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CHANGING AUTHORITY AND HISTORICAL CONTINGENCY
An analysis of socio-political change in the colonial history of the Markham Valley (Papua New Guinea)*

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ABSTRACT. As Papua New Guinea (PNG) became entangled with colonial administrations and Christian missions and new opportunities to make distinctions emerged, many older modes of social differentiation began to decline. These changes unfolded in regular patterns: missionaries attempted to subvert local sources of cosmological power, while government officials cooled conflicts and set up points of contact. At the same time, who was appointed village representative, who became an evangelist and which conflicts came to an end were contingent on local circumstances. The particularities of these historical events would sometimes go on to influence the political economy of the impacted areas in the years to come. This paper seeks to explore this intersection of changing socio-politics and historical contingencies by tracing the colonial history of two Wampar villages in Morobe Province, PNG. By describing the biographies of two colonial-era Wampar leaders, I recount the early and mid-twentieth-century regional history of pacification, conversions to Christianity, World War II, the institution of informal village councils and land disputes. I argue that these changes not only introduced new modes of authority into Wampar life but also created critical historical junctures, giving a lottery-like character to the colonial era. By tracing this history, this paper seeks to examine the role of new forms of authority and leadership in creating historical contingencies in the colonial period.

1. *Introduction*

Anthropologists and historians of the colonial period in Papua New Guinea (PNG) have often noted how the staggered arrival of Christianity and colonialism presented local peoples with a range of new pathways to power.[1] Opportunities to convert to Christianity, to work as a translator or to join a patrol as a carrier, for example, provided chances to gain new wealth and prestige. At the same time, pacification and conversion, coupled with the sudden influx of goods, such as shells and salt, frequently undermined pre-existing means of social differentiation.[2] Although they did not know it at the time,

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1 Finney (1973), Gammage (1998:38), Godelier (1986:191), Martin (2013)

2 See, for example, Hughes (1978).

the local people who aligned themselves with the incoming order sometimes shaped the future political economy of the areas involved.

By tracing the colonial history of two Wampar villages in Morobe Province, PNG, this paper explores one such chain of events. In the first part, I provide an ethnographic introduction to the Wampar, before moving on to outline forms of leadership and the political economy of pre-pacification Wampar life. For the remainder of the article, I recount the lives of two colonial-era Wampar councillors in the context of changing socio-political circumstances.[3] In doing so, I examine how the ending of warfare and the coming of Christianisation, coupled with subsequent historical circumstances, not only provided new domains of power and modes of authority, but also created critical junctures in the history of the region.

The first figure to be treated in this article, Kwila Kwat, possessed a magnetic personality and accumulated a fearful reputation for sorcery and physical prowess throughout his life. By describing his rise to power in the village of Mare, I explore how pacification, the ending of initiation and World War II all provided opportunities for young men and women to gain more influence in their communities. The second colonial-era councillor I describe is Peats Go, who was more of a mediator, broker and translator than Kwat. Through an account of Go's life, I trace how their early conversion to Christianity saw the Wampar evangelise and build paternalistic relationships with neighbouring groups. These relationships would allow particular Wampar leaders, including Go, to play a vital role in a land-court decision in 1981. Ultimately if inadvertently, this evangelism and court involvement shaped the political economy of the area that now hosts the Wafi-Golpu mine prospect. I conclude by examining the underpinnings of both Kwat's and Go's authority and the relative authority of the land courts.

Throughout this article, I use authority and power in a conventional Weberian sense. Weber defines *Herrschaft* (authority, alternatively rulership or domination) as 'the chance that specific (or all) commands will be met with obedience on the part of a specifiable group of persons'.[4] In contrast, he defines *Macht* (power) more broadly as

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3 These changing socio-political circumstances impacted individuals differently based on categorical distinctions like age, gender and birth-order. Changes in gender relations are not the focus of this paper, although they periodically surface in the account provided here.

4 Weber (2019:338). As has been frequently noted by Weber commentators, there is no English equivalent for *Herrschaft* (see Swedberg and Agevall [2016:90] for a summary of the secondary literature on *Herrschaft*). In this paper, I have deferred to Talcott Parson's translation of 'authority' (Weber 1947:152, Fn. 83). This is not an entirely satisfactory solution. Parson's translation of *Herrschaft* has been criticised, with 'rulership' and 'domination' being popular alternatives (see Weber [2019:471], also Swedberg and Agevall [2016:90]). However, the English term 'rulership' carries an implication of uncontested sovereignty, sitting uncomfortably with Weber's emphasis on the role of chance in *Herrschaft*. Moreover, 'rulership', with its connotations of stratified political institutions, is inappropriate for the kinds of political relations considered in this paper, which are often grounded in face-to-face interaction. While 'domination' has become a standard English translation, as Keith Tribe notes in his recent translation of "Economy and society", Weber uses other terms – 'Gewalt', 'oktroyieren' – when he wants to emphasise coercion (Weber 2019:472). For these reasons, I have used

'every chance, within a social relationship, of enforcing one's own will against resistance, whatever the basis for this chance might be' (Weber 2019:134; emphasis in the original).

In many ways, the account presented here is a conventional one of temporary, charismatic authority, based on 'personal qualities that make an individual seem extraordinary' (Weber 2019:374) fading unless it is converted into a more legal-bureaucratic form of authority (Weber 2019:343). Over the course of this article, I will recount how the particular 'personal qualities' associated with such authority among the Wampar, from fighting skill to evangelism and knowledge of Tok Pisin,[5] changed, as sources of legal-bureaucratic authority become more prominent through institutions such as courts and village officials. Critically, all these changes were deliberately regularised: German Lutheran missionaries and Australian patrol officers were both part of a broader administrative apparatus that was explicitly designed to produce regular results, whether saving souls or promoting political and economic development. What I hope to articulate is how this more comprehensive, more generalised social process became manifest in the particular struggles and personalities of the moment.

An account of the contingencies that result from such moments of colonial interchange may seem to possess some resonance with Marshall Sahlins' famous notion of the 'structure of the conjuncture' (1981:33). This is not the place for an extended analysis of how Sahlins' notion relates to the forms of contingency I recount here. In brief, the 'structure' in Sahlins' account is one of culture, or more specifically a structure of signs. In this reading, this 'conjuncture' results from cultural agents who are motivated by such a system of signs and who revalue that very structure by undertaking stereotypical actions in specific circumstances. As a consequence, the 'reproduction of a structure' leads to its own 'transformation' (Sahlins 1981:8). Sahlins' most famous example of this process is sexual relations between Hawai'ian women and British seamen and the gradual dissolution of the *tabu* system (1981:37).

Here, I am less focused on such moments of 'structural' re-evaluation through moments in history, although more generic revaluations of self-understandings by Wampar, colonial agents and Lutheran missionaries are certainly components of the story presented here. Rather, my narrower concern is how the particularities of specific instantiations of authority – the 'commands' in Weber's concept of *Herrschaft* – do or do not endure so that future actors or institutions defer to them, thereby creating the possibility of historical events echoing through time. In particular, I will stress how the conjuncture of uneven access to the Lutheran Mission, on the one hand, with the arrival of highly discretionary, 'command-and-control' bureaucratic institutions such as

'authority' as a translation, but this should be strictly read as short hand for Weber's definition of 'Herrschaft', with its focus on non-coercive obedience.

5 Tok Pisin is a creole language and lingua franca of Papua New Guinea.

courts (Sterelny 2016:535), on the other, created critical junctures in the colonial period of Morobe Province.

Data for this paper come from a variety of sources: oral histories collected from both Wampar- and Watut-speakers during fifteen months of ethnographic research in the Sâb Wampar area between 2016 and 2017 (the ethnographic present for this paper),[6] archival research on patrol reports for the region between 1937 and 1971, court documents, affidavits from the numerous claimants to customary ownership of the Wafi-Golpu prospect, and prior anthropological and historical work in the Morobe region.[7]

2. *Wampar*

The ethnographic focus of this paper are Sâb Wampar, a self-identified sub-group of Wampar-speakers in the Markham Valley.[8] Those who identify as Wampar are an ethnolinguistic group of some twelve to fifteen thousand people in the Markham Valley, near the industrial port of Lae, PNG's second-largest city (see Figure 1). Today, the Wampar occupy a broad swathe of land around the lower Markham river, the lower Wamped river, and all along the river Waes (the upper tract known as Gorogeas). The Sâb Wampar area consists of three contemporary villages, Mare, Wamped and Tseats, all of which are on the southern side of the Markham river. According to my own surveys, Mare had

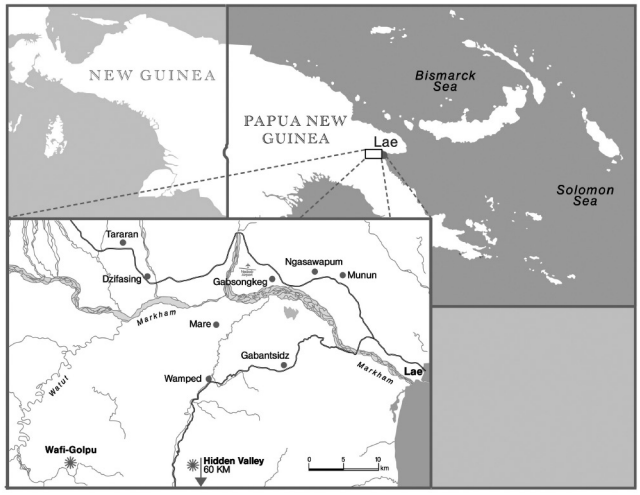

Figure 1: Contemporary distribution of Wampar villages in Morobe

6 In this paper, I use real names for historical figures while anonymising contemporary sources. All direct quotes from informants were spoken in Tok Pisin, translated by the author.

7 In particular, I draw on Fischer (1978, 1992), Sack (1976), Willis (1974).

8 In historical sources, Wampar are also known as Laewomba or Laiwomba. It is unclear when Wampar-speakers began to understand themselves as and act under the name 'Wampar'.

a population of a little over 2 600 in 2015/16, Wamped one of around 1 200. No census data are available for Tseats, but this village is around the same size as Wamped. Anthropologists have studied the Wampar extensively. The northern village of Gabsongkeg hosted their first anthropologist, Hans Fischer,[9] as well as Bettina Beer.[10] Since then, anthropologists have conducted research in the villages of Gabantsidz (Kramp 1999), Dzifasing[11] and Tararan (Lütkes 1999).

The nature of pre-pacification Wampar politics and economic activities is unclear due to a fragmented historical record. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that the thirty-odd years of German colonisation in the Markham Valley were very uneven and because Wampar sociocultural life is also likely to have varied across space, as it does today. To the extent that Wampar life at that time can be recreated, it was a mutually interacting product of expanding colonial empires. For this reason, it is more accurate to describe this period as pre-pacification rather than pre-colonial.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Wampar were, like today, swidden horticulturalists subsisting primarily from banana (W: *gaen*),[12] supplemented by wild game hunting. They did not raise large pig populations, nor practice intensive agriculture, and were broadly economically egalitarian. Within this context, social differentiation depended most prominently on categorical differences of gender, age, birth order and ability. Across the Wampar region, individual Wampar women may become renowned for pig husbandry, while the ability to wrap bananas formerly gave men prestige. Likewise, the Wampar did, and still do, place great emphasis on male talent at hunting.

Missionary reports gathered from northern Wampar suggest that the Wampar practiced a form of headhunting. Conflict, almost exclusively in the form of raiding, informed estimates of prestige, feuding and social reproduction (Fischer 1978:144), with young men being required to collect heads, or at least commit homicide, before marriage.[13] In addition, like almost all elements of everyday life, conflict probably had cosmological significance. The missionary Georg Stürzenhofecker recounts that the Wampar saw non-Wampar as pigs sent by their ancestors to hunt and harvest spiritual energy (Fischer 1978:146), and the missionary Karl Panzer made a similar observation (see below).

In terms of social organisation, the Wampar organise themselves into exogamous patrilineal descent groups (W: *sagaseg*), routinely related through marriage (preferentially cross-cousin marriage or sister-exchange) and enmeshed in histories of alliances and conflicts with one another. Unfortunately, there are no detailed records of the re-

9 See, for example, Fischer (1975, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2013).

10 See, for example, Beer (2006, 2015, 2018), Beer and Schroedter (2014).

11 See Bacalzo Schwörer (2012), Bacalzo, Beer and Schwoerer (2014).

12 I mark Wampar words with a 'W'. Individual names and place names follow Hans Fischer's spellings of Wampar words in order to ensure continuity with prior publications.

13 This is akin to other lowland, riverine, headhunting societies in New Guinea and elsewhere. See Evans (1922:186), Harrison (1993), Knauft (1990:281, 283).

lationships between *sagaseg*, residential patterns, marriage alliances and raiding in the pre-pacification period. Oral histories of the immediate and more distant past include accounts of both multi-*sagaseg* settlements and more distributed, mono-clan hamlets at different times, although it is difficult to draw definite conclusions from these accounts. Today, and probably historically as well, the *sagaseg* act as a basis for both solidarity and action-groups around marriage, death and conflict, although their importance to contemporary social life has waned in recent years due to demographic changes.[14] It will suffice to note here that, compared to more fluid forms of affiliation (Barnes 1962, Wagner 1974), *sagaseg* membership and affiliation are unambiguously patrilineal. That said, non-Wampar are routinely adopted into Wampar clans, and historically *sagaseg* have fused and fissioned as demographic and martial fortunes rise and fall (Fischer 1975).

Within this context, the ability of certain men to draw alliances of *sagaseg* together, coupled with their fighting ability, feature prominently in Sâb Wampar oral histories of leadership. Wampar political leaders were not like the Big Men of the Highlands of New Guinea, whose power was based on their ability to accumulate and distribute pig-based wealth. The Wampar have no large-scale exchange cycles akin to the Engan *tee* or Hagen *moka* (Feil 1984, Strathern 1975). Instead, several Sâb Wampar oral histories recount war leaders (W: *garaweran*) who distinguished themselves through their knowledge of sorcery and fighting skills, akin to *aoulatta* (Great Men, warriors of great renown among the Baruya).[15] These individuals were distinguished materially from their fellows. Young men wore a headband made of cassowary feathers (W: *kuwik moamu*), while men of renown wore *refanturan* (W), an ornamental bark cap with bird feathers on the top and pig's teeth on the side, and painted with a particular pattern indicating their clan (Willis 1974:30).

Prominent war leaders seem to have been the product of a partly routinized form of charismatic leadership through which individuals distinguished themselves by their extraordinary personal qualities in the context of traditional expectations on the part of older, first-born men that they should play influential roles in their lineages (Weber 2019:374). Sâb Wampar oral histories recall at least two instances of particular war leaders becoming despotic.[16] Like Watson's account of the Eastern Highlands despot Matoto (1971), pre-colonial Tolai *luluai* and *aoutalla* who gave themselves up to despotism,[17] these figures are recalled as 'bad men', killing indiscriminately and demanding wives.[18] Like despotic *aoutalla* who found that 'the punishment for despotism […] was the tyrant's death' (Godelier 1986:110) or other such figures in societies with more egalitarian

14 See Bacalzo, Beer and Schwoerer (2014).

15 Godelier (1986:174). There is, however, an absence of an institutionalised division between different forms of greatness among the Wampar.

16 Brown (1963), Salisbury (1964), Strathern (1966)

17 *Luluai* were village headmen appointed by the German administration, first in New Britian and the Shortlands in the late 1890s (Firth 1983:2, 35).

18 Godelier (1986:110), Salisbury (1964:226), Watson (1971)

attitudes (Boehm 2001), these figures met untimely deaths at the hands of those who were offended by their domineering dispositions.

Without a more detailed empirical record, it is impossible to say whether these more tyrannical Wampar war leaders were aberrations of more consensus-based forms of leadership of the sort described by Read (1959). At the very least, despotism was a possibility before colonial intervention (contra Brown 1963). In the cases recalled here, the power of such figures was highly unstable, prone to overreach and collapse. More broadly, there is no evidence of the prestige or position of war leaders being inherited, and both their charismatic authority and coercive powers lasted, at most, only as long as their lifetimes.

3. *Migrations and expansion in the German colonial period*

An early figure for the population density of the Markham Valley, calculated from the 1972 and 1973 census data, indicates that the area between the Leron and Erap rivers – Wampar land and the current sites of Dzifasing and Tararan – has a population density of just 3.4 people per square kilometre (Papua New Guinea Department of Agriculture 1973: Appendix 6, Part 3). By contrast, west of Wampar land, in the Leron-Umi area, the density jumps to 16.2 persons per square kilometre. This expansive and sparse political geography is partly a product of the Wampar's political economy, outlined above, being impacted by the increasing presence of German colonial actors on the coast from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like other areas on the fringes of expanding colonial empires (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992), this period seems to have been an unusually violent one. Around the late nineteenth century, Wampar-speakers began raiding down the Watut river valley from where the Watut river meets the Wafe, near the site of the current Wafi-Golpu mine prospect,[19] displacing coastal peoples as they went.[20]

During this same period, coastal groups had begun trading with the German colonists. Bismarck annexed the northeast coast of New Guinea in 1884 (Firth 1983), and the Lutheran Neuendettelsauer Missionsgesellschaft set up the first mission station in Simbang, near Finschhafen, in 1886 (Sack 1976:36). As Germans became more and more active in the region, they recruited people from along the coast and traded goods for labour. Based on contemporary accounts of Wampar raids, the historian Ian Willis writes:

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19 Today, the claim that Wampar migrated from the Watut is contentious due to the presence of the Wafi-Golpu. However, numerous sources prior to the existence of the mine, even as a prospect, corroborate this claim. See Fischer (1963, 2013), Willis (1974) and Sack (1976).

20 Fischer (1992), Sack (1976), Willis (1974:31)

> What they [Wampar] prized above all, however, were the European manufactured goods – beads, mirrors, calico, knives, axes – brought back by returning labourers or given to village leaders as an inducement to supply recruits. In particular they sought ironware (1974:31).

Meanwhile, labour recruiters drawing on coastal populations favoured physically strong, young men – these populations' main warriors – while a series of smallpox epidemics that swept through coastal communities in 1893 and 1894 exacerbated population imbalances further (Firth 1983:37–38, Sack 1976:26–28).

Collectively, the Markham Valley in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw an intersection of several features: warfare as at least one source of prestige and as a means of Wampar social reproduction, coinciding with conditions that made conflict both more attractive (for example, over commodities) and more likely to succeed (there were fewer male opponents). The result is the present-day political geography of the Markham Valley, vast swathes which are dominated by the Wampar. After several retaliatory raids into Wampar territory that failed to quell Wampar attacks on the coast, the northern Wampar were pacified and began converting to Christianity in 1911.[21] Missionisation came later to the southern Wampar. According to today's church leaders, in the late 1910s Wampar from the northern villages, accompanied by a missionary (probably Karl Panzer), arrived on the south side of the Markham.

Sâb Wampar conversion to Christianity undermined some of the most important pillars of male social control. It seems reasonable to suggest that the period before pacification saw violent conflicts increase in frequency in Wampar life, while their abrupt ending also removed one source of differentiation among both men and *sagaseg*, with raiding and male initiation both coming abruptly to an end as well (Fischer 1978:42). Unlike Big Men, former war leaders found no convenient cultural niche they could occupy in the new order (cf. Finney 1973), although charismatic figures would still have a role to play. While Wampar men lost access to one source of prestige, however, the consequences of Wampar territorial expansion were not so temporary. As elsewhere in New Guinea, pacification froze boundaries, leaving those who had enjoyed recent success retaining their territorial advantages. The Wampar now controlled much of the Markham Valley, having driven their former victims to the coast or into the uplands.

Owing to these territorial advantages, the Wampar hosted a mission station in Gabmadzung, giving them preferential access to both schooling and the church (Beer 2018). Throughout the Australian colonial period, patrol officers noted the influence of the Lutheran Church in Wampar villages, with H.E. Cooke going so far as to describe the Church as having a 'claw-like grip' on the region.[22] In this context, having a position with a mission gave one significant prestige and importance. In 1955, Patrol Officer R.

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21 See Fischer (1992) for a full account.

22 Downs (1946), Clark (1948), (Green 1955a), Cooke (1968:26)

Green noted, 'The Mission representative […] is an influential man in village affairs, and in some cases the village officials "play second fiddle" to him' (1955a:1). As these extracts suggest, this new source of power was highly gendered: initially, in 1911, the sole Bible school in the Wampar region in Gabmadzung was limited to boys (Beer 2018:3), part of a broader system of educational inequality in pre-independence Papua New Guinea (Macintyre 2017).

These changes were followed by the dramatic intrusion of World War II, followed by more gradual entanglement with the Australian colonial administration. Some of the key actors in this latter period were Australian patrol officers (*kiap*). *Kiap* responsibilities changed considerably between the pre-war period and PNG's political independence in 1975. In the early years, patrol officers worked with Papuan police, carriers and translators to explore territory and pacify warring groups, particularly in the interior of New Guinea. In the later period, the *kiap* helped enact Australia's obligations under the UN to develop New Guinea, both politically and economically, for eventual independence (Sinclair 1981:21).

These changes all occurred in the Wampar region as well, *kiap* relationships with Sâb Wampar being part of the more comprehensive effort to prepare PNG for political and economic independence. The *kiap* encouraged the Wampar to set up self-governing councils, plant coconut trees and dig toilets, while the latter drew them into their own schemes and goals. Thus, the markedly more pliable political scene created because of the ending of warfare began intersecting with the notably gendered spaces of the Lutheran Church, the World War II military and the colonial administration. These new commercial political and military changes posed both a threat and an opportunity to anyone benefiting from or dissatisfied with the old order of things respectively. In this space of dialogue and dispute, certain individuals rose to prominence.

4. *World War II, councillors and Kwila Kwat*

Today the Wampar recall their ancestors as giants, and both missionaries and patrol officers routinely remarked on the physical height of the Wampar compared to other Morobe populations. These ideas still play a role in inter-ethnic relations (Beer 2006), and many Wampar believe they were once taller but have now shrunk due to inferior food and mixing with other ethnic groups. Kwila Kwat was, according to both contemporary accounts and Wampar recollections, a giant who lived after the time of giants. Born in the late 1910s (Downs 1946), one elder in Wamped recounted an appropriately outsized origin story for Kwat:

> During ancestral times, Kwat's mother was pregnant when his clan were travelling between settlements. His father, along with the other men, were out in front, scouting. If they encountered anyone, the women hid in the bushes. During one of these expeditions, Kwat's

> mother gave birth and decided to bury him. When his father returned, he asked Kwat's mother what had happened. Finding out that she'd had a baby boy, he said 'I want a son I can train how to fight. If it was a girl, leave her there, but he is a boy'. They rushed back to where Kwat's mother had buried him and dug him up. Kwat was still alive. But he did not survive the experience unscathed. While he was in the ground, the spirits of the forest changed him. They gave him his power (conversation in Wamped, 12 September 2017).

Kwat lived after Wampar pacification and through World War II. World War I did not really come to the Markham, except for changing the colonial authority from German to Australian. World War II, on the other hand, changed the fortunes of many Wampar, including Kwat, with the Markham Valley seeing intense fighting between Japanese and Allied forces (Sinclair 1981:49). Like many young men at the time, Kwat worked as a carrier for the latter. To an even greater extent than when the Lutheran mission arrived, Sâb Wampar encounters with Allied soldiers provided opportunities for young men to gain contact with Europeans. These changes upset the already tenuous position of the older men. In the first patrol of the region following World War II, in 1946, Ian Downs recounts:

> Their village officials [*luluai* and *tultul* (assistants to *luluai*, similarly selected by colonial administration officials)] gave very little assistance to the war effort during the war years, and the affairs of the villages were run by the heads of family groups and a small clique of highly intelligent young men who exploited their superior intelligence in contacts with Americans and Australians to such an extent that the power and influence of the ranking officials was gradually weakened to a degree of almost impotence (1946).

The group of younger men was 'led by "Ex. Deportee Lewits, alias Kwila Kwat"'. He made an impression on Downs, who described him as

> one of the strongest native personalities that I have ever encountered, a magnificent physical type, and a born leader. He is now about thirty years of age and his influence extends from Mumeng to Pesen and throughout the North and South groups of the Leiwomba [Wampar] (Downs 1946).

By the time Downs met Kwila Kwat, the latter was already a political force and a troublemaker. Kwat had ambitions to join the native constabulary, but his prison record prevented this. Downs noted that, '[h]e is capable of giving the Administration a great deal of assistance or of alternatively causing it a great deal of embarrassment', and sensing his political potential, suggested that 'he would make a great Tultul'. He added with concern that Kwat had 'interfered with a number of native women and narrowly escaped another prison sentence'. As such, it 'would not be good policy to make him an official until he has shown that he can observe the Native Administration Regulations'. Despite Down's cautious endorsement of Kwat, not all the former's superiors were so positive, one noting that '[m]en like Kwila are inclined to be bullies or tyrants and

they frequently are a law unto themselves. It is considered that Kwila should not be appointed as an Official' (Downs 1946).

Kwat's youthful rebelliousness took place in a context of wider changes in the area, with the now tenuous hold of the older men providing opportunities for Wampar women as well. Individual women are mentioned only rarely in colonial records, and there appears to be no parallel akin to Wanti, a colonial-era Wampar woman of prominence in Gabsongkeg, in the Sâb Wampar area.[23] Nevertheless, *kiap* reports from the period routinely detail stories of obstinate Sâb Wampar women holding onto reparation payments from World War II, ignoring the attempts of their parents to arrange marriages or refusing to marry altogether.[24] Although one should not naively accept patrol officers' accounts about the civilising roles of God and government in liberating Wampar women, these reports of tensions underscore how conversion, pacification and World War II undercut many pre-colonial bases of power, such as initiation and fighting ability, changes which probably had consequences for older men's controls over both women and younger men.

Older officials, despite their absence during World War II, were not passive to such changes. In particular, the *kiap* learned about local cases of insubordination through older male leaders, frequently *luluai* and *tultul*, who had originally been appointed by the German administration (Firth 1983:xiii). As Downs recounts:

> The leader of the Conservative group in [Mare] is the brother-in-law of the present Luluai, a 'Mission Boss Boy' by the name of Pes. He is an intelligent native who runs the village through the Luluai with occasional upsets and interference caused by Kwila's group. There is continual strife in the village (Downs 1946).

Downs proposed to deal with these ongoing struggles between clans, young and old, men and women, by institutionalizing them in the form of informal village councils, with each clan providing one or two elected 'councillors'. At the time, the village council system had not yet been introduced to PNG as a whole (Sinclair 1981:39), and the Wampar 'councils' were part of a string of unofficial bodies that the *kiap* sporadically introduced throughout the colony, part and parcel of efforts to build local political capacity through indirect rule. These councillors did not have official powers akin to native courts. Instead, their ostensive purpose was to 'arrange regular meetings, and assist the officials with advice as to method [sic] of doing things, and in determining the proper application of native customs' (Downs 1946).

Despite the earlier concerns of higher officials, after the creation of village councils, by 1955 Kwat had become an elected councillor for Mare village (Green 1955a). During his rise to power he accumulated influence and acquired a reputation for unnat-

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23 See Beer (2018:9).

24 Downs (1946), Murphy (1937), Robinson (1949)

ural strength. Today, one of the most commonly repeated stories I collected about Kwila from informants, not only in the Sâb Wampar area but also in Gabsongkeg, concerned a soccer match. One version of this story went as follows:

> When Kwat was a young man, he frequently played soccer. Because of his unnatural size and strength, he repeatedly broke people's legs. Government officials became frustrated, so they brought him into the station in Morobe. They presented him with a cement ball and told him to kick it. If he failed, they would arrest him for all the legs he had broken. Kwat ran to the ball and kicked it with all his strength. Dust flew up, and the cement shattered into small pieces. They gave him the name 'Kwila', because his legs were like iron, like the tree [Intsia bijuga], and they gave Wampar the name Number 1 Markham (conversation in Mare, 3 October 2017).

Other informants stressed his strength in hyperbolic terms, explaining that Kwat had a 'booming voice and he had legs the size of your body. He could tear you apart with his bare hands – he had sorcerous power. People knew his name throughout Adzara, on the other side of the Markham in Dzifasing, Gabsongkeg, all the way down to Labu' (conversation in Wamped, 12 September 2017).

Kwat's political prowess continued to impress colonial officers, with H.P. Green reporting in 1955 how 'Kwila, a native of impressive personality dominates the council, and his appreciation of the administration's policy in this region is very good indeed' (1955a). Green reassured his superiors that '[t]here appears little chance of [Kwat]'s rule becoming despotic, as he is a progressive person, and very reliable as far as the administration is concerned' (1955a). In Mare, however, even Kwat's own descendants disagree with Green's assessment; there, Kwat is widely remembered for being 'dictatorial'. Several informants from Mare, not related to Kwat, recalled to me that 'everyone was afraid of him – if you did not do what he asked, he would kill you. Because he had some kind of power'.

5. *Evangelism, court cases and Peats Go*

The second figure described in this article, Peats Go, has no grand origin story. He was probably born around the same time as Kwat (Cooke 1968), and Go's father held a political position early on as a *luluai* (Burke 1945). Like Kwat, Go worked as a carrier during World War II, where he learnt Tok Pisin. After the war their paths diverged, and as a young man Go worked at Singawa (then known as Manakang) driving cattle and planting coconuts for an Australian company.

From Singawa, Go travelled to the Watut to work as a pastor in one of the many 'more backward' communities the Wampar helped evangelise following their conversion (Cooke 1968, Fischer 1992). Hosting a mission station since the 1910s gave the Wampar a notable edge over neighbouring communities. Taking advantage of these

inequalities, the Wampar began adopting nearby groups with a paternalistic air that continues to this day (Beer 2006). In this respect, if the Markham Valley at the beginning of the twentieth century was characterised by Wampar martial dominance, then the early and middle twentieth century saw this geographical conquest give way to spiritual expansion. As the missionary Karl Panzer recounts:

> That Laewamba [Wampar], who had still slain people in 1915, sent the first evangelists to the not yet baptised Watut [...] in 1920 was a nearly unbelievable change. That happened by God's will! Consider also that the heathen Laewamba had talked about their neighbours as barbarians! To Laewamba, all their neighbours had been pigs, sent by the ancestor spirits for hunting – yet today the Laewamba leave their homes and their people to bring the word of God to the people they previously hunted like pigs, and to guide them to heaven.[25]

As Panzer mentions, one such group pacified and converted by the Wampar were the Watut, who now live adjacent to the Watut River, near to the source of Wampar migration in the late nineteenth century (Fischer 1963:16–17). In the 1920s, Wampar evangelists not only converted Watut-speakers, they also actively facilitated village relocations, going so far as to begin 'burning down old village sites in the Middle and Lower Watut areas and forcing people to congregate in larger, more accessible settlements'.[26] While the circumstances of these conversions and relocations are controversial today, contemporaneous sources suggest that one such movement took place east across the Watut river to form today's village of Babauf,[27] around five kilometres from the Wafi-Golpu copper and gold deposit.

The nature of the power afforded by conversion and mission schooling was different from the military power that facilitated Wampar territorial expansion. Although war leaders had charismatic authority among their peers, the Wampar's ability to expand into the Markham was narrowly dependent upon their coercive power. By contrast, the conversion of the Watut involved their new wards voluntarily deferring to the Wampar, burnt villages notwithstanding. Today, Watut elders stress the Wampar's spiritual power, recalling how, upon meeting the first Wampar evangelists, 'the Watut

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25 Karl Panzer: "Aus der Laewambawelt", Neuendettelsauer Missionsblatt 15(2):15, 17–18, 23 (1925), p. 17; cited in Beer (2006:110; translation Beer)

26 Ballard (1993:8). Fischer (1963:15) provides a similar account.

27 Bayer, Lechner and Male (1955:164), Fischer (1963:235). The earliest map of the region comes from a German expedition by H. Andexer between 1910 and 1912. Andexer (1914) identifies a 'native plantation' ('Eingeborenen-Pflanzung') near the current location of Babuaf village. To the west of the Watut river, he notes 'Papuaf-Leute'; probably 'Babuaf people'. In his review of the historical evidence for migrations in the Middle Watut, Chris Ballard (1993:6) takes this to indicate a Watut 'settlement' to the east of the Watut prior to World War I. My interpretation here differs from Ballard's account, given the contemporary sources mentioned above. To my mind, the map itself is ambiguous, as the German word 'Pflanzung' usually refers to 'plantation'. It seems unlikely that Andexer would use this word to describe a resident population when elsewhere on his map he uses 'Dörfer', the plural of 'Dorf' (village), the more familiar word to describe villages. The word 'plantations', however, indicates land-use to the east of the Watut, although by whom is unclear.

drew back their bows and arrows but did not fire [at the evangelists]. At this time, the word of God had power, and God took the Watuts' strength away, their arms falling to their sides' (conversation at National Agricultural Research Institute, 1 November 2017). In addition to more God-given power, Wampar evangelists eagerly demonstrated their superior access to material wealth, distributing mirrors, cloth, salt and matches in a fashion similar to Australian patrol officers attempting to convey European power through European goods. It was in one of these Watut communities that Go worked, a relationship that would prove fruitful later in his life.

In 1958, after returning home from working with the Church, Go was elected as the local government councillor for Wamped. This was three years after Kwat had become a councillor in Mare (Cooke 1968). Today, Go is recalled as the 'the first, and last, good councillor of Wamped', a 'translator' (*man bilong tanim tok*). Instead of stories of broken cement balls, a trail of paperwork follows Go concerning intervillage mediation and early timber concessions near Wamped (500 pounds for 2 750 hectares).

Go continued his mediation work into the post-independence period. In 1981, three men from the Watut, where Go had previously worked as a pastor, approached the Wampar for legal help in a dispute over land near the Watut river. This was land from which the Wampar had migrated in the late nineteenth century, on to which they had probably encouraged Watut-speakers to resettle following their conversion to Christianity. It was also land that would go on to include part of the Wafi-Golpu mine prospect. In 1977, geosampling by Conzinc Rio Tinto, part of Australia Exploration Ltd, had indicated the Wafe river as a possible location for prospecting (Ballard and Kanasa 1993:32). However, significantly the case in question was not motivated by any future vision of mine-related wealth. Instead, Watut-speakers from the village of Babuaf approached their Sâb Wampar allies for legal assistance against Mumeng-speaking settlers who had allegedly been moving into the region, cutting down coconut trees, stealing and encroaching on the land (supposedly since the 1960s [Tovue 1989:93]).

According to witnesses to the event, the Sâb Wampar village council at Mare selected three Wampar men to travel with the Watut men and testify in this case: Peats Go; Intu Ninits, a pastor who had missionized in Aseki; and Gau Monz, an elder who had worked as an agricultural officer (*didiman*) in Finschhafen. All three men spoke Tok Pisin fluently and were relatively well educated for the time. Esera Kwako, one of the three Watut men, who had attended a District Bible school in Myanmar and had been police officer, went to testify with them.

Before outlining the case itself, it is necessary to step back briefly in order to examine the legal framework that structured both the encounter with and the powers of the court. As anthropologists and lawyers alike have stressed, PNG law is 'archetypally' pluralistic, with the constitution stipulating 'customary' practice as the underlying law of the country.[28] Both the regular and the land courts act as central mechanisms for en-

[28] Aleck (1993), Demian (2003:97), Goddard (1998). See PNG Constitution, Schedule 1.2.

forcing this law should disputes arise over 'custom'.[29] Critically, court judges have much freedom in interpreting customary law. According to the Native Custom (Recognition) Act 1963, courts are 'not bound to observe strict legal procedure or apply technical rules of evidence', and may refer to 'any matter or thing stated in such works as evidence on the question' (Independent State of Papua New Guinea 1963). As Supreme Court Justice Miles reflects: 'the Native Custom (Recognition) Act 1963 ousts the strict rules of evidence and enables a court to inform itself as it sees fit on any question as to custom' (Papua New Guinea Law Reports 1981). Thus, legally, court representatives have a significant degree of discretion in attempting to determine customary law, customary affiliation and customary land ownership.

This legal order intersected with Wampar and Watut history at a particularly salient moment in the 1980s. On 21 August 1981, Peats Go, Intu Ninits, Gau Monz and their Watut ally, Esera Kwako, travelled to the Local Land Court in Lae to attend a case between the 'Babwaf [Babuaf] clan' and the 'Engabu [Hengambu] clan' (Babwaf vs Engabu 1981), although neither are 'clans' in any sense. In court, Go and the other Wampar witnesses referred to the late nineteenth-century Wampar history of migration from the Watut area as evidence of their ownership of the land, with several additions (Babwaf vs Engabu 1981). The Wampar witnesses also generously included the Watut-speakers at various points in this account, claiming that they had lived together with them in historical villages in the region and spoke the same local language (*tok ples*). Kwako finished his testimony as follows: 'Because of this, Wampar and Babwaf know that the land belongs to Wampar and Babwaf' (Babwaf vs Engabu 1981). In their turn, Hengambu witnesses testified to occasional fights with the Wampar to the north of the disputed area but argued that the land was vacant when they arrived, Watut-speakers being confined to the west of the Watut River. Owing to the lack of Hengambu witnesses, on 24 September the Local Land Court awarded the case to the 'Babwaf clan', upon which Hengambu representatives promptly appealed to the Provincial Land Court, which rejected the appeal (Engabu vs Babwaf 1982).

Notable misunderstandings over geography and affiliation vex the testimonies and the decision itself. As mentioned above, Morobe Province in the early colonial period saw significant migration and resettlement. Courts made decisions with little knowledge of this and the land in dispute was never mapped due to lack of funding (Babwaf vs Engabu 1981). More generally, the testimonies of Go and his Wampar fellows were probably critical to the outcome of the case, given their substantial testimony and linguistic proficiency, and their ability to narrate mission activity ranging from Gabmadzung to the Watut probably improved their credibility. However, the merging of the Watut and Wampar parties that drove much of the confusion in the case continues to impact on conflicts over land to this day.

[29] See Filer (2006:67) for a history of customary land-ownership in the Australian colonial period.

6. *New powers and historical contingencies*

Having presented a slice of Sâb Wampar history in the early twentieth century, for the remainder of this article I will tease out the relationship between the new forms of power and authority to which the Wampar gained access early in the same century, showing how these changes created historical junctures, some of which still shape the region today. The impact of World War II, the introduction of village councils and the political rise of Kwila Kwat illustrate several critical dynamics of the colonial period. Rather than just straightforwardly increasing or reversing male dominance, the arrival of Christianity and, later, the Australian colonial administration saw a brief opportunity for different groups to assert themselves, albeit in an already unequal field. While the ending of warfare and of initiation provided a fleeting opening for change, the colonial regime and the Lutheran Church had numerous gendered biases of their own. In this earlier period, only a few Wampar men and no women became pastors and evangelists (Beer 2018:8). These changes were compounded by the well-acknowledged gendered impact of the introduction of steel tools.[30] By contrast, young men were recruited as carriers during World War II, a handful of them travelling outside Wampar to work on plantations and learning Tok Pisin in the process. In Mare, this meant that the ritualised and martial sway that the older men had exerted on Wampar life was briefly broken by Kwat, along with a small cadre of worldly-wise and more assertive young men before Kwat himself became an incumbent political actor.

The hyperbole surrounding Kwat's size, his physical and supernatural abilities and complaints about him being excessively demanding are in many ways reminiscent of how pre-pacification war leaders who became despotic are described. As with earlier leaders, Kwat's authority was grounded in his charismatic and occasionally coercive sway over his fellows. These powers were supplemented by his ability to convince colonial officials that he was a useful ally. Likewise, Go gained influence in the eyes of his peers through his experiences. Unlike Kwat, many of Go's powers were rooted in new sources, including evangelising outside the Wampar area and his fluency in Tok Pisin. In this respect, for both Kwat and Go, the root of their authority lay in a mixture of transient, individual properties and the office they held; a 'charisma of office' (Weber 2019:343). The new village positions provided little in the way of formal powers; as R. Green noted during one of his patrols,

> the extent of the influence excited by village officials depends more on his personal influence than on the position he holds; in this area good officials are few and far between, the majority are either too old or are incapable of carrying out the duties expected of them (Green 1955b).

30 See, for example, Godelier (1986:192–193).

This is not to say that these positions were mere window-dressing. Rather, village councils provided a new political arena personal forms of politics while also augmenting individual charismatic authority

Both Kwat and Go are remembered today, and their children continue to play influential roles, albeit not as large as their parents, in contemporary village politics. However, it is not the goal of this article to examine the extent that Go or Kwat's descendants do or do not enjoy specific advantages compared to one another or their fellows. Rather, I am concerned here with the relative persistence of different instantiations of authority. In this regard, Go's testimony in 1981 is notable due to its lasting influence on the political geography of Wafi-Golpu. While the authority granted by court cases was the result of idiosyncratic circumstances, once the Provincial Land Court of Lae had handed down its judgement, Go's personal influence was made more permanent. Crucially, the decision was not tied to Go's physical person nor his office. Much to the chagrin of Go's descendants, the court cases were not dependent on either his person or his lineage, as they went instead to the legal entity known as the 'Babwaf Clan'. As a result, Go's testimony was converted into a qualitatively different socio-political form constituted by court decisions whose judgements could influence actors beyond his lifetime.

In emphasising the importance of the 1981 decision for Wafi-Golpu, I do not want to misrepresent h o w the case became important, nor w h o the courts have authority over. As numerous scholars of post-colonial countries have emphasised, the authority of various socio-legal institutions is frequently contested (Sikor and Lund 2009). On 25 February 1983, after the 1981 case and 1982 appeal, Nowa Kwila, one of Kwat's sons, delivered an official eviction notice to the Hengambu, who promptly ignored it. This state of affairs was complicated further when, in another set of lower court decisions in 1984 and 1986, the Hengambu were recognised as co-customary landowners of the 'Wafi-Golpu prospect'.[31] Thus, the results of the original court decisions were hardly 'regularly observed' (Weber 2019:343), nor were they regularly applied. The court had neither authority over those in the region nor the coercive power to implement decisions should they be contested.

Rather, the decisions had authority with those institutions that are more deferential to such legalistic decisions. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full legal history of the Wafi-Golpu area or to recount the attempts of later actors to levy force or money to abate the idiosyncrasies of these early results. Suffice it to say here that the State Solicitor's Office, the Supreme Court (Somare vs Nen 2018) and therefore the owners of the Wafi-Golpu prospect see the 1980s cases as deciding who were the customary owners of this area. This means that the 'Babuaf' are considered to be one of

[31] See Yanta vs Engambu, Twangala, Bupu, Omalai, Piu (1984) and Yanta Clan vs Hengabu Clan (1985). These cases arguably contradict the Babwaf vs Engabu (1981) and Engabu vs Babwaf (1982) decisions. However, a full discussion of the legal and political ramifications of the 1984 and 1985 decisions would fall outside the scope of this article.

the customary landowners of the mining area, as a consequence of which they are to be given preferential access to royalties, employment and contracts with the mine, should the mine prospect be approved. In effect, even though the court's decisions had little legitimacy at the time, since the 1980s they have, after the fact, become increasingly central.

7. Conclusion

Today, both Mare and Wamped continue to host weekly village meetings, although they are no longer patronised by a council of formally elected elders, while Sâb Wampar are on the legal and geographical periphery of the Wafi-Golpu mine prospect. Inadvertently, however, Wampar-speaking individuals and groups played critical roles in shaping the political economy of the wider Morobe Province. These events took place in a broader context of diversifying forms of power. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Wampar leaders were known for their hunting skills, charismatic leadership, fighting ability, sorcery and at times coercive power. By the end of the colonial period, education, fluency in Tok Pisin and religious and official position had supplemented, and in some cases replaced, the powers of the past. This diversification was the product of a deliberately regularised, colonial-era process of pacification, Christianisation and gradual encompassment by the colonial state. The process provided opportunities for particular individuals to gain new sources of power and to put these powers to use in novel socio-political institutions. Kwila Kwat led his groups of age-mates to eventually become a dominating force on the council, Wampar evangelists convinced previously hostile neighbours to break their bows and convert to Christianity, and Peats Go helped convince a Local Land Court that the 'Babwaf clan' was the owner of disputed land. None of these events were strictly random, but they did occur in a context in which minor differences in decision-making would have led to notably different outcomes. Of these events, Peats Go's role in the 1981 case is notable in that it continues to have a clear legacy today.

Thus, the learning of Tok Pisin, evangelism, village councils and subsequent testimonies are emblematic of the kinds of processes raised as an issue in the introduction to this article: socio-political transformations that create historical junctures. A final question is what it was about the particularities of the colonial moment that created the possibilities for such a combination of the impactful and the idiosyncratic. The chain of events recounted here is not a matter of Go 'routinizing' his charisma (Weber 2019:378). Nor, I should stress, is temporal duration inherently linked to legal-bureaucratic authority. To an extent, both patrol officers and *lululai* had authority grounded in their offices, but the temporal duration of their 'commands' were frequently more short-lived.

Instead, the duration and politico-economic impact of Go's testimonial influence was dependent, in part, on the particularities of the legal order involved, namely (1) judges with broad discretion to interpret 'customary law', (2) underfunding and a lack of local knowledge on the part of those judges, and (3) the existence of subsequent actors with both substantial economic resources and a preference for showing deference to land courts rather than contesting them. These qualities mirror common features found in institutions that are generative of historical contingency. As the philosopher of science Kim Sterelny argues, 'command-and-control' institutions like military hierarchies, courts, and governments introduce substantial historical contingency because a 'myriad individuals [become] causally sensitive to the decisions of those few (in the limit, one) at or near the top of the hierarchy' (Sterelny 2016:534). In PNG, there is far from a straightforward connection between 'commands' and subsequent 'control', as the failure to enforce the early 1980s court decisions indicates. However, precisely because certain actors *do* respond to such commands, notably state institutions that interface with multi-national mining companies, the decisions of land courts (and those that influence such decisions) have the potential for substantial downstream influence.

By situating these processes within concrete historical moment, the different events recounted in this article have shed some light on to the different ways in which socio-political change in the colonial period generated historical junctures. Narrowly, the intervention of colonial agents such as missionaries and patrol officers, as well as historical events like World War II, disrupted the more regularised reproduction of traditional forms of authority, creating openings for others to gain novel sources of power. More broadly, the arrival of highly discretionary bureaucratic institutions, such as land courts and mission societies, which also shaped the distribution of resources, such as mining rents or mission education, gave a lottery-like character to the colonial-era. As a result, a lucky few – like Peats Go – had both the means and the opportunity to leave an outsized mark on the region.

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