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The triumph of capitalism in East New Britain? A contemporary Papua New Guinean rhetoric of motives

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The shell-money users of Papua New Guinea's East New Britain Province have been described as pre-adapted to capitalism. This was in part because they – the Tolai, in particular, but also the Duke of York Islanders¹ – were long accustomed to commerce using an indigenous, universal and divisible currency (T.S. Epstein 1968).² Moreover, these East New Britains have come to be known as among the best educated and most prosperous of Papua New Guineans (Bray 1985a and b).³ Nonetheless, as we walked down the streets of the provincial capital of Rabaul shortly after our arrival there, viewing the sights with relatively fresh eyes – this visit in 1991 was the first for one of us and the first return after almost twenty years for the other – we were startled by a school-boy's essay on money appearing in a window of the United Church's Memorial Hall.

Posted among selected compositions on various topics by other Tolai teenagers, Martin's essay struck us, in its unalloyed celebration of economic individualism, as a remarkably condensed (if somewhat adolescent) expression of a fully (and frighteningly) developed – no longer *pre*-adapted – spirit of capitalism. We reproduce it below as written:

Money makes me smile.
Money means beer.
Money digs up the skul [Pidgin English for school].
I love money more than anything else.
When I lose even one toea [about US\$.01] I almost beat myself to a pulp.
Hey girls money can find you a lover, make you comfortable and bring harmony to your life.
Money is the dream of every teenager.
To hell with love. With money you can have refrigerators and stereos.
The age-old fairy-tale of love is fast being replaced by the hard reality of money.
If I'm a rich man I can get to marry the prettiest woman.
Somebody who doesn't have money cannot make love.
People work, people sweat, people suffer, people die, all for money.

When I have money, I'll live in a high quality house, eat good food and be recognized by other people as someone to respect.
It will lead to girls quarreling over IAU [Tolai for 'I/me'].
**YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE MONEY
BEFORE YOU CAN DO
ANYTHING YOU WANT!**

What startled us about this essay was that (minor details aside) we could well believe it had been written by a young Donald Trump. To be sure, Tolai and Duke of York Islanders were often preoccupied with accumulating shell money. Yet, shell money served as the basis of personal prestige and efficacy only to the extent that it was used to generate the relations of 'mutual entailment that constituted sociality (see T.S. Epstein 1968; Salisbury 1970; Errington 1974a; A.L. Epstein 1979 and 1992; Bradley 1982; Neumann 1992; Sime 1992.) Although we realized that teenagers might often be more self-centered and self-consciously iconoclastic than adults, we were, even so, struck by the degree to which Martin focused almost entirely on the short-term and instrumental uses of money, in contrast to those uses that were long-term and socially (or cosmologically) regenerative. While Martin did want to be admired and respected by others, he made no obvious acknowledgment that he accepted any social obligations or entailments, or that he recognized his views might have social consequences. In these regards he had, it seemed to us, well internalized crucial elements of capitalist ideology.⁴

As Bloch and Parry have argued (1989: 1-32), capitalist ideology differs from the ideologies of many other economic systems. In those other systems, short-term private and long-term public or corporate interests are recognized not only as distinct but also as needing to be coordinated and balanced one with the other. In capitalism, short-term personal goals are either conflated with long-term social ones such that it is '*only unalloyed private vice that can sustain the public benefit*' (Bloch and Parry 1989: 29) or, the two types of goals are seen as so distinct that one can not 'imagine the mechanisms by which they are linked' (Bloch and Parry 1989: 30). (This is not to say that capitalism is entirely monolithic (see Kelly 1992) or to deny that, under circumstances of perceived crisis, there might not be pressure to think explicitly about long-term social goals.)

We do not know precisely how Martin came to value so exclusively these private and instrumental short-term goals. In fact, we know no more about Martin as an individual than he revealed in his essay. Nor do we know the criteria by which his essay was chosen for display. Yet, he became for us a persona, an 'ideal type' (Weber 1949). Martin, we realized, might turn out to be somewhat atypical of modern East New Britain youth. He was certainly one possible outcome of a complex history. His statement of aspiration, we suspected, might illuminate contemporary social, political and economic processes in East New Britain as well as, perhaps, in the changing nation of Papua New Guinea more generally. In fact, we came to regard 'Martin' not only as an ideal type for us, but for many East New Britains as well.⁵

As we pursued our subsequent research on Karavar in the Duke of York Islands, 'Martin' remained at least on the periphery of our thoughts and, we discovered, the thoughts of virtually everyone we met. Certainly when our Karavaran friends commented on the sorry state of regional and national politics they seemed to have 'Martin' on the mind. Politicians, for instance, were frequently disparaged in phrases suggestive of 'Martin,' such as: 'come in a politician, go out a [very wealthy] businessman.' We were to hear such disparaging sentiments often during our research, as

politicians engaged in a flurry of local campaigning in anticipation of the 1992 National Parliamentary elections.

Indeed, many East New Britains (and, we think, many other Papua New Guineans) used 'Martin' as a point of rhetorical reference to appraise, shape, justify and contest their political alternatives. As such, his essay had mythic aspects. Less a *charter* for existing social, political and economic relationships (Malinowski 1926) than a pole on a *chart* of possible relationships, his essay nevertheless indicated certain existing pre-occupations.⁶ 'Martin,' thus, was both good to think about and with (Lévi-Strauss 1963).

'Martin' did not, however, stand alone. In the East New Britain appraisal of politicians, for instance, he was frequently contrasted to other ideal types, the contrast thereby giving each persona rhetorical sharpness and clarity. (As Burke noted, 'rhetoric, according to Aristotle "proves opposites"' (1969: 25)). In this paper we first discuss 'Martin' in relationship to a diametrically opposed pole on the chart of possible political relations in contemporary East New Britain. This contrasting pole was invoked, at least on Karavar, as the basis of a sociality — both local and beyond: a sociality constituted not out of atomized citizens, but out of entailed kin.

Our primary ethnographic focus will concern the appearance on Karavar of the (then) Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Rabbie Namaliu. The occasion was a major mortuary ceremony — a *matamatam*. It may have been partly to dispel any possible association between himself and a 'Martin' that Namaliu asserted both his local grounding and his social entailment to his audience by comparing himself to the persona of a mythologized leader named Tovetura. Tovetura was the most illustrious of the ancestors commemorated at the *matamatam* Namaliu was attending. In so doing, Namaliu claimed that his interests and those of the Karavarans were entirely inseparable and conjoined as Tovetura's had been with his supporters. He thereby argued that he not only understood, but also met the local standard for the evaluation of leaders.

We will maintain, however, that the 'Tovetura' standard of particularistic connection, though locally compelling, was likely to prove unworkable in the context of regional and national politics. Under these circumstances, national or regional politicians had great difficulty achieving re-election to office.⁷ This difficulty, in turn, we suspect, encouraged them to make the most of their opportunities so that they would be able to leave office as wealthy businessmen. (We stress here that we are not accusing any particular politician, certainly not Prime Minister Namaliu, of lacking probity. However, as we shall elaborate further below, there was throughout Papua New Guinea the probably accurate perception that politicians often used their offices for personal profit. This perception, we might add, coupled with images coming from the Western media about the good life, most likely had affected the 'historical' Martin.) Hence, the invocation of 'Tovetura' by Namaliu and other politicians — rather than countering 'Martin' — had, in certain regards, the unintended consequence of supporting him.

In response to this oppositional deadlock, some have proposed a new pole on the chart of political possibilities, one seen as appropriate if Papua New Guinea were to become a progressive nation. This persona, that of the 'statesman,' appeared to temper the self-interest of 'Martin' and broaden the sociality of 'Tovetura.' But, the promise of this new persona, we shall show, would probably be misleading. The 'statesman' would likely discredit the pole of sociality through which local people tried to make their politicians accountable, while leaving the pole of self-interest relatively strong, to the extent that the 'Martins' would remain essentially unscathed. In other words, with the invocation of the 'statesman', the triumph of capitalism was being enjoined, although

many, we suspect, would find the argument unconvincing. Our suggestion, thus, is that the triumph of capitalism was by no means pre-determined, even among the shell-money users of East New Britain.

Throughout the analysis of what is essentially a contemporary Papua New Guinea rhetoric of motives (Burke 1969), we will be more suggestive than definitive. We do not, for instance, wish to claim that the political personae we consider as ideal types exhaust those current in East New Britain, much less in Papua New Guinea. Nonetheless, we did find that they figured significantly in the discourse concerning national and local political interests during this election period.

TOVETURA AS IDEAL TYPE

The following is one of the accounts we collected about what had become the rather standardized — almost codified (cf. Neumann 1992: 84) — mythic persona of Tovetura:

Tovetura was from Utuan [Karavar's closest neighbor in the Duke of York Islands]. He was a bad man who seduced many women, including those of his own line. He alienated even members of his own family who wanted to kill him. He alienated Karavarans too, but not as thoroughly. He was a flying fox [large fruit bat] who flitted from one place to another.

Soon he fled to Ulu [another nearby Duke of York island] which was then just like bush. At Mauke [a particularly wild area on Ulu], he came in contact with a *turangan* [a powerful and dangerous spirit]. As he was living there, he became hairy. His beard grew; his hair grew. When thirsty, he drank the water which collected at the forks of trees. He lived below the ground, in a burrow.

The *turangan* asked him what he was doing at Mauke. He told it that he had run away because everyone wanted to kill him, and asked it how he could go back without being killed. The *turangan* told him to tell his mother to weave lots of baskets, and then to get one of them and put it in his underground dwelling. He did so and when he returned one day, he found it filled with shell money. He did this with each of the baskets his mother had woven.

Then he went to Karavar and gave Tombar's ancestors five fathoms of shell money to gain access to part of the men's ground. He said he was going to hold a mortuary ceremony at which much shell money would be distributed. All of the men of Karavar wondered how this flying fox was going to accomplish this. He had some of his Karavaran cousins and brothers clear for his ceremony the area that came to be called *Tamanawa*. The meaning of *Tamanawa* is 'what sort of a place is this?' It got this name because people wondered how such a man could make anything of significance happen there. They did not know about the *turangan* and the shell money.

Tovetura pulled it off. Moreover, he did so with a *liu* [a dance which is the most expensive form of mortuary ceremony because each of the many dancers must be generously paid in shell money]. He had women string all the shell money the *turangan* had given him. People thought he would never manage to succeed at a *liu*, because one has to be extremely wealthy to sponsor one.

Tovetura was a big man because he moved so quickly from a poor to a rich one. He led the Germans because of his power. No one could defy him. Tovetura became the paramount *luluai* [administration-appointed headman] of the area. It was he who appointed subsidiary *luluais*. First he appointed Militay of Karavar. He gave Militay a hat and a staff [symbols of office] and said, you must watch, you must be ready. I am putting this hat on you so that you will watch

your territory and look out for all your people. I am giving you this stick to settle all problems and wrongs.

After he gave the hat and staff to Militay, he gave them to Tuba of Matupit, then to Pero of Yelakur, then to Bramtovovo of Vunamami [the latter three are all Tolai]. Then, he himself took the white cap [marking the highest government appointment -- that of paramount *luluai*] and became the boss of them all. It was he who wrote the 'constitution' and created the 'rules' [these were the English words used]. For example, if someone committed incest, he must either pay one hundred fathoms of shell money or be killed. If someone slept with the wife of another man, he must pay thirty fathoms to the offended wife and thirty fathoms to the offended husband.

Tovetura was a man who would kill you if you did not listen to him. The German government observed his rules and followed them. It is true that the Germans flogged men, but we did this before they came. We said that if a man cannot pay for his wrongs with shell money, then he should be flogged. Some people back then wanted to practice cannibalism. But Tovetura thought they were crazy. If they tried to do this, he had them pay or be flogged. It was Tovetura who heard the courts; he was the first magistrate.

Familiarity with cross-cultural mythology would suggest that the Tovetura story was once a classic example of what might be called the 'emergence of society' genre. (See, for many examples, Lévi-Strauss 1969). In such stories, human sociality began when a pre-cultural, animalistic being was either transformed or transforms himself through the imposition or assumption of cultural rules (cf. Gewertz and Errington 1991: 33-37). However, the story as we collected it -- in almost codified form, as 'official' history -- may well have been modified in response to the changes brought by colonialism: it concerned not the birth of society so much as the birth of a new society.

In the account, society already existed in clearly recognizable form: it was Tovetura who initially flouted its established rules, especially those pertaining to sexuality, such that he came to live outside of society. Ostracized, unkempt, unshorn, he sheltered and foraged as a solitary animal.⁸ Significantly, with the acquisition of shell money Tovetura moved from feral fugitive to socializing magistrate:⁹ he changed from one who broke the prohibitions against incest and adultery to one who not only upheld, but substantially strengthened, these prohibitions. Indeed, he put such teeth in the rules he had himself broken that Karavaran society became for the German colonists a model for the well ordered polity.

But how could Tovetura's acquisition of large amounts of shell money be plausibly described as 'civilizing' not only himself, but his society? How, in contrast to money, which provided Martin with the means to pursue unencumbered self-interest, could shell money provide Tovetura with the basis of (enhanced) sociality?

To elaborate on our earlier discussion of shell money and its relationship to money: Like money, shell money was a major standard by which everything as well as everyone was evaluated. The differences in the amount of shell money that individuals owned and used in public ceremonies distinguished those persons of importance from those of mere respectability and the latter from those of no consequence. (See, for confirmation, Errington 1974b; Bradley 1982; Epstein 1992; Neumann 1992; Simet 1992.) However, unlike money, regarded by many in the West as either 'devilish acid' or 'guarantor of [personal] liberty' (Block and Parry 1989: 30), shell money was understood by its East New Britain users as neither dissolving social ties nor freeing persons from obligation to

each other. Shell money was not only fundamental to the prestige system, but was fundamental to social ordering.

For both Tolai and Duke of York Islanders, big men — those wealthiest in shell money — generated social order in several respects. For instance, they had an important part in ensuring that compensation for social and ritual offenses was paid. Moreover, big men were the principal organizers of mortuary ceremonies. These ceremonies were not only to commemorate, but also to replace, the dead — especially those dead who had been big men during their lifetimes. As such, these ceremonies were crucial contexts for aspiring or established big men to demonstrate their own contemporary leadership and eminence — to show that they could adequately supersede their predecessors. This demonstration consisted of meeting heavy ceremonial expenses and showing that they had sufficient resources to control a large following. As Salisbury said for the Tolai, a big man ‘creates a name, not for himself alone, but in terms of which other people can organize themselves’ (1970: 30). In these regards, big men *were* society: the shell-money expenditures of big men for these and other activities comprised both the politics of self aggrandizement and of social reproduction. Unlike the capitalist circumstances described by Bloch and Parry, short-term personal and long-term social interests were perceived by East New Britain shell-money users as essentially conjoined.

It is important to note that in the speeches and harangues with which such mortuary ceremonies culminated, really big men such as Tovetura would proclaim: ‘*iau, iau, iau*’ (I, I, I). They would then embellish by saying that they alone were weighty on the island, that they were the only ones sufficient to make things happen. It is, almost certainly — to return briefly to the schoolboy’s essay on money with which we began — Martin’s familiarity with a big man’s rhetoric that led him to insert this Tolai-Duke of York Island word into his English essay.

But we can now see more clearly the difference in Martin’s and (e.g.) Tovetura’s usages. In effect, the ‘*iau*’ Martin wished to be was more akin to the asocial, fugitive Tovetura than to the victorious big man and magistrate. Whereas Martin’s ‘*iau*’ was an assertion of the sufficiency of his instrumental and self-focused agenda, Tovetura’s ceremonial triumph was the basis of a renewed, indeed, accentuated — and momentarily unified — social order, one which included not only indigenous, but early colonial society. Contrasting persona in the same (somewhat broadly conceived) social field, Martin and Tovetura together provided the range of political possibilities imagined when Prime Minister Namaliu visited Karavar.¹⁰

THE MORTUARY CEREMONY AND THE INVOCATION OF TOVETURA

The *matamatam* Namaliu attended commemorating Tovetura (and others) was widely regarded by Karavarans as less well financed than it might have been. The principal sponsors were Toliplipnawa Daki and Eric Alden, members of separate but related matrilineages. As the first portion of their ritual work, they had arranged for the construction of an *aim*, a cement commemorative marker, much like a large and elaborate gravestone. Inscribed on their *aim* were the names of both sets of their matrilineal dead, including the name of Tovetura.

However, some members of Daki’s matrilineage were reluctant to help him cover the expenses of this *aim* and those of the *matamatam* to follow. (Such a marker and its concomitant ceremonies, if lavishly celebrated, might cost sponsors and their matrilines a thousand kina and hundreds of fathoms of shell money.) Daki became so angry at their

foot-dragging that he said he would pay for the *aim* and the ensuing ceremony without their help. Moreover, he decided to have his own name inscribed on the *aim*. In this way he indicated to them and to everyone else that he did not regard them to be his relatives at all: he was asserting that he, himself, would commemorate his own death, even before he died, since he could not count on them to do so later. Despite Daki's assertion that he would manage his portion of the ceremony essentially on his own, many doubted that he had the resources to do so. (As it turned out, we helped Daki because he and Errington were 'brothers,' Daki's father having adopted Errington years before.)

Alden, too, was evidently under-financed. But, more cosmopolitan than Daki (in part by virtue of more extensive work experience), he had the skill to use the forthcoming national election to augment his resources. He knew that at such a time politicians often rewarded the local leaders who, they felt, could deliver the votes. Thus, Alden invited major national and regional politicians from competing political parties to his *matamatam*. In this way, he sought not only to impress them and play them off against each other but to gain local respect as one with important outside connections.

It is important to note that most contemporary Karavarans such as Daki and Alden had become dependent on outside help for their ceremonial performances. In even the relatively recent past, control over large stands of coconuts and the followers necessary to process them had provided big men with much of the wealth — money was readily converted into shell money — upon which their political power had rested (cf. Epstein 1992: 52). By 1991 the coconut economy had collapsed. Copra was trading at 60% of what it had earned ten years earlier (East New Britain Economic Newsletter, 1991). Such had been the fall of copra prices that few Karavarans regularly bothered to process coconuts at all. Indeed, the stands formerly controlled by big men were untended, open to anyone wishing to gather the nuts.¹¹

Consequently, sponsors of contemporary mortuary ceremonies frequently depended on modest remittances from employed Karavarans (cf. Carrier and Carrier 1989) and on gifts from government officials (non-Karavaran, often even non-Duke-of-York-Island) sporadically trying to please their constituents (cf. Bradley 1982).

Both Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu, of the Pangu Party, and East New Britain Provincial Premier Sinai Brown, of the Melanesian Alliance Party, accepted Alden's invitation and provided economic support for his *matamatam*. However, as it happened, only Namaliu assumed an important public role. Brown arrived with an entourage the evening before the major events of the ceremony began and spent the night in private conversation with Alden and others he was cultivating as political allies. He then left early the next morning before Namaliu came. Brown clearly did not wish to engage Namaliu directly on this occasion. The reason, our friends suggested, was that Namaliu was visiting Karavar, not primarily as a politician but as a kinsman mourning and commemorating local dead. Under such a circumstance, Brown — who lacked such close connections to Karavar — would, in contrast to Namaliu, have appeared unseemly — as unduly instrumental in his pursuit of political self-interest.

Namaliu arrived by helicopter around 8:30 a.m. He and his entourage — including one who video-taped the Prime Minister and his interactions — were greeted primarily by Alden and his kin. Namaliu was dressed informally in a laplap (a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist), a brightly colored shirt, and moccasins without socks. After Alden's niece had presented him with a necklace of flowers and Alden had said a few words of welcome, Namaliu was escorted to the men's ground. There he removed his shirt and changed into thongs. His assistants also handed him an elaborate,

commercially prepared wreath and a basket containing shell money. Namaliu was also adorned with the powders and charms which all initiated men wore to protect themselves from the danger of the ritually-powerful *dukduk* and *tubuan* figures, which were active throughout the *matamatam*. The party then emerged from the men's ground and proceeded to the marker commemorating the dead, the *aim*.

At the *aim*, Alden introduced Namaliu to the throng of assembled men, women and children – some 300 in all. Then, after placing the wreath and ten fathoms of shell money on the *aim*, Namaliu delivered the following speech in Pidgin English. We translate it in its entirety:

Eric [Alden], fathers, brothers, and cousins, I want to give just a little speech. I think Eric already explained the story of the *aim*; this is not new to us; it is an old custom of ours. I am happy to be with you at this time, at the village of my father. I can not stay long, but I am happy that I was able to come for a short time to be with Eric and to put some flowers on the *aim* – a wreath – as is customary.

The big man commemorated here was the first paramount *luluai*. He was appointed long ago, when the German administration first came here to our land. I am very happy about this because I think it was he who opened the road of the government at this place of ours. And I understand that if he had not opened the road and gone first in providing leadership, then I would not be able to engage in this kind of work. He came first and I follow in his path. So I am very happy to be with you here, but am very sorry that I am unable to stay the whole day. My father is also unable to come today because his leg is bothering him. He must remain in the house. But Tombing [a Tolai with close kinship connection with Karavar, and one of Namaliu's employees and strongest supporters] and all of our other brothers will be coming to be with you during this time when you finish all the work according to the custom of the village.

What we are engaged in here is a very important custom of ours: it involves finishing all of the obligations we have incurred. Eric and his matriline will make this ritual work and all the people here will understand that, yes, the work has been completed according to custom. Now it is finished and the work can go to another line.¹² And I am extremely happy about this because such work of completing our customs is important to strengthening our life here in the community.

If we do not uphold our customs, then our village will not be strong. And it is the same for the country. Our country will not be strong unless we keep the cultures of our communities strong. And here, concerning us who live in the Duke of Yorks, this particular custom is important. We can die, yet the custom remains and is strong. And I say thank you to all the members of the family and to the matrikin for organizing today's work. I hope that everything will run smoothly during the rest of the day, according to plan.

I must go to Kabalo Teachers College. That is why I cannot stay with you. I must visit there where they are celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary. I am very sorry about this, but I wish Eric and his line the best for the rest of today. And next time I come here, I will know that everything was finished well according to the custom of the community. And the next mortuary ceremony will be held by another line whose turn it will be. But, concerning us, everything will be finished well which has now been started. Later [today], important things will come forth. They are things for which you have worked and I say thank you for them as well. I mean the *tubuan* and the *dukduk*. They mark this event; they do not appear for trivial matters. And we are additionally strengthened by this

good custom. Before all the work is finished, these things will be concluded in the men's ground according to the custom of this place.

And I am extremely sorry because many of our fathers died and I was not here. It was not because I did not want to be here. It was work which prevented me from spending much time here. Tuembe died, and I was not here. Before that, when I was young, Tonga was alive, and then he died, and I was not here. Many of our fathers, our brothers, they died and my father was able to come with all of the mothers and all of the brothers and all of my other fathers too. They were able to come and stay with you here at the village.

Frequently my father used to tell me stories. I understand a great deal because he did so: about how he grew up here; about the time he was small; about how he lived with his cousins here. I understand all of this well, and I also know about the time after I was born when I lived for three years at Watnabara [the Methodist hospital and school complex on the neighboring island of Ulu]. I lived there for the first three years of my life and they brought me here to Karavar where I stayed with my grandparents and fathers.

So I have 'family roots' [English terms used] that go back here and are strong. And that is why, every time something comes up, I am sorry that I am unable to be with you. And that is why I am happy, very happy, to be here today. And I wish to thank Eric because he came with Tombing to remind me when this work was to be. And last week, the two of them came with Harry [Eric's in-married brother-in-law who was a candidate for office in the national capital of Port Moresby] to remind me. And I am very happy because they helped me come together with all of my brothers, and Eric, and all of my cousins to mark this day, this day commemorating our fathers and our ancestors who have died.

So I think that this is all there is to my little speech. And I wish you the best for the rest of the day and I am sure that everything will run well. I think that is all. My little talk is finished.

The connections to Karavar which Namaliu stressed in his speech convinced most of our friends that he came to the *matamatam* more than simply as a politician breezing through at election time. He was, people recognized, rooted to Karavar in a number of important ways. Not only did he have close and well maintained kinship links with an important matriline – that of Tonga and Tuembe – but, as he emphasized, he and his family had a long-term involvement in Karavaran affairs. (Namaliu's kinship links with Karavar had been maintained, in part, by decades of mutual ritual assistance and participation;¹³ these links were particularly strong with Tuembe, to whom Namaliu was linked both patrilineally and matrilineally.)

Namaliu did, indeed, have 'family roots' at Karavar, roots the Karavarians accepted as mattering to him very much. Several onlookers were themselves clearly moved when, for example, directly after Namaliu spoke, he and Elit, the sister of the deceased Tuembe, were seen sobbing together in memory of their close kinsman. Certainly, most were willing to accept his statement that work had kept him away from other important ritual occasions in the past: they were willing to grant that, although a Tolai, his local connections to Karavar were in good order.

Namaliu also presented himself plausibly as a supporter of custom.¹⁴ He was, as everyone knew, not only an initiated male but a ritual adept in the male *dukduk* and

tubuan society. In his speech, he stressed the importance of following long-established ritual procedures and sequences exactly and completely.

Of more significance even than Namaliu's emphasis on the durability of his local connections to Karavar and on the importance of maintaining continuity in custom, was his decision to focus on Tovetura (only one of a number being commemorated): he did this, we think, so as to stress Tovetura's greatness in the past and to link that greatness to the viability — to the strength — of the present and future Papua New Guinea. Tovetura, it may be recalled, both reinforced Karavaran law and extended it to the Germans. By operating as a particularly effective big man — as 'boss of them all' — he had opened the road to the government. Consequently, Tovetura, though long dead, was far from an anachronism: he was a model for emulation in the present. Namaliu, as Prime Minister, was claiming to be his analogue and his political descendant — and, perhaps in a broad sense, his genealogical descendant as well.

Namaliu's statement of political continuity had some similarity to the Solomon Island speeches White (1991) analyzed. These speeches, White argued, gave local people a sense of who they were in a changing world, by providing an ideology of indigenous agency in the face of the profound social and political upheavals of the colonial era. Typical of such speeches was a denial of anachronism so as to contend that old ways remained feasible and desirable models for contemporary life.

It seems to us, though, that Namaliu's speech did this and more. His denial of anachronism also operated to conflate the role of a traditional local leader with that of a modern (e.g.) Prime Minister. We think that in so doing Namaliu was actively conjoining short- and long-term personal and public interests through extending the limits of a kin-based polity. These were the claims he made: I am your big man in the way that Tovetura was; you should support me because I am his analogue. My successful self-aggrandizement — my continued eminence as Prime Minister or, at least, as Member of Parliament — will be to our common benefit because we are bound in mutual sociality. Just as Tovetura was both big man and paramount *luluai*, I am both Karavaran big man and Prime Minister. Just as Tovetura made the broader world accord with Karavaran custom, so will I. Hence, as long as our custom remains strong, so too will the nation remain strong. Because I am here honoring Tovetura — showing that I am one with you, that we are united in kinship, custom and sentiment — you should vote for me. (And, indeed, in what proved a very close election, it was the Duke of York Islands vote which provided the margin sufficient to return Namaliu as Member of Parliament.)

Namaliu was, in other words, assuring his Karavaran audience he was not a 'Martin.'

* * * *

Those to whom Namaliu spoke recognized, as we have said, that they had become increasingly dependent on outsiders, including politicians, for outside resources if they were to enact their customary ceremonies in more than basic form. They were, in consequence, receptive to his message. But they were also cautious about accepting his protestations of solidarity and kinship: To what extent was he entailed to them? To what extent could they elicit from him?

Namaliu, as it turned out, provided at least two semi-public demonstrations proving his good faith. In advance of his visit he sent word to Papala, the widow of Tuembe (with whom, it will be recalled, his primary Karavaran ties focused), that she should present a gift of food to him. She did so as he and the accompanying throng passed her house after

his address. He responded to her gift in a way both intimate and public: by whispering words of comfort about Tuembe into her ear and by, within sight of others, pressing a roll of kina notes — K100 (US\$110) in all — into her hand. In addition, he had let it be seen that he gave a similar amount to Tuembe's sister, Elit, when the two of them wept for Tuembe.

Karavarans had also set their own tests of his entailed kinship. For example, in anticipation of his visit, a woman asked us to type and send the following letter to Namaliu. We translate it from the (Pidgin English) dictation she provided with names changed:

Dear Prime Minister Namaliu,

Rabbie, I of your matriline, would like to ask you for your help. I wish to make you look at my problem. In this regard I would like you to help me with K1,000 [US\$1,100] so that I can buy a boat. I of your matriline, my husband, Benny Peng, died. Isaac took his place to watch over his children. Now I would like you to help me and all of us — Isaac and Marawut [Isaac's father]. We are trying you out with this letter. We want to borrow money from you. Later, after we put the boat to work, we will repay you.

That is it: that is the worry of me of your matriline and of Isaac and Marawut. All three of us, including me of your matriline, want your help.

Thank you.

The author of this letter was arguing that her claims upon Namaliu's resources were particularly strong and that they were reciprocal: She was a reasonably close kinswoman of his — related through Tuembe — and, moreover, promised to pay him back. However, Karavar was a small (365 persons, in 1991), substantially endogamous community in which kinship was sufficiently fluid that ties could be readily established (as through adoption or ritual cooperation, for instance). Namaliu, thus, could have — and probably had at one time or another — received requests from virtually everyone on Karavar, all based on kinship ties.

It also followed from the existence of an overlapping, interpenetrating kinship nexus that Namaliu would as a 'Karavaran' receive requests for community projects. Indeed, we were asked by the members of the local school board to type a letter (which we omit!) petitioning him for funds to construct a two-story, permanent-materials school. According to letters we received after leaving the field, he eventually complied with this appeal.

Karavarans did realize that Namaliu would not — could not — comply with every request they directed to him. No Karavaran — not even the big men of the past — had done so. After all, not even their own children working elsewhere would actually grant all of their requests for money. (We were also asked to type many letters requesting money from these migrants.) Though great, Namaliu's resources were also recognized as limited. Nonetheless, if he were to maintain his entailment to them, he would have to come through at least some of the time.

While it was possible for Namaliu to come through sufficiently to keep Karavarans reasonably happy, it was extraordinarily difficult for him (or anyone) to extend 'kinship' throughout an entire electorate — and this was not only because his resources were finite. Simply put, his constituency was too large to be easily treated as a kinship unit. Hence, from the Karavaran (or other particular) perspective, any substantial gifts Namaliu gave to those elsewhere, whom Karavarans themselves did not recognize as close kin, might

well suggest one of two things: either he was claiming primary kinship grounding at too many places to be plausible; or, even if he could make a case for such multiple groundings, then his gift to one group would suggest his relative lack of entailment to the other. In the former case, his implausibility would cast him as a self-serving 'Martin'; in the latter case, he would appear to be another group's 'Tovetura.'

CONCLUSION

We have in this essay described 'Martin' and 'Tovetura' as personae who comprised two poles on the chart of political possibilities envisioned by at least some of East New Britain's contemporary shell-money users. As reference points for local people, these personae conveyed sharply contrasting models of person and polity: Martin concluded his essay with an unentailed '*iau*' reflecting a socially disconnected preoccupation with private interests; Tovetura concluded his *liu* with (we surmise) a '*iau*' reflecting a triumph that was not only personally gratifying but regarded as socially constituting.

We have argued that, at least in generalized form, these personae figured quite explicitly in the claims made by and against elected officials at Karavar. To summarize: For officials to prove that they were not 'Martins' — not exclusively out for themselves — they had to subscribe convincingly to the standards of (locally defined variants of) 'Tovetura'. Yet, in so doing, they embraced, at least in rhetoric, an unworkable model of trans-local constituency — one based on the construction and maintenance of inter-personal entailment. National (much less regional) politicians could not plausibly sustain the networks of kinship through which they claimed connection with their constituencies.

We suggest, as well, that comparable personae were on the minds of people not only elsewhere in East New Britain but more broadly throughout contemporary Papua New Guinea. For instance, newspapers cited widespread popular skepticism about who would profit from the various development schemes (timber projects, gold mines, oil fields) advocated by politicians. It is no wonder that, at a time many Papua New Guineans suspected their politicians of making empty promises in order to obscure self-interested concerns, another pole on the chart of political possibilities was called for. In a recent edition of the *Times of Papua New Guinea* — the issue reporting the final results of the national election of 1992 — the following editorial appeared:

It is ironic that at a time when nationalism should be put before anything else, our elected leaders are already divided into their little regions vying for whatever position they can get in the new government.

Already some names that make the person on the street shudder have been announced as candidates for the position of prime minister. It is obvious that some of these self-interested groups are not concerned in getting the best person into the country's top position. Their main concern seems to be to get the best deal for themselves. Any thoughts about the people who have elected them into parliament have already been pushed to the back of their minds and no doubt this will be the trend for the next five years.

With intense lobbying going on now among the political parties and independent members, we hope some of them still have enough integrity to vote with a clear conscience. The people of this country want to see a strong leader at the helm of a government that is going to do the right thing by the people.

The life of the last government ended on a very bad note with ministers resigning before they could answer charges for breach of the Leadership Code or

even outright criminal offenses. Do we want these people back in government? What happened to all the anti-corruption talk that was spilling out from the Opposition's camp a month ago? . . .

The province or region where the prime minister comes from is a very minor concern to the people of this country. A strong stable government led by the right person with the right qualities is what should be the major concern to the members of parliament and the people on the street (July 9, 1992: 7).

Significantly, this editorial attacked the self-interest of politicians, not only because it led them to ignore the concerns of their constituencies, but also, the welfare of the nation. It described them, in other words, as 'Martins' — as those who made no attempt to join short-term private with long-term public interests. Interestingly, the primary counter-model suggested to 'Martin' was not a 'Tovetura' but a new persona who might be termed the 'statesman'.

Such a persona, an image perhaps borrowed from the West (as was the idea of the nation itself), referred to a politician who, neither unduly self-interested nor parochial, had primarily the interests of the nation in mind. The 'statesman', by focusing on long-term public goals, was able to establish a vision of the general good which provided the context in which individuals would be able to pursue their private interests. He — or at least his persona — had been useful in the capitalist West at times of systemic and exceptional crisis, such as those of war or economic depression. It was then when his vision was likely to be called upon to articulate (to refer again to Bloch and Parry's (1989) discussion) that which is usually unexplicated in capitalism: the relationship between short-term private and long-term public goals.

The image of the 'statesman' came, therefore, from the same system of 'fully developed' capitalism in which 'Martin' was at home. It is significant that the editorial invoking the 'statesman' appeared in the national English-language newspaper regarded as appealing to only the best educated. Moreover, the editorial was printed directly above an advertisement sponsored by an association of capitalist developers, 'The PNG Chamber of Mines and Petroleum'. This ad queried the elite readers thus: 'Did you know that more than one third of the tax that Government collects each year comes from the Mining and Petroleum Industry?' (*Times of Papua New Guinea*, July 9, 1992: 7).

Given the socioeconomic context in which the persona of the 'statesman' appeared, we wonder about the ideological implications of its invocation in the rhetoric of motives characteristic of contemporary Papua New Guinea politics. Following Burke's example of the shepherd who 'acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm' yet 'may be "identified" with the project that is raising the sheep for market' (Burke 1969: 27), we do not wish to impugn the objectives of the editorialist advocating the persona of the 'statesman'. We do wonder, however, about this persona's 'identification with other orders of motivation extrinsic to it', about the 'larger unit of action' (Burke 1969: 27) in which it participates. In particular, we suspect that the 'statesman' might, in fact, operate within the chart of political possibilities less to offset the 'Martins' than to discredit — to supplant — the 'Toveturas'. The 'statesman' would make the 'Toveturas' appear obsolete and anachronistic in a progressive, developing country, one in which the 'Mining and Petroleum Industry' provided such substantial public — and private — revenues (cf. Chakrabarty, 1992).

There was, as well, the implication in the editorial that those who supported 'Tovetura' were themselves anachronistic. They were not — to refer to what was another, though implicit, persona in the editorial — the generalized 'good citizen'. Preoccupied

with particularist ties that led them to search for their local 'Tovetura', they were not 'the people on the street' or 'the people of this country' to which the editorial alluded: they were not, for instance, among those who were unconcerned about the region from which the Prime Minister came; they were not among those who shuddered at some of the names suggested for this office.

Although the editorial purported to be an attack on the 'Martin'-like behavior of politicians, it would, in effect, serve to remove the competition. By defining (either directly or indirectly) the indigenous models of person and polity — which we have been glossing as 'Tovetura' and his local followers — as anachronistic in modern Papua New Guinea, the editorial appears to reduce the chart of acceptable political possibilities to the (linked) persona of 'citizen' and 'statesman'. However, in our view, the context in which the 'Mining and Petroleum Industry' contributed so heavily to public (and private) revenues, might well be one in which 'citizens' and 'statesmen' existed primarily in rhetoric to obscure the prevalence of 'Martins'. We worry, in other words, that those who abandoned a 'Tovetura' in hope of getting a 'statesman' might well simply end up with a 'Martin'. (This is not to say that 'statesmen' did not or could not exist in parliamentary, or other, democracies, but that they were certainly rare.)

Whatever its limitations (and these, we have indicated, were substantial), the 'Tovetura' standard by which politicians were found so frequently wanting was the primary one through which local interests could be asserted (sometimes to the be-devilment of multi-national corporations who thought 'the deal was done'). 'Tovetura', after all, represented a system (whether pre-adapted to capitalism, or not) in which the connection between leaders and followers and between short-term private and long-term public interests was understood as intimate, if not indissoluble. In contemporary Papua New Guinea, this model might continue to prove the most impressive and effective standard of accountability available.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to the granting agencies that supported our field trip to the Duke of York Islands for four months in 1991. Errington received a grant-in-aid from the American Council of Learned Societies and a Faculty Research Fellowship from Mount Holyoke College. Gewertz received a Faculty Research Grant from Amherst College. These grants also enabled us to engage in two months of historical research in Papua New Guinea and Australia. We thank our Papua New Guinea colleagues at the National Archives and University of Papua New Guinea for their assistance. To Joe Nom of the University's New Guinea Collection and to Tom Barker, Marta Rohatynskyj and Karolus Walagat of the East New Britain Provincial Government, we send a special thanks. In Australia, we worked primarily at the Mitchell Library in Sydney and at National Archives in Canberra. Librarians at both of these institutions were very helpful. In addition, we thank our friends and colleagues at the Research School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University — particularly Jim Fox and Michael Young — for facilitating our work in Canberra by appointing us Visiting Fellows. Errington had, prior to 1991, made two trips to the Duke of Yorks. In 1968, in collaboration with Shelly Errington, he spent a year on Karavar Island under a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health; in 1972, he spent four months on Karavar, sponsored by a Crary Summer Fellowship from Amherst College. He expresses gratitude to each of these institutions. Once again, we thank Carolyn Errington for her close reading of our manuscripts and many editorial suggestions. Finally, we note that the order in which our names appear as authors is arbitrary, for we wrote this article jointly.
2. Shell money consisted of small cowrie shells strung together on strips of rattan and counted either individually or measured on the body in standard lengths. The most important length has been described by European commentators as the 'fathom'. Continuously spliced, these strips could be arranged in large, wrapped coils, containing hundreds of fathoms.

3. As Bray suggested, the relative sophistication of Tolai and Duke of York Islanders was for 'historical and geographical reasons' (1985b: 191). Contacted by Europeans earlier than were other Papua New Guineans, Tolai and Duke of York Islanders were 'given a headstart in educational and economic development. This caused an initial imbalance, and although some steps are being taken to combat it, the imbalance is being maintained with time' (Bray 1985b: 191). Indeed, in 1982, East New Britain had a higher percentage (31%) of students enrolled in grades seven through ten than any other province in the country (Bray 1985a: 17).
4. We realize that most Tolai and Duke of York Islanders, in actuality, would usually strike a course somewhere between concerns focusing on self-interest and on social commitment: perhaps they would navigate closer to one alternative than to the other depending on particular and sometimes changing life circumstances such as age, education, gender, and position — whether villager, local big man, urban wage earner, government bureaucrat, or politician. Nonetheless, Martin did, we argue, present, especially for village people, a relatively novel — and troubling — alternative.
5. These 'ideal types' were far more general than those which Young described operating among Goodenough Islanders where clan leaders actually modeled their lives on the careers of their particular mythical predecessors (Young 1983).
6. We refer here, of course, to Malinowski's view of myth as charter (Malinowski 1926), and to the fact that the connection between particular myths and existing social organizations may be much less direct than he believed (Bourdieu 1977; Sahlins 1981; Gewertz 1988).
7. In the national election of 1968, 23 out of 46 Members of Parliament were returned to their seats; in 1972, 38 out of 73; in 1977, 35 out of 91; in 1982, 48 out of 92; 1987, 56 out of 104; and, in 1992, 48 out of 108. We thank Ron May for providing these statistics.
8. For discussion of images of the pre-social past in Karavaran ethnohistory see, for instance, Errington 1974a and b and Errington and Gewertz forthcoming.
9. In 1991, many Karavarans thought that those who had acquired great wealth, including some still alive, were likely to have done so with the help of *turangan* who gave them access to caves filled with shell money.
10. The contrast between these ideal types might, of course, be sharper in the rhetoric of claims than in enactment of conduct, particularly in everyday life. In this regard we found instructive a recent photo-essay in the English-language *Times Papua New Guinea* appearing in a section designed to address the problems and concerns of 'youth'. A young, educated Papua New Guinea woman was shown taking a job in a provincial town so that she could be near her family. Soon, she found their demands for money overwhelming. A girl friend advised her to find work far from her family in the national capital of Port Moresby. She accepted this advice and, with assurance that her friend would visit, departed. As far as readers knew, she found her relocation and her separation from her kin and their claims entirely satisfactory (July 7, 1992: 17). Yet, in our experience, it would still be the exceptional young migrant who would wish to spend his or her entire life separated from natal home and from the claims of family. Indeed, many we have known who left home in similar circumstances did eventually remit and did periodically return. These migrants reported to us, sometimes with wry ambivalence, that even after living away for years, they still regarded the approval of their kin as a major determinant of personal worth. (See Carrier and Carrier, 1989 and Gewertz and Errington, 1991: 111-125.)
11. The eminence of these big men, including their ceremonial importance, had been fostered, if not created, by a colonially imposed system of indirect rule based on the appointment of local headman (such as Tovetura). It also rested on an indigenous context of fluid land tenure and kinship (Errington 1974a). Under these circumstances, big men, many of whom were *luluai* and thus verified and sustained by colonial law, were able to control strategic resources, including labor (cf. Foster 1988: 22-70).
12. Karavaran mortuary exchanges moved not only between matrilineal but between matrimoieties.
13. Indeed, the first *matamatam* Errington attended with Karavarans in 1968 was held by Namaliu's Tolai kin in East New Britain.
14. There is a growing literature on the invention of tradition and the construction of custom. For some recent examples from the Pacific, see: Keesing and Tonkinson, 1982; Linnekin, 1983; Philibert, 1986; Keesing, 1989; Hanson, 1989; Lindstrom, 1990; Linnekin and Poyer, eds., 1990; Thomas, 1991; White, 1991; Foster, n.d.

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