaned boy adopted by an old woman who lives in a massive tree. As a young man, Keva attracts the attention of village women with his fine dancing and handsome figure. When their husbands leave on an extended hunting expedition, the women throw themselves against the tree, attempting to reach the youth and have sex with him. A young boy spies on them and reports back to their husbands. The furious men chop away at the tree, but each morning the tree appears restored. Eventually, one of the senior men works out a solution, burning the chips as the men's axes cut them from the tree. Still dancing, Keva falls with the tree, marking a cultural boundary between Northern and Milne Bay peoples and their respective forms of drums, dancing, clothing and languages.

The Keva/Dararuk narrative bears similarities to stories related in Austronesian New Britain (Pomponio, Counts, and Harding 1994), but in this context, it marks the furthest extent of iconic Binanderean cultural features. The more visible distinctions between east and west are in fact quite striking: short handled versus long handleless 'hour glass' drums, plain grass versus decorated tapa cloth skirts, unadorned versus elaborately tattooed women's faces. Collingwood Bay peoples welcome visitors and celebrate presentations of gifts with cries of 'Oro Kaiva!' and share with Binanderean-speakers common dance

forms and costumes. Traditionally, men and women wear decorated tapa cloth bearing emblems marking clan identities. Although less elaborate than among the Orokaiva, Collingwood Bay people also traditionally initiated first-born children in ceremonies involving large exchanges of wealth and food between marriage partners.

Yet, it is not hard to detect commonalities with Massim societies to the southeast. The Kalauna of Goodenough Island conceive of their society in terms of autonomous clans emerging from under the ground in possession of particular distinguishing competencies, among the most important being certain types of magic and sorcery (Young 1971). Collingwood Bay people also share with the Kalauna a tradition of competitive feasting between coalitions of clans. As in Kiriwina and other Massim societies, the highest-ranking leaders in Collingwood Bay societies symbolise their power with oversized lime gourds and elaborately carved spatulas. While the elaborate facial tattoos of Collingwood Bay women appear to be a unique feature of the region, body tattooing was common amongst women in Austronesian societies across southeastern PNG (Barton 1918). Like their sisters to the southeast, Collingwood Bay women in the past tattooed their upper thighs and buttocks (Barker and Tietjen 1990; Hermkens 2013). This was done in secret while men were absent from the villages during yearly grass-burning hunts.

The distinctive markers of Massim versus Binanderean culture one finds in Collingwood Bay societies are the products of generations of interactions between Austronesian and Papuan-speakers in what has long been a contact zone. Like the Maisin language, the cultural expressions that have emerged are not merely mixtures but locally evolved formations that at once resonate with but stand apart from those found in neighbouring societies. Consider mourning practices. As elsewhere in the Northern Province, these centre on widows and widowers, who traditionally undergo extended periods of mourning in silent isolation, dressed in heavy costumes of Job's Tears. The end of mourning is marked by the symbolic removal of restrictions. In an echo of the first-born initiation ceremony, in-laws bathe and then dress the mourner in new tapa and ornaments, offering gifts to help them begin their new life (Barker 2014). Women take centre stage in this ceremony, not only preparing food for exchanges but publicly donating gifts of tapa, cooking pots and mats. Echoing the famous *sagali* of the Trobriand Islands, the exchange ideally serves to bring the clans associated with the marriage into balance by publicly balancing debts while on a smaller scale opening a competitive space as women come forward to bestow gifts most associated with their gender on the figure of the mourner (Weiner 1976).

The long history of Collingwood will never be known, but the available evidence suggests certain trends. According to the oral histories, the two largest language groups, Korafe and Maisin, are recent arrivals who both forced other groups to move when they were not absorbed. Possibly as a consequence, the Binanderean features of Collingwood Bay traditional costumes and dancing are prominent. At a more foundational level, however, we find a typical Austronesian emphasis on precedent in which clans assert distinct identities based upon their separate origins and various associated rights and emblems. If this is the case, the Maisin language, rather than an oddity, stands as the exemplar of a process occurring across the Bay as various newcomers have combined cultural elements into new forms. This underlying Austronesian signature becomes even more apparent when one examines the indigenous political system, to which I now turn.

Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Collingwood Bay Societies

One does not have to visit a Collingwood Bay community long before hearing talk of ‘chiefs’.⁶ Determining who is (and just as importantly, who is not) a chief, however, is no easy matter. Sometimes people refer to a particular individual as a ‘chief’. More often, villagers speak of chiefs quite loosely, referring generally to senior male clan members. That said, it is not unusual for even young men to describe themselves as ‘chiefs’ when claiming the privileges belonging to their clan. While some of the many ‘chiefs’ clearly exercise influence, none possess the authority to order others around apart from junior members of their near family. Gossip and the ever-looming threat of sorcery serve as levellers against any person who pushes too hard or displays more than their fair share of wealth. In general, men exercise authority over women and elders of both sexes do not hesitate to boss around the younger members of their households. All the same, despite the talk of ‘chiefs’, daily life in the local villages appears highly egalitarian, marked by near constant exchanges of food, labour, and gossip between people who for the most part have grown up together within densely overlapping kinship and marriage networks.

There is no vernacular terms equivalent to the English word ‘chief’. Among the Maisin the common term for leader is ‘big man’ (*tamati bejji*). For the most part, the influence exercised by individual men and women has much to do with their personalities, achievements, and reputations as hard workers and generous contributors to exchange networks. In short, like the Paiwan chiefs discussed by Ku in this issue, Maisin leadership in practice resists easy categorisation in the classic terms of ascribed versus achieved status. Yet there are clear notions of hierarchy in the ways Collingwood Bay people conceive of their clans and leaders. In certain circumstances, these distinctions have formed the basis for a nascent system of chieftainship. Significantly, Maisin, Korafe, Ubir and Miniafia-speaking groups share cognate systems (Bonshek 2005; Gneccchi-Ruscione 1991; Stephens 1974; Wakefield 2001). While there are differences in detail, the commonalities strongly suggest that the system has evolved regionally rather than originating from one Austronesian or Papuan source.

In what follows, I describe the system for the Maisin communities in the southern part of the Bay, which I know best (see Barker 2016; Hermkens 2013). My analysis proceeds in three steps. First, I give a description of the indigenous political system as Maisin typically describe it. Next, I turn to the more fluid picture of the system in practice. Finally, I examine how the system has responded to the challenges of colonial and postcolonial interventions.

Principles of Hierarchy and Equivalence in Maisin Society

The traditional political system among the Maisin and their neighbours is structurally based on the notion of multiple origins of particular clans which define distinct identities. According to the charter histories, the Maisin clans emerged from underground, each in possession of certain privileges and emblems. Such *kawo* or *kawo evovi* include tapa cloth designs, types of lime spatulas, songs, body ornaments, carved designs, plant and animal totems, magic, and various customary rights of no obvious practical purpose (such as the right to hold torches in both hands or the obligation to give away personal items if

someone expresses admiration of them). Such *kawo* are considered inalienable properties of the clans that possess them. They pass down the male line. Daughters may use their fathers' *kawo*, but they cannot pass them to their own children with one rare exception: mother's brothers may gift one of their *kawo* to a first-born child during her or his initiation. Usually, the recipient is not allowed to pass that particular item to their own children, although sometimes permission is given.

Maisin distinguish between two types of clans: Kawo and Sabu. The superior ranked Kawo clans share several markers of their rank and associated prerogatives. The markers include wearing rooster plumes in headdresses, clipping the fringes of the thatched roofs of their houses, and arranging houses around a plaza. Kawo are alternately referred to as *ira ari kawo*, 'drums are their emblem' referring to their right to organise and host feasts and dances in their hamlet plazas. They are also referred to as 'peace' or 'alliance' (*sinan*) clans as it is through hosting feasts that Maisin build alliances with outside groups. Each Kawo clan has associated Sabu. These are often described as 'servants' of the Kawo in light of their key duty to provide labour, food and dancing during feast times. Sabu clans possess a single shared right – to make war. They are thus referred to as *ganan ari kawo*, 'spears are their emblem'. Individual Sabu own specific privileges, such as tapa emblems, but generally they possess less *kawo* property than higher ranked Kawo clans do.

Maisin further distinguish between two confederacies of Kawo clans (each with its associated Sabu) in terms of origin histories placing them on different parts of the Musa River following their emergence from underground and subsequent migration routes to Collingwood Bay. The *Wo ari Kawo* and *Mera ari Kawo* confederacies engaged in competitive exchanges as 'food enemies', working to outdo each other with massive gifts of raw foods and dancing in alternating feasts (cf. Young 1971). The ultimate goal of such feasts, whether with other Maisin or foreign groups, was to forge a balanced relationship, often sealed with marriage exchanges, to assure an ongoing alliance.

Although Maisin routinely refer to elders of Kawo and (although less often) Sabu clans as 'chiefs', the political organisation is more accurately described as a heredity class system cognate with others found among lowlands Austronesian-speaking groups, notably Manam Island and Mekeo in PNG and Maikira in the Solomon Islands (Chowning 1979, 70). That said, the Maisin system bears some structural similarities to a truly chiefly system: that of eastern Fiji in that it forms 'a scheme of two intersecting forms of dualism' (Sahlins 2004, 58), symmetrical and asymmetrical. The first, a form of diametric dualism based upon reciprocal opposites, was embodied in the exchange between confederacies opposed as food enemies. The asymmetrical opposition is embodied in the Kawo/Sabu relationship, which is commonly likened to that between an older and younger brother.

These dualisms map upon intersecting moral logics that turn on a distinction between equivalency and hierarchy. Ideally, exchanges between parties should balance out, even in the case of asymmetrical relationships. The ideal state of society is aptly expressed in the compound Maisin word *marawa-wawe* which literally means the sharing of one's guts, the seat of life and emotion, resulting in a state of perfect commensality. Those with an equivalent status ideally should over time match exchanges whether these be of food or within marriages. They mark their equivalence, ideally, by matching exchanges like to like (and thus preferred marriage traditionally for Maisin was sibling exchange). Asymmetrical

relations as Maisin imagine them should also over time come into balance, but in this case through the exchange of unlike things. Parents and older siblings give their juniors care and advice. And in return, they and their advice should be respected and followed.

The Kawo leaders, as they are imagined in oral traditions, are the prime exemplars of the interplay of symmetrical and asymmetrical dualism. They brought peace, it is said, by hosting feasts and exchanging gifts of food, tapa, spouses and valuables not only with 'food enemies' but equivalent leaders from other groups, making them friends by bringing them into a state of balanced reciprocity. At the same time, the Kawo of old are said to have calmed the passions of their fierce Sabu with fine words and solid advice, allowing them to give way to their violent natures when war was required.

I need to stress again that this is an idealised model that influences but by no means determines how traditional leadership works in Collingwood Bay. It strikes me as distinctively Austronesian. That said, one can also detect Binanderean elements in the imagining as well as practice of leadership. Some seem trivial, such as the welcoming shout of '*Oro Kaiva!*' In interviewing older folk, I found evidence of a system of plant emblems not unlike those described for Orokaiva (Schwimmer 1973; Williams 1930). Owned both collectively and individually, such emblems were used to mark ownership, placed taboos on crop trees, and to symbolically break social relationships. Even more intriguing, a few very old men insisted that in the past all young boys went through an initiation ceremony in which they were presented with ornaments representing homicides (cf. Williams 1930, 177–179). If true, some of the more curious ornaments collected from Collingwood Bay around 1900 and now residing in British and Australian museums may be homicide emblems, suggesting Binanderean influences.

Hierarchy and Equivalence in Practice

Having described the Maisin political system as it is portrayed by Maisin to outsiders and themselves, I now need to complicate the picture for as in all societies there is a considerable gap between the ideal and practice. The first thing to note is that just as there is no vernacular term for 'chief', Maisin also lacks an exact equivalent for 'clan'. The closest term is *iyon* which is best glossed as a social grouping or division and may refer to anything from a country to a household. While people are generally consistent about who is *Kawo* or *Sabu*, larger 'clans' frequently encompass smaller divisions, marked by name and often specific *kawo* properties. There are further complexities. The Mera ari Kawo confederacy, for instance, groups various clans under different 'big names'.⁷ On the Wo ari Kawo side, one finds a clan that includes Kawo and Sabu branches. In practice, the system is further complicated by residence patterns. Most Maisin villages are multinucleated, made up of contiguous hamlets lined up along coastal sandbars. Hamlets are named for the clans that occupy them. But here again, one finds inconsistencies. Many clans occupy one hamlet but others are interspersed within and often between villages. While they may bear the same clan names, in practice they have little to do with each other. In short, the ideology of 'clans' presents a far more concrete picture than is the case. In practice, the association of clan names with various *kawo* elements and competing histories allows for a surprising degree of fluidity at the level of local residential units. That said, there is little debate among Maisin as to who is Kawo or Sabu.

Other than subtle hints, such as clipped rooflines, however, the Kawo/Sabu distinction is not visible in daily life. All villagers live in bush houses, carry on the same work in their gardens, and equally engage in sharing and gossiping. In principle, Kawo leaders should be the first to speak in public gatherings and dominate conversations. In practice, men (and sometimes women) who have something to contribute do so. Unless dancing is arranged – since it must occur in a Kawo hamlet – there is little or no difference between the life passage rituals and exchanges organised by Kawo or Sabu. In short, in daily life, Maisin villages appear highly egalitarian places, at least within the sexes.

It is very likely that things were different in the past, before the establishment of church and state and the accompanying suppression of warfare and decline of intertribal feasting. Kawo and Sabu leaders alike certainly exercised more power and it is not unlikely that clans and clan identities were more consistent and clearly marked.⁸ That said, a certain degree of fluidity has probably always existed in the system and accounts for its survival and continuing relevance. The gifting of *kawo* to maternal first-borns, the growth and decline of clans, as well as fading memories generate not only disputes but means to create relationships of identity that cross putatively hard and fast lines ordained by separate origins. While based upon an ideology of separate origins and identities, as an idealisation, the Kawo/Sabu relationship in part because of underlying flexibility and fluidity allows multinucleated communities to create unities when required, not least when challenged by outside forces.

Hierarchy and Equivalence in History

Chowning (1979, 66) cautions that in all but a few cases anthropologists have studied societies in which ‘indigenous patterns of leadership [have] been drastically altered’ through the interventions of government officers, missionaries, and labour recruiters who interfered with indigenous leaders while introducing new forms of political organisation not based upon kinship, exchange, or prowess at warfare, magic, or feasting. While the archival record for Collingwood Bay is relatively rich, the first detailed ethnographies only appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the continuing economic isolation of the Bay, the communities there have been profoundly impacted by colonial and postcolonial developments and are deeply integrated into wider socioeconomic networks of PNG and the world beyond. Churches and schools have operated nearly continually since the early part of the Twentieth Century with the result that many if not most of the population includes English in its repertoire of languages, church festivals form the main social event in the region (along with sports matches), and there is near constant movement of people between the villages and the towns, where many people from the Collingway Bay area hold jobs. While indigenous forms of leadership – Kawo and clan elders – remain important, they have long co-existed and overlapped with local church, government, and community leaders (Tietjen and Walker 1985). Indeed, in the case of the Maisin, there would appear to be a surfeit of leaders once one totals up all of the community organisations and roles that exist, from the village councillors to the Anglican Mothers’ Union (Barker 2007).

Paradoxically, the multiplicity of leader positions reflects the fact that no individual in Maisin society possesses the singular authority to order others to do his bidding. Beyond the level of close kin, decisions depend upon consensus. Certain individuals are much

more skilled in building consensus than others. Yet, as in most Melanesian societies, consensus tends to be shaky and vulnerable to gossip and sabotage by rivals. Organising church festivals, end of mourning rituals, welcoming ceremonies for candidates running for Parliament inevitably involve continuous discussions long into the night, frequently requiring rapid adjustments to deal with crises such as a death, rumours of an adultery, or the refusal of one party to contribute. Villagers complain bitterly about the gossip, delays, and deal-making yet view any attempt by an individual or faction to impose order with the greatest suspicion. Within the household, a senior woman or man may exercise near tyrannical authority over their juniors in organising a new garden or preparing for a major exchange, but that authority does not extend much further in the multiclan Maisin villages. In short, Maisin society on the whole is highly egalitarian.

Oral histories paint a very different picture: one of powerful 'chiefs' leading their people to a new land, waging war and building alliances with other chiefs along the way. During the first decade of periodic encounters, from first contact in 1890 to the forceful establishment of government control at the beginning of 1901, government officers and missionaries alike identified two powerful 'chiefs' in their reports: Bogege of Sinapa and Wanigera of Uiaku. There is little doubt, given the evidence of the raids both organised (including a botched ambush of the first Resident Magistrate) that these two individuals exercised a great deal of power (Barker 1987). Yet significantly, they were Sabu warriors. Following pacification, they are described as members of 'sub-clans', but the missionaries and government officials who established themselves in Collingwood Bay had virtually nothing to say about chieftainship thereafter (Barker 1996).

Reading between the lines of archival reports and local memories, however, one finds evidence of the continuing play of the Kawo/Sabu opposition over time. When I compiled the names of men who had served as village constables during the colonial period and later as representatives to the Local Government Council established at Tufi in the early 1960s, almost all turned out to be Sabu. Interestingly, the most renowned of Maisin to join the colonial police force was Gerald Pakai, who served as Jack Hide's right-hand man on several of his legendary exploratory patrols in the 1930s. Pakai was a member of a Sabu clan. Given the association between government officers and the exercise of arbitrary authority, it makes some sense that members of the 'hot headed' clans would put themselves forward for these positions.

The mission, on the other hand, attracted members of both Sabu and Kawo clans to its ranks of teachers, evangelists, nurses, and clergy. However, in a different way, the association with Kawo is more profound than that between Sabu and government authority (Barker 2012). During the colonial period and since, the Anglican mission developed an intimate relationship with local people by virtue of its physical presence in the villages. Local staff – most of them Melanesian converts themselves – were heavily dependent upon villagers for labour and food and they needed to maintain good relationships if only to encourage parents to send their children to school and to keep the church pews full. They learned Maisin, engaged in local exchanges, and in a few cases married into the villages. Relationships with white missionaries were more distant as these were based in Wanigela to the north and only visited the Maisin villages once a month or so to supervise the teachers, to baptise converts and to hold communion services.

The Anglican mission was (and remains) highly hierarchical, with authority passing down from bishop to priest to deacon and so forth. Yet Maisin did not perceive this

authority as the same as that of government officers. Elderly Maisin I interviewed likened the missionaries to Kawo leaders of old in that they were peace-makers whose teachings served to calm the warrior passions of the Maisin prior to conversion. The association between the church and Kawo clans has been further strengthened by the popularity of church festivals held on patron saint days. These often entail several days of feasting and traditional dancing along with community gifting to the church. While the Kawo/Sabu distinction is not marked since the events take place on neutral church grounds, the festivals nonetheless are clearly successors to the intertribal events formerly organised by Kawo clans (Gnecchi-Ruscone 1997; Hermkens 2007).

Maisin often complain about the demise of traditional leadership and the moral expectations on which it was based. It seems that more and more people are failing to meet exchange obligations, that the unity the older generations experienced in a single church is crumbling as new sects gain adherents, and that too many 'big shots' are returning from the towns diminishing the respect that senior men have long enjoyed (see Martin this issue). And, indeed, most of the time the distinctions between high and low-ranking groups seems to have little relevance to daily life, the challenges people face and the anxieties they feel. Yet, as in so many other parts of the Austronesian world, notions of hierarchy in general, and chieftainship in particular, remain potent resources both for political activation and institution building (White and Lindstrom 1997). As Besnier (2011) has described for Tonga, such systems are crucial nexuses of 'bifocality', simultaneously referencing local and global experiences and understandings, bringing them into unstable and transitory alignment (cf. Tsing 2005).

During my initial fieldwork in 1981–1983 in Uiaku village, the politics of the Kawo/Sabu distinction were limited mainly to quarrels over the ownership of certain rights and names. These could be quite passionate and were no doubt stirred up by my recording of migration stories, genealogies and associated properties. Yet the customary system seemed to have little relevance for community events or decisions. Both Kawo and Sabu senior men spoke freely during meetings and occupied leadership positions in the several voluntary organisations, such as the church council, youth club, and school associations that operated (rather fitfully) at the time.

During the 1980s, many villagers expressed a sense of shame at their 'poverty' relative to other Papua New Guineans. Several Maisin, mainly living in the towns, have over the years signed contracts with logging companies to clear cut the primary rainforest that lie between the coastal villages and mountain wall, about 25 km inland. The promise each time this happens is that profitable commercial plantations will replace the forests bringing jobs and money to the community. This has been a common scenario throughout much of Melanesia over the past 30 years or so. A majority of rural Maisin, however, have to date successfully fended off these efforts which they perceive accurately enough as land theft. The anti-logging campaign has been assisted and given great visibility by various national and international non-governmental organisations, including Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund, resulting in two victories in the National Court of PNG in 2002 and 2014.

This fight has impacted the Maisin and neighbouring groups in numerous ways that I've documented elsewhere (Barker 2004, 2016). The Kawo/Sabu traditions have proven a key point of reference in uniting the community. Around 1995, I began hearing talk about a 'council of chiefs'. This failed to materialise, but nevertheless the distinction

took material form as Maisin organised festivals to welcome their environmental allies, with Kawo and Sabu groups assuming their customary roles. This has been particularly marked in greeting ceremonies. As dinghies bearing delegates approach the shore, they are challenged by Sabu warriors thrusting spears and clubs in their direction. The threatened fight is called off by a Kawo elder, holding high a large lime pot and spatula, who leads the visitors to a shelter where they are served coconut water and food, marking friendship. The Kawo/Sabu distinction, however, has gone well beyond a ceremonial performance. The leader of the an 'integrated conservation and development' organisation that formed a kind of umbrella group for the Maisin, was a senior member of a Kawo clan. Fittingly, he spent much of his time in diplomacy between different factions, not least among hot-headed members of Sabu clans who talked up the opportunity of violence against loggers should they show up on the beach. More recently, local activists have worked to form a regional political body to represent the interests of all the language groups in southern Collingwood Bay. Interestingly, its manifesto references 'the authority vested in the traditional Paramount chiefs' suggesting a degree of reification of the Kawo designation (Gangai 2010).

While properly understood as a hereditary class system, it is possible that something resembling hereditary chieftainship may be developing in some Collingwood Bay communities. A handful of families in recent years have sponsored unusually large first-born and end of mourning ceremonies that appear in part to cement the claims of the next generation to exercise authority. Their names are well-known both in the Bay and the larger population of 'Tufi people' working in urban centres across PNG. Perhaps as importantly, they are well represented among the Collingwood Bay diaspora, whose largess in contributing money and goods for local ceremonies has become increasingly apparent. To date, however, the emergence of chiefly families (as opposed to Kawo clans) remains a potential rather than a given. As Rio (this issue) points out, 'When we accept that hierarchy is about ideology and values we also have to acknowledge that hierarchy is all the time in a state of transformation.' There can be little doubt that the Kawo/Sabu distinction and its cognates will remain a potent reference for Collingwood Bay people well into the future.

Conclusion

Collingwood Bay today marks the northwestern extent of Austronesian languages on the southern tip of PNG. It is impossible to know when the first Austronesian-speakers arrived, but the archaeological evidence from Rainu village reveals trade and the presence of typical Massim styles on pottery and conus shells dating back at least 500 years. Most Collingwood Bay people consider themselves historically recent migrants from elsewhere. The two largest language groups share overlapping migration histories with Binanderean groups to the northwest. Binanderean cultural features, particularly the use of decorated tapa cloth and dance styles, distinguish Collingwood Bay expressive culture from that of Massim groups on the other side of the Milne Bay provincial border falling on the eastern side of the Bay. Yet, a closer look at language and social organisation reveals considerable mixing from Papuan and Austronesian cultures, most spectacularly in the case of the Maisin language. This suggests that the migration histories mask an older more prolonged process of cultural integration in the Bay.

When one turns to the way that Collingwood people perceive their own history, Austronesian characteristics become apparent. While histories related by clan elders vary in terms of detail and richness, they generally place a strong emphasis upon origins. They serve to define the identity of descent groups along with an array of other inherited emblems, prerogatives, and customs. Although clans belong to different language groups, crucially they are not defined in terms of language. When examined in detail, one finds considerable overlapping in terms of the stories, properties, and rights of clans across language groups in the Bay. In the past, ‘war’ or ‘peace’ leaders likely appealed to and created (through gifting) common elements in clan identities in order to build alliances within and between language groups. Somewhat paradoxically, the constitution of clan identities in terms of origins and associated properties may have worked to incorporate newcomers into an emerging regional system by providing a mechanism that in practice transversed language and tribal boundaries.

The co-presence of ‘peace’ and ‘war’ clans in the five language groups in Collingwood Bay is highly suggestive of such a regional evolution. The Kawo/Sabu distinction along with the common referencing of individual clans in terms of paired older and younger brothers exemplifies the sort of precedence found in most Austronesian societies: the establishment of a priority in ranking by virtue of a priority in origins (Vischer 2009). Like the Mandaya of the Philippines, Collingwood Bay people tend to project hierarchy into their remembered history and ceremonial occasions, while community life for the most part is highly egalitarian (Yengoyan 2006). Yet the ideology of ‘war’ and ‘peace’ chiefs provides a potent resource for building alliances under powerful leaders in the face of outside threats and pressures. In the past, the cycle of warfare and feasting were the key occasions for the emergence of such powerful leaders. Today, the threat of land theft from logging interests, on the one hand, and unequal opportunities to acquire wealth through networks of employed relatives offer opportunities for the emergence of new ‘chiefs’ who turn to the legacies of oral traditions to bolster support for their leadership. In this, too, Collingwood Bay people are following a common scenario in many if not most Austronesian communities (White and Lindstrom 1997).

Notes

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2. I’m here relying on Dutton’s (1971) village-level survey for classification of language groups. Collingwood Bay people make finer distinctions. Wanigelans, for instance, break Dutton’s Onjob into two languages: Onjob and Aisor.
3. It should be noted, however, that two clans residing in the Maisin-speaking village of Uiaku are descended from and retain relationships with the Onjob community to the north. According to oral traditions, they allied themselves with Maisin when the latter migrated into the Bay. At least three communities in Collingwood Bay – Uwe, Wanigela, and Uiaku – are home to two or more language groups.
4. I discuss the vernacular conception of groups in the second part of this chapter.
5. Collingwood Bay people were themselves subject to raiding by groups from the west, most notably Okein and Doriri groups.

6. See Lin and Scaglione (2019) for a discussion of the challenges of defining ‘chiefs’ in Oceania.
7. Consider, for example, the Simboro clan. Once one of the largest clans in Wo ari Kawo, in 1981–83 it had been reduced to three households in Uiaku. To my surprise, two of the households considered themselves to be Simboro *and* members of Korafe clans on Cape Nelson based upon marriage and gifts of *kawo* that had occurred generations ago.
8. Missionaries and administrators alike initially misidentified Sabu leaders as the ‘chiefs’ of the Maisin, presumably because they took the lead in warfare. Afterwards, Kawo leaders are occasionally identified as chiefs, particularly on the part of the mission which needed to negotiate for land for its stations. As elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, the suppression of warfare and introduction of contract labour served largely to undermine traditional authority.

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