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Chapter 4

Moral Exchange and Exchanging Morals: Alternative Paths of Cultural Change in Papua New Guinea¹

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Introduction

This chapter concerns striking similarities and equally striking differences between the Gebusi and the Tangu, two small hinterland Melanesian societies that lay some 400 kilometers distant from each other across the vast bulk of mainland Papua New Guinea. Aside from location, Tangu and the Gebusi differ in that Tangu have been subject to influence by Western trade goods, colonial influence, and labor out-migration since at least the late 19th century, whereas Gebusi were first effectively contacted by outsiders in 1963. The ethnographic accounts of these societies differ as well; the Tangu were studied by Kenelm Burridge starting in the 1950s, while the Gebusi were studied by me and my wife, Eileen Cantrell Knauff, beginning in 1980. Despite these differences, striking similarities in Tangu and Gebusi morality—and in their emphasis on moral equivalence in particular—pose an intriguing question: Why is it that Tangu, after prolonged outside influence, remained in many ways morally and culturally resistant to fundamental change, while Gebusi have experienced pronounced cultural change if not transformation in these same regards over a short period of sixteen years, from 1982 to 1998—despite a general absence of economic development? This chapter addresses the similarities and differences between Gebusi and Tangu in this regard. In the process, my account addresses issues of

¹ This chapter is dedicated to Kenelm Burridge, whose writings first engaged me in 1974, when I was twenty years old. Burridge's works were the most important single authorial influence in persuading me to become a Melanesianist. My senior BA thesis at Yale, written under Harold Scheffler and Donald Black considered the relation between the Burridgean notion of equivalence and the dynamics of colonial impact in Melanesia through a comparative study of twenty "cargo cults." Though I never met or corresponded with him prior to 2003, Burridge's core ideas informed my first fieldwork among Gebusi and percolated into my subsequent career. This chapter is an attempt, long belated, to publicly recognize and draw upon the specific value of his ethnography and its spirit of equivalence.

Special thanks are extended to John Barker, not only for organizing the conference on which this volume is based, but for his insightful and penetrating comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Though I have tried to benefit from John's perspicacious remarks, all shortcomings in this chapter remain my own.

morality and values in relation to cultural continuity and change across Melanesia more generally.

Gebusi

When I first arrived among them in 1980, the Gebusi of Papua New Guinea's Western Province appeared to be one of the most culturally remote and so-called unacculturated groups in the country. Seventeen years earlier, in 1963, they had still been using stone axes when first effectively "contacted" by Australian patrol officers. To this day, their area still has no travelable roads to other parts of the country. In 1980, Gebusi had no significant mission influence, no out-migration, and no significant cash cropping or other cash economy. They boasted robust and continuing public traditions of male initiation (including male-male sexuality and insemination), all-night spirit séances, inter-village fights, and elaborate divinations, inquests, and accusations concerning sorcery. Compared to other Melanesian groups, Gebusi were distinctive in taking the leveling functions of sorcery accusation to an extreme. Along with studies of their spirit life, shamanism, and cosmology, I documented them to have had one of the highest homicide rates known in the cross-cultural ethnographic record. Their killing was not primarily from warfare but from the execution of accused sorcerers, largely within the community to which they belonged (Knauff 1985a; 1985b; 1986; 1987a; 1987b; 1987c; 1989).

The moral basis for this pattern was a strong if not radical regime of what Burridge (1969b) termed existential equivalence through direct exchange. Among Gebusi, this dynamic included sister-exchange marriage, immediate reciprocity at feasts, and the taking of the life of the accused sorcerer in direct exchange for the life of the person who had died from sickness. Underlying these bare social facts was a value system that placed strong emphasis on amity and equivalence. This was epitomized in the key Gebusi term *kogwayay*, which they used more generally to refer to their distinctive customs and way of life as a whole. In referential terms, *kogwayay* may be roughly glossed as "good company." The three morphemes of the word convey its meanings. *Kog* is the morphemic root of Gebusi words that connote togetherness, being alike, similarity, and comradeship or friendship. *Wa* is the Gebusi verb root "to talk"—a term that refers not to directive speech, haranguing, or monologic discourse but to casual, friendly, and free-floating dialogues that lace Gebusi social interactions and particularly the social life of their longhouses during the evening. *Yay* is the Gebusi lexical root for cheering, joking, or yelling in exuberant and joyous collectivity or in friendly riposte.

In practical usage, the component parts of Gebusi *kogwayay*—togetherness, casual talk, and exuberant cheering or joking—referred not only to a social ethic of social friendship and political equity but to a spiritual and cosmological amity. This reciprocity and equivalence pervaded both the extensive Gebusi spirit world and the means by which Gebusi themselves accessed this world—through Gebusi spirit mediums who married spirit women. The relatives, friends, and children of these spirit women came inside the medium's body during spirit séances. They exchanged

their spirits with his own and spoke in elaborate songs to the assembled audience of Gebusi men and boys.

The flipside of Gebusi morality and sociality emerged as deep-seated but hard-to-acknowledge anger and resentment in the context of inequality and lack of reciprocity, especially among adult men. This tension was especially pronounced between patrilineages that were affinally linked by marriages that had not been reciprocated—that were not sister-exchanges. Nonreciprocal marriages frequently resulted from the willful and insistent desires of young men and women to choose their own marital partners despite the objections of the woman's natal kin. Almost half of Gebusi first marriages (48%) formed in this way, i.e., nonreciprocally. These included some of the oldest marriages known—both extant and genealogically.

In the Gebusi social and moral world, there was no easy way that structural inequity between the bride's and groom's patrilineages could be rectified in cases of unreciprocated marriage. In a society vigilantly dedicated to immediate exchange, Gebusi did not admit or accommodate substantial compensation by exchange of material goods. Thus, for instance, they did not promote or accept major exchanges of bridewealth or other forms of compensation.

Statistically, the high rate of homicide within Gebusi communities was highly correlated with non-reciprocated marriages. In particular, sorcery accusations and killings were by far greatest between patrilineages linked by one or more marriages that had not been reciprocated. In essence, matrimonial breaches of person-for-person exchange were ultimately responded to with person-for-person exchange in the realm of death: the life of an accused sorcerer was expunged in reciprocity for the death of a person who died from sickness. The vigilance of this system was reflected in a rate of indigenous killing that amounted to virtually one-third of all adult Gebusi deaths. Its moral and spiritual dimensions adhered in the fact that death and sorcery inquests were orchestrated by entranced Gebusi spirit mediums during spirit séances—that is, through the agency of their equivalent spirits.

Notably, Gebusi did not have indigenous community headman, big-men, or what Burridge (1975) calls "managers." Par contra, the aggressiveness associated with would-be leaders easily became a magnet of antagonism among Gebusi—and eventually the target of sorcery accusations and lethal violence against those who tried to lead by authority rather than by personal example. As such, Gebusi leadership was vigilantly decentralized. By contrast, Gebusi spirit mediums—through the vicarious agency of their spirit-world friends—exerted influence that was both important and displaced from their own identity.

To round out this cycle of equivalence and vigilant reciprocity, most Gebusi recommitted themselves to pro-social and positive reciprocity in the wake of sorcery inquests and executions. Persons who were closely related to those killed as sorcerers were often reabsorbed, re-amalgamated, and eventually co-resided in longhouse communities along with those who had killed or abetted the killing of their relatives. In the multi-clan structure of Gebusi longhouse communities, amity and equivalence were often ultimately re-established.

Alongside and against this internal Gebusi dynamic were both the constant threat and the reality of self-willed outsiders. Of particular significance here were the numerous, densely populated, and aggressive ethnic neighbors of the Gebusi, the

Bedamini. During the pre-colonial era, Bedamini undertook devastating raids into Gebusi territory. Some of these forays decimated entire Gebusi villages. If Australian colonial officers had not arrived and put an effective end to Bedamini raids during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Gebusi might well have been a largely moribund ethnic group of refugees by the time we arrived to live among them in 1980. In 1980, Gebusi numbered about 450 as opposed to the approximately 3,800 Bedamini.

Indigenously, then, Gebusi lived in the shadow of larger and overarching inequalities that were based on aggression—the military power of their populous ethnic neighbors. During the 1960s and 70s, however, this power was supplanted by a new authority—that of Australian colonial officers. Delightfully if somewhat ironically for Gebusi, Australian officers directed virtually all of their regional force and attention against the Bedamini. In the process, they left Gebusi largely alone. By the early 1980s, Gebusi had benefited greatly from the curtailment of Bedamini raids as well as from the modest influx of Australian steel axes and knives—which enabled Gebusi to cut bigger gardens and build larger and more numerous houses. On the other hand, Gebusi received little direct intervention or influence from Australians themselves—apart from the yearly colonial census patrol that meandered through their territory. Gebusi were described in government reports as “quiet tractable people who have seldom given the Administration any difficulty” (Barclay 1970-71, unpaginated). In fact, Gebusi often remained free enough to continue executing sorcerers in the bush without government knowledge or interference. To a surprising degree, then, the power of Australians provided Gebusi both the autonomy and the space to elaborate their own cultural and social forms. In some ways, when we first lived with them in 1980-82, Gebusi had been liberated to proliferate their own forms of indigeneity.

Gebusi Times Changing

When I went back to live and work among Gebusi in 1998, I found that many things had changed, if not been transformed (Knauff 2002a; 2002c; 2005). Eighty-four percent of the adults were now baptized Christians and regular churchgoers in either the Catholic, the Evangelical, or the Seventh Day Adventist churches. All of the boys and almost all of the school-aged girls were daily pupils for seven hours a day, five days a week, at the local community school. Gebusi boasted talented rugby and soccer teams; these vied in refereed competition against squads of other communities and ethnic groups on the ballfield at the main government station. Gebusi women lugged heavy net bags of produce twice a week in an often fruitless attempt to sell their food at the local market.

These changes and others had emerged without an appreciable change in economic development, political intrusion, or coercion. Gebusi brought themselves before the agents and institutions of the post-colonial state rather than the reverse. Previously a people of the deep lowland rainforest, a number of communities picked up and moved to within a short walking distance of the government station. This was done with the express purpose of attending the station's churches, having children attend its school, enabling village women to bring food to the local market, and

allowing men to play in sports leagues on the government ballfield. It was hard not to conclude that the Gebusi I had lived with had quite willingly adopted a self-conscious local modernity. In comparative perspective, recent Gebusi actions have paralleled those of selected other Melanesian societies in which social and cultural change has been embraced with fervor and intensity (e.g., Burt 1994; Dwyer and Minnegal 1998; Gostin 1986; cf., Robbins 2004).

In the mix, many of Gebusi's previous customs were vestigial or moribund. All night spirit séances, which had previously been held an average of once every eleven nights, were entirely a thing of the past. All the previous spirit mediums had either died or cut their tie with the spirits—and no new spirit mediums had been indoctrinated. Men's singing with the spirit world had been replaced by guitar and ukulele ballads modeled on cassette music heard from bands in other parts of the country. The world of the traditional spirits had virtually disappeared, and male initiations and ritual homosexuality were extinct or almost so in all but the most remote villages.

Beyond these differences of custom and specific belief were changes of subjectivity and affect—a deeper change of culture. Gebusi notions of temporality, in which the future was assumed to repeat the past, increasingly emphasized the unfolding of social time as a path of anticipated progress. Whereas indigenous Gebusi temporal markers, generational naming practices, and subsistence practices had emphasized cyclicity, Gebusi activities at school, church, in sports, and at the market were increasingly evaluated against the success or failure of personal achievement or development over a finite period of time. People now feared being “late” at such activities and also feared failure at the end of marked time periods of intended accomplishment or improvement—not performing well in school on the Friday test, not being ready for Judgment Day at the Sunday church service, not having scored enough points by the end of the rugby match, or not having sold any food by the end of the twice-weekly market.

At the same time, Gebusi had developed a surprising penchant for sitting quietly and absorbing the teachings, harangues, and directives of outsiders: the pastor in church, the teacher in school, the government official, the dictates of the market boss, and the referee on the ballfield. None of these personages were Gebusi; rather, they were Papua New Guineans from other parts of the country who had come to bring national and religious enlightenment to this out-of-the-way part of the country. If Gebusi had before been a people who would sooner slay a sorcerer than tolerate a sense of existential inequity, they were now ripe subalterns in a newly modern world of social, political, and spiritual hierarchy. God was an apt symbol of the absolute authority held by the world beyond the horizon, just as his religious and political emissaries from other parts of the country (themselves almost invariably Christian) dominated the modern institutions that Gebusi were so enamored of as passive subjects. Though Gebusi maintained a looser and more equivalent social life in their own community, it was notable to see Gebusi men in the community echo the same rhetorical and authoritarian style in the village that pervaded the church, the classroom, and government activities—and without opposition from their fellow villagers.

As if to reflect the acceptance of subordination to outside power rather than its resistance, the Gebusi rate of sorcery accusation and violence had fallen precipitously. Though real-world murder as homicide had previously accounted for 32.7% of all adult Gebusi deaths, the rate of killing dropped steadily during the 1980s until punctuated by one final beheading in 1988. Then it fell to zero for all of the 1990s. Funerals are now carried out in a surprisingly Christian manner with the outside pastors officiating. The previous passion of community divinations and the practice of sorcery violent inquests have practically ceased.

If the Gebusi model of person-for-person direct exchange has been broken in the realm of death—the life of a presumed sorcery suspect is no longer taken in exchange for that of the sickness victim—the same is true in marriage and in feasting. In contrast to earlier days, not a single marriage that took place in my communities of study between 1982 and 1998 was a sister-exchange. Patterns of inter-village ritual feasting and traditional dancing have become “parties” (*fati*) in which asymmetry is created between the prestigious store-bought rice and tinned fish of the hosts and the merely traditional dried game brought by the visitors. Instead of traditional dancing, festivities now revolve around string band music and teenage disco dancing to cassettes of rock music.

In many ways, Gebusi have not just grappled with a new world of modern cultural hierarchy but been fundamentally changed through willing subordination to it. Still not subject to land alienation, significant wage employment, or dramatically altered means of subsistence, they could easily return to the large tracts of largely uninhabited forest land that they now frequent only occasionally. But they chose instead to live within the near orbit of the government station and its modern institutions and associated activities—even though their economic benefit is but minimal in the bargain. Why is this? A comparison to, and contrast with, Kenelm Burridge’s earlier work on the Tangu is helpful in addressing this question.

Tangu

During the late 19th century in a hinterland off the eastern coast of New Guinea, the four neighborhoods that later formed the collective polity of Tangu were only nominally differentiated from surrounding peoples and communities (Burridge 1956, 427; 1957c, 56; 1966, 393, 396). These four neighborhoods—Wanitzir, Riekitzir, Biampitzir, and Mangigumitzir—spoke dialects that were mutually intelligible, as were those of other adjacent groups (Burridge 1966, 396). At this early period, Tangu social life appeared aggregated within each individual settlement, including through men’s houses or *garamb*, which exerted social control and discipline, enforced taboos, and socialized and circumcised young men (Burridge 1959a, 198; 1969b, 171ff). Under the auspices of the men’s house, groups were also organized for collective ritual and warfare (Burridge 1966, 403; 1969b, 37).

Though three of the four neighborhoods were matrifocal in kinship emphasis one of them, Wanitzir, was patrilineal in orientation (1966, 403; 1969b, 37). In geographic and socioeconomic terms, Wanitzir was oriented more towards the coast and had ties of kinship, myth, and custom that affiliated it with seaward peoples

(1956, 415; 1957c, 57). Ultimately, then, Tangu came to be composed of two different groups, one having migrated inland, and the other cluster of three communities having moved toward the coast (1956, 415; 1960, 117; 1969b, 9). At their inception, relations between the four neighborhoods were insecure and easily lapsed into hostility (Burridge 1960; 119 1969b, 16). And even after their coalescence, the four neighborhoods exhibited antagonism through sorcery suspicions, ritual hostility, and idealization of the brother-sister relationship as the preferred marriage link (Burridge 1958, 46, 49, 61; 1966).

Cohesion among Tangu was fueled by the benefits of economic interdependence, on the one hand, and the need for alliance against hostile neighbors, on the other (1969b, 15-17). Only Wanitzir supplied clay cooking pots, which were in great demand. Other items were more accessible in the other Tangu neighborhoods: arecanut, tobacco, pandanus, betel nut, and sago, the latter two of which were particularly important for trade (1957c, 57). Riekitzir and Mangigumitzir additionally promoted a lively trade in string bags (1957c). Procuring salt may also have stimulated common trade relations, since a large salt pool was located centrally amid the four neighborhoods (1969b, 53). In this context, warfare pressure from outside helped congeal the four neighborhoods for defensive purposes, perhaps a bit like Donald Tuzin (1997; cf., 1980; 1976) described for the Iahita Arapesh in the Sepik. This defense had trade implications, since one of the enemy groups, the Diawat, threatened to cut off the funnel of coastal good to Wanitzir and hence to the other Tangu neighborhoods. Items such as beads, iron, cloth, and hunting dogs were all transmitted in this manner. For a variety of reasons, then, the four neighborhoods of Tangu banded together (Burridge 1957c, 57; 1959b, 137; 1966, 394; 1969b, 15).

Invariably however, integration was compromised by lack of a common system of dispute settlement, kinship, land tenure, and marriage, which was frequently by wife-stealing (1960, 121; 1966, 394). Crucial here was the development of shared ritual elements and display in exchange ceremonies of reciprocity, if also competition between the four neighborhoods. Through this means and other social interactions, Burridge suggests, nascent Tangu settlements became gradually familiar with each other’s men’s house rituals, dances, and narratives. Even in the 1950s, it remained important for a Tangu manager to be proficient in the dance variations of adjacent Tangu neighborhoods (1966, 401; 1969b, 15). Eventually, the dance, display, and oratory of inter-neighborhood reciprocal food exchanges (the Tangu *br’ngun’guni*) became the diagnostic feature of collective Tangu sociality. Gradually, those from the four neighborhoods became viewed as brothers, while, reciprocally, the locus of antagonism could be internalized between those who *were* in fact brothers (1959b, 152).

Over time, a shared system of kinship groups, the *gagai*, spread and laid the basis for a shared polity throughout the four neighborhoods (1957c, 68, 72). The *gagai* was an alliance system whereby communities that were previously independent could be classified as members of the same moiety (1957c, 67; 1969b, 8). Over time, the *gagai* came to allocate land and forge and adjudicate political alliances as well as forming an exogamous group that Burridge describes as “jurally compact” (1957b, 85, 89; 1957c, 68, 72; 1969b, 12ff). Though the original word *gagai* had merely meant “settlement” or “section” in the three matrifocal neighborhoods, it gradually became

an overarching kin system that encompassed the patrifocal kin system of Wanitzir as well (1957b, 85; 1957c, 67, 71; 1969b, 8). Far from marginalizing Wanitzir, this system allowed the latter neighborhood to exploit its economic and geographic position as middlemen between inland groups and coastal ones (1966, 394; 1969b, 15). During the early 20th century, this position was as lucrative as it was precarious, as the Germans were introducing large quantities of coveted artificial dogs' teeth and other goods (1956, 427; 1958, 53; 1966, 394). Into the 1950s, Wanitzir seemed to remain the most wealthy of the four Tangu neighborhoods, serving as a dispensary for Western goods and influence (1966, 406, 408; 1969b, 24, 47, 136, 174).

Against this coalescing system were complementary atomizing influences. A severe epidemic around the turn of the century reduced the population of probably several thousand by a significant number. Distrust and suspicions of sorcery intensified within and between family groups (1969b, 18). Gender relations were strained, as women were particularly susceptible to the introduced disease, which had symptoms similar to that visited by male sorcery. And a shortage of women spurred an increased flurry of wife-stealing. In the mix, the constraints of the men's clubhouses weakened and Tangu social relations fragmented and dispersed, resulting in a dislike for nucleated settlement that persisted at least until the mid-twentieth century (see 1957c, 60; 1959a, 189; 1966, 397; 1969b, 5, 57). In the ethnographic present of the 1950s, Tangu brothers were essentially rivals, and antagonism *within* cooperating neighborhoods was as great as, or greater than, that between exchange partners from different communities. Sorcery remained a constant threat in neighborhoods as well as between them (1957c, 139; 1966, 394, 402).

In this context, even brotherly solidarity demanded explicit demonstration of equivalence similar to that forged between erstwhile outsiders in other neighborhoods (1969b, 37, 56-57). Reciprocally, kinship increasingly became a function of convenience rather than a *priori* conformity (1957a, 184; 1959b, 152, 139, 147; 1969b, 20).

Across this background came the colonial changes of the twentieth century. For Tangu, these included first and foremost regular labor recruitment of young men to the coast, some seventeen miles away. To this was added gradual pacification and Christianization through the establishment of a mission at Wanitzir. By the early 1950s, 85% of a total Tangu population of about 2,000 was considered nominally Christian, with 25% of the population, mostly women, designated by Burridge as active church-goers (1969b, 27n.1). By contrast, the older generation of men in many households remained skeptical and anti-Christian holdouts.

At least as important as Christianity for Tangu was the shift from German to Australian administration in the New Guinea territory following World War One, and then the invasion of the Tangu area by the Japanese during World War Two. This, in turn, was followed by the reinvasion of the area by allied forces, including the dramatic bombing of the Christian mission by allied planes, since this was used as a Japanese outpost.

For Tangu, the turning and conclusion of the war produced an immense American military presence in nearby Manus Island, followed by huge stocks of equipment left behind, and, at the war's end, payment of indemnities. By the early 1950s, however,

almost all of this windfall infusion of wealth had been dissipated or withdrawn. In Wanitzir, the mission was struggling to reassert itself.

Tangu in Analytic Perspective

Stepping back from this historical mosaic, we can reconsider the dynamic features of social morality emphasized in many of Burridge's publications on the Tangu. Equivalence was actively asserted and assiduously maintained between brothers as well as between neighborhoods through *br'ngun'guni*. Self-willed or unrestrained behavior on a local level was mediated by exchange and moral equivalence. This informed what Burridge described as the preliminary dialectic between the reciprocal and non-reciprocal and between the moral and the self-willed, amoral, or divine.

These tensions resolved themselves in Tangu equivalence and stasis, termed *mgnwotngwotiki*, in which a state of neutral equality was achieved between erstwhile competitive exchange partners. As Burridge shows in *Tangu Traditions* (1969b), however, this state was temporary at best; the social separation of equality and neutrality invariably gave way once again to active demonstration of equivalence through competitive exchange. These tensions were also engaged on a larger scale by what Burridge calls the historical dialectic, which includes the inequality and lack of equivalence that Tangu suffered in their relationship with whites. The relation between the internal Tangu dialectic and the larger historical dialectic, which it both informed and became a part, is illustrated both in the millenarian myth-dreams of cargo cultists and the extensive indigenous narratives of Tangu traditions. As such, the categories of the moral and the divine, the disciplined and the unconstrained both complemented and redefined each other over time.

What does this have to do with so-called modern change and to the kind of more seemingly radical but less externally-motivated transformations that I have described for Gebusi? On the one hand Burridge tells us, toward the end of *Tangu Traditions* (1969b, 451) that, "Manipulation of persons and categories doubtless existed in the past. Yet one may assume that it was not as general a feature of social life as it is today." One of the results, as he suggests in selective Durkheimian fashion, is a "lack of sustained metaphysic" and "growing anomy" (1969b, 439). As such, if the Tangu category of *imbatekas*—the self-willed, odd, awe-some, and divine—existed in the 19th century, it became progressively mapped onto Europeans and Americans, who were almost self-evidently powerful, non-reciprocal, odd, and materially efficacious, and also onto aspiring Tangu as well. This went hand in hand with other European-inspired changes during the first half of the 20th century: an epidemic of disease; the disruption and then intensification and inflation of trade relations through the introduction of artificial dog teeth and other trade goods; the German pacification and later missionization of various groups; and the opening of individual managerial and more entrepreneurial capacities for Tangu managers by the demise of the men's clubhouse, the solitary settlement, and the collective fighting group. From early in the 20th century, many and then most young Tangu men spent time on coastal plantations in lieu of traditional initiation. In later decades, these experiences abroad

were intensified by the military activities and services provided by or demanded of Tangu by Europeans, Japanese, and Americans during World War Two.

In this context, we can see how incipient categories of self-willed and amoral power become magnified, projected, and re-internalized in larger proportions among Tangu themselves, at once challenging and intensifying their indigenous moral system. The term “dialectic” that Burrige uses may indeed be an appropriate one. We can also see how a preliminary dialectic within Tangu was encompassed and made more intense and conflicted by what Burrige calls a larger historical dialectic. In essence, we have from Burrige in 1969 an intriguing model of cultural change. Unlike the theories put forth by Marshall Sahlins a dozen and more years later (1981; 1985; 1995), Burrige’s model is not driven ultimately by the sudden impact of external forces, a cataclysmic arrival of outsiders, nor by a relatively static continuity of cultural logics already in place. His model embraces the tensions of developing awareness in lived experience rather than the disjunctions and synchronies of symbolic logic or structure.

Comparisons and Contrasts

Here we may make selective comparisons and contrasts between Tangu and Gebusi. While Tangu were influenced by Westerners since at least the 19th century, Gebusi were not effectively contacted until 1963. Other contrasts are equally if not more striking. After many decades of outside contact, Tangu in the 1950s still absorbed the categories of Western authority and eccentricity within the parameters of their own moral system. Tangu assertions of local equivalence were, if anything, hyper-robust. Local assertions of equivalent exchange and reciprocal fears and suspicions of sorcery were intensified rather than reduced.

For Gebusi, however, the story is different. A mere twenty-five years after effective first contact—and in the context of reduced rather than increased Western presence, in the era of post-colonial nationality—the Gebusi rate of sorcery plummeted and their assertion of equivalence in the reciprocal exchanges and marriages precipitously declined. This despite the fact that both Tangu and Gebusi had become increasingly fragmented and dispersed in residential terms, that the Tangu men’s clubhouse had seen the same demise as the Gebusi longhouse and initiation, and that both groups were, for what it is worth, deemed to be approximately 85% Christianized. The collectivizing institutions of Gebusi initiation, warfare, socialization, and spirituality had become moribund for both groups as people became more individuated in life roles and activities. For Gebusi in 1998, for instance, these life-courses were quite diverse, and they encompassed the possibility of becoming a church devotee, a schoolboy, a member of a sports team, or a hanger-on at the government station as well as (and more prestigious than) being a mere gardener, hunter, or traditional house-builder.

In the mix, however, and apparently much more than the Tangu of Burrige’s ethnographic present, Gebusi have accepted rather than resisted an outright hierarchy of external imposition, in place of traditional equivalences. How and why? The answers are multiple, and the details are sketched out in other recent work (Knauff

2002a; 2002c). For present purposes, we can consider two salient factors. The first concerns the history of outside intervention and the larger differences between New Guinea in the early 1950s and in the late 1990s. Among Gebusi, the impact of white colonial influence was brief—only thirteen years. It then disappeared with little expansion of economic or political impact, and no discernible Christian influence. The primary effect of colonial influence was to pacify the Gebusi’s warlike neighbors, the Bedamini, and to introduce steel axes and bush knives. In their ignorance, colonial officers tacitly enabled the continuation, if not the florescence, of many Gebusi practices. Being less warriors than targets and victims of Bedamini aggression, Gebusi welcomed government intrusion more than they resisted it. If anything, they desired *more* opportunities for contact and for its anticipated benefits—economic and otherwise—than they received.

With the departure of the Australians, Papua New Guineans from other parts of the country gradually arrived to lead modern institutions in the Gebusi area: a church, school, market, sports league, and so on. Located on the expanding station of the old patrol post, these institutions became a magnet for Gebusi, many of whom moved to the edge of their territory, which abuts on the land and the airstrip of the Nomad government station. As such, they could directly engage with and participate in these institutions and activities while living on their own land.

By contrast, the longer-standing and more geographically expansive contact of Tangu with the Germans resulted in much longer-distance routes of commodity trade and plantation labor, mediated by Wanitzir, and with comparatively little presence of outside authority figures on the doorstep of Tangu itself. In contrast to Gebusi, Tangu seem to have been active and effective warriors vis-à-vis their neighbors. They were resistant to incursions by German colonial patrols into their guarded territory. As a consequence, as Burrige puts it, “Tangu gained a reputation in administrative offices for being intransigent” (1960, 130).

In the delimited context of plantation labor at the coast, Tangu learned to accept the orders and authority of others. But some Tangu men refused plantation work because of the threat to their manliness posed by passively taking orders and abuse from white overseers and Melanesian boss-boys. As Burrige puts it, “Accepting an order is a denial of manhood, submission to the breach of equivalence...Only a few Tangu are able to stomach it for long” (1960, 216). And yet, Tangu were, over time, more disposed to accept orders and authority from outsiders than they were from each other, including their own potential leaders. In the limited role of a government liaison or outsider, orders could be accepted, including by cargo prophets. But similar affronts could rarely be tolerated from other Tangu in their mere capacity as village leaders.

Differences of historical period are also relevant in explaining the divergences between Gebusi and Tangu. If outsiders resided further away from Tangu, they wielded particularly autocratic, unpredictable, and potentially pernicious influence during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The idiosyncracies of this force—colonial beatings on the plantation, unpredictable government punitive expeditions and killings, great oscillations in labor recruiting, trading practices, punishments, and the like—were magnified by different agendas, policies, and personalities among Westerners themselves, and particularly between missionaries, traders, and

colonial officers. For Gebusi, by contrast, the so-called benign or liberal Australian colonialism of the 1960s provided a context of power that was relatively predictable and less draconian—particularly for Gebusi themselves—than it had likely been for the Tangu. Moreover, the triangle of influences from the colonial state, church, and market, if not seamless, was probably less contentious or unpredictable in its articulations for Gebusi during the 1960s–1980s than it was for Tangu during the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Among Gebusi, the transition from a strategic acceptance of outside authority to its outright embracement was perhaps the biggest change that I witnessed between the early 1980s and 1998. In 1980–82, Gebusi accepted government authority but avoided it when they could. But in 1998, they not just accepted but willingly and actively sought out ways to participate as passive subordinates in institutions that subjected them to harangue and the order of external so-called enlightenment: the church, school, market, and referees on the ballfield, for hours and hours on end. Their shift appears much quicker and much more dramatic than that of Tangu, whose acceptance of outside authority appears much more ambivalent, resistant, and contextually limited (their long association with the coastal labor trade notwithstanding). Indeed, the ability of Tangu men to work on the coast may have intensified rather than undercut their sense of truculence in the ridge-top locale of their protected inland residence. As was mentioned further above, part of this difference is undoubtedly due to differences of historical period. The abilities and attractions of acting locally modern are, in relative terms, likely to be much greater for Gebusi in a post-colonial world of the 1980s and 1990s—in which local officials are themselves Papua New Guineans—than was the case in the fully and sometimes brutally colonial world of interior coastal New Guinea during the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Second, on a moral front, is the character of Christianity in each location. Though Christianity is a constant larger foil of Burridge's accounts, especially in his writings on millenarianism, we get less sense of its direct institutional impact, as a church, in Tangu itself. Though the redemptive possibilities of Christianity in a world of self-willed and authoritarian behavior are of course always present, and are alluded to in a number of Burridge's works, this is not the variety of Christianity that I found among Gebusi. In their contemporary context, the authority of God brings hierarchy and monologue at least as much as it brings equivalence, dialogue, exchange, or redemption (Knauff 2002a, chs. 5–6). This result is not inherent in Christianity *per se*, but rather to its empirical incarnation among Gebusi and a range of other Melanesian societies. The authoritative interpretation and promulgation of God's word by outside pastors is quite strong in the Gebusi area. This may also have been true among or near to the Tangu—we have little way of knowing. But at least in Burridge's published accounts, the tone of Christian redemption and the ideals of Christian equivalence ring stronger in the Melanesian world of the Tangu than they do in my experience with Gebusi.

Revivalism, orthodoxy, and the social action of evangelism are common and in some ways have always been common in Melanesian versions of Christianity (Barker 1990a; Douglas 2001; Robbins 2004; Robbins et al. 2001; Jenkins 2002; see more generally Beeman 2002). These patterns appear to be as much in conflict

as in concert with the more nuanced, loving, and thoughtful awareness of Western Christianity depicted by Burridge in his 1991 book on Christian missionary endeavors. As was also the case further above, there is little way of knowing if Burridge's thoughtful and philosophical exploration of the potentials of Christian equivalence have a significant or a material relation to the way Christian authority and dogma were actually represented to Tangu or actually experienced by them.

This said, it seems likely, as John Barker (pers. comm.) has suggested, that Christian churches in Melanesia have in recent decades become increasingly individualistic and attuned to a global economy and its associated values. Among Gebusi, villagers have the choice of attending at least three different churches: the Catholic, Protestant Evangelical, or Seventh Day Adventist. Among one sibling set of three true adult Gebusi brothers, each man has chosen to belong to a different church. This diversity reflects the locally modern trend for people to develop increasingly differentiated roles and choices in school, at the market, on the ballfield, in government, in church, and in an expanding array of village and station-related activities. This diversity likely contrasts with narrower institutional parameters and choices faced by Tangu during the colonial era—in church as well as in government activities and plantation labor.

Bringing these twin factors together, the confluence of an increasingly diverse moral world in a post-colonial era has combined with strong *in situ* leadership of outsiders (Papua New Guineans from other parts of the country) to skew the moral dialectic among Gebusi in a distinctive way. Change provides the Gebusi choices, but it also casts these choices in ways that presume hierarchy and subordination. Domination has become acceptable in ways it was previously not *vis-à-vis* values of equivalence and reciprocal exchange. For contemporary Gebusi, accepting hierarchy is seen as practically a prerequisite for pursuing, much less internalizing, a path of progress, of aspiring or achieving personal advancement along standards of contemporary economic success and modern status. This hierarchy is epitomized by the absolute power and authority of a Christian God.

Active as opposed to passive acceptance of subordination is far from general across Melanesia and is certainly not universal. In this respect, distinctive local features of Gebusi colonial and post-colonial history may be particularly important. In comparative terms, Gebusi have been quite a small and powerless group which has had little in the way of economic or political leverage. Their particular history of being subject to larger inequality if not domination—first by Bedamini and then by their “saviors,” the Australians—has predisposed them to accept and appreciate both the power of outside authority and the beneficial potentials of modern developments in their lives. In this context, the contemporary presence of post-colonial Papua New Guinea officers, teachers, and pastors, resonates with a penumbra of powerful and potentially helpful influences from a modern wider world. These histories help inform Gebusi willingness to supplant equivalence with willing subordination in the context of locally modern activities and institutions and sometimes in the social dynamics of their own settlements as well. At least during the late 1990s, this acceptance continued despite, and even because of, a general and continuing lack of external economic benefit, wage-labor, cash economy, or out-migration.

This pattern contrasts to the responses of many larger and more politically influential groups in Melanesia, and also with the Tangu. On the other side of the mountains that separate the Gebusi's lowland rainforest from the Southern Highlands, for instance, the populous Huli people appear more than dedicated to assimilate outside influence to their own cultural and moral system rather than sacrifice their own sense of historical and cultural entitlement. Cultural responses that foreground hybridization or resistance rather than capitulation to outside authority figures are legion in many parts of contemporary Melanesia.

Conclusions

If Gebusi of the 1990s and Tangu of the 1950s shade toward different ends of a moral continuum of change in Melanesia, the bulk of Melanesian societies are probably now somewhere in the middle. For sake of simplicity, I have probably overstated my case for Gebusi, who certainly retain significant aspects of subjectivity and morality that I encountered among them so strongly during the early 1980s. Reciprocally, Tangu may have changed by the 1990s in ways that make them, in selective terms, more Gebusi-like than was the case in their ethnographic present of the 1950s. However, the difference between Gebusi and Tangu responses to external and so-called modernizing influence remains substantial. Gebusi have been more wholeheartedly accepting of external change, and Tangu have been more ambivalent and resistant. This difference is thrown into yet greater relief by the very strong indigenous values of amity and equivalence in both societies, notwithstanding the many other regional and structural differences between them.

Some of the difference between Gebusi and Tangu paths of change relates to their differing historical epochs—including differences between early and high colonial versus late colonial and post-colonial circumstances. Other aspects of difference relate to very particular aspects of local history, politics, and violence in each case, including the fact that Gebusi were treated as "quiet and tractable" while Tangu were treated as aggressive and "intransigent." Yet others relate to distinctive patterns of articulation, regularization, and sedimentation—differing paths of recursion over time through which local values interact with and refract off of external powers and values. All three of these axes seem important to consider in detail to account not just for the variation in cultural response between Gebusi and Tangu but for the very large and complex range of variation in cultural and moral change across Melanesia as a whole. In broader terms, this evokes Burridge's articulation of primary and historical dialectics in a new key—one that takes into account larger epochs of historical context, specific articulations of local morality and value, and distinctive features of authority, economy, and coercion that impinge on social life without completely determining it.

To these three axes, a fourth dimension should also be added, concerning women and gender. The unmarked frame in my depictions above, as in Burridge's work, is that of men. Equivalence and its threats are in this analysis an effectively male province. And yet, as Melanesianists have long realized, male status insecurity easily locks with cultural ideologies that exclude or disparage Melanesian women (e.g.,

Langness 1967, 1974; Read 1952; cf., Strathern 1988). In the contemporary context, the insecurities and subordinations that Melanesian men experience vis-à-vis outsiders may be displaced onto women through newly modern forms of female domination or devaluation (see Knauff 1997). At the same time that increased mobility and modern institutions such as the church, school, and market can provide new opportunities for women, they may be constrained by new strictures of gendered tradition. Relative to men, women may be restricted or confined by expectations of domesticity and moral conservatism. While men may be encouraged to take up new roles and activities, to travel and adopt new styles of commoditized life, women may be seen as big-headed or immoral for too actively pursuing these same opportunities.

In the same way that Burridge contextualizes his primary dialectic of male equivalence within a larger one of historical change and colonial development, so, too, in complementary fashion, the male drive for modern status equivalence is configured dialectically against the insecurities and strains of admitting women to this same process. Burridge mentions that Tangu women were "much as chattels" under the traditional system of bride-capture and bride-price, and that they were generally happy to see the men's clubhouse and its customs of collective male tradition lose force (1969b, 19, 25). Later, it was Tangu men rather than women who went to work on coastal plantations and who participated most actively in the local machinations of World War Two. Little wonder then, as he notes in passing (1969b, 27n.2), that most of the regular church-goers in Tangu were women. If the tension between male and female modern equivalence is not directly addressed in Burridge's account, their complementarity relationship would seem to constitute an additional dialectic, of gender, that twines integrally with the preliminary and the historical dialectics of morality that he exposes so effectively, and those of power and coercion that he addresses with less attention. Roughly analogous gendered patterns may be found among Gebusi, for whom the active participation of women in church and at school is complemented by, if not provocative of, male desires to be yet more locally dominant in these modern institutional contexts (Knauff 2002a, 27-29). The possibilities of modern female agency easily pose new threats to male insecurity and drive more modern aspirations for equivalence among men.

Across ranges of time and space, Melanesian societies continue to be interpretable through lenses of understanding that benefit from the analyses and insights of Kenelm Burridge. His dynamic view of moral change in Melanesia provides for comparative reflections that benefit our own developing awareness. His work provides an effective way to appreciate the core tensions of Melanesian moral and social life, and, in the process, to rethink some of our own most entrenched assumptions.

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