



## ABSTRACT

### TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF LAND FOR THE NEW GUINEA ISLANDS

William K. Longgar

One hundred and thirty years ago the Methodist Mission acquired land in a number of areas in the New Guinea Islands region for the purpose of carrying out its mission. Now the land no longer belongs to the Methodist Mission (although many of the titles are still held by the Methodist Overseas Mission), but to a fully indigenous church, the United Church in Papua New Guinea.

Times have changed and are changing. Social and economic changes have raised issues of land ownership, use, transfer, and compensation. The church is now facing difficulties in land use, often in contexts of mutual misunderstanding. The land purchased from or given by the people to the missionaries a hundred years ago is now under dispute by the descendents of those who sold or gave the land. The church faces the danger of its redemptive presence in the societies and communities in the islands being hampered by its involvement in land conflicts.

The impact of the global capitalist economy is exerting pressure on Melanesians to utilize the land for economic purposes, resulting in increased cash crop activities in the islands. Population growth also puts pressure on the limited land available in many parts of the islands. The existence of two different land ideologies, the Western ideology and the traditional Melanesian ideology, is a cause of conflict. These only serve to intensify the disputes and conflicts between the church and the people. These and the methods and purposes of land



acquisition by the missionaries have raised the issues and questions that are being investigated in this study.

A model of constructing a theology of land for the New Guinea Islands was developed and applied to this problem. The model is exegetical, using biblical and cultural themes on land to construct the theology. The model embraces a high view of Scripture and a high view of culture. It shows that God is the ultimate landowner and the land is his gift to the Melanesians through the ancestors and the clan systems. Because the land is God's gift to Melanesians his redemptive presence in Christ through the church can enable the people to live, share, find peace, security and rest, and prosper on the land.

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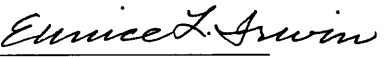
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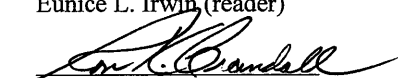
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By

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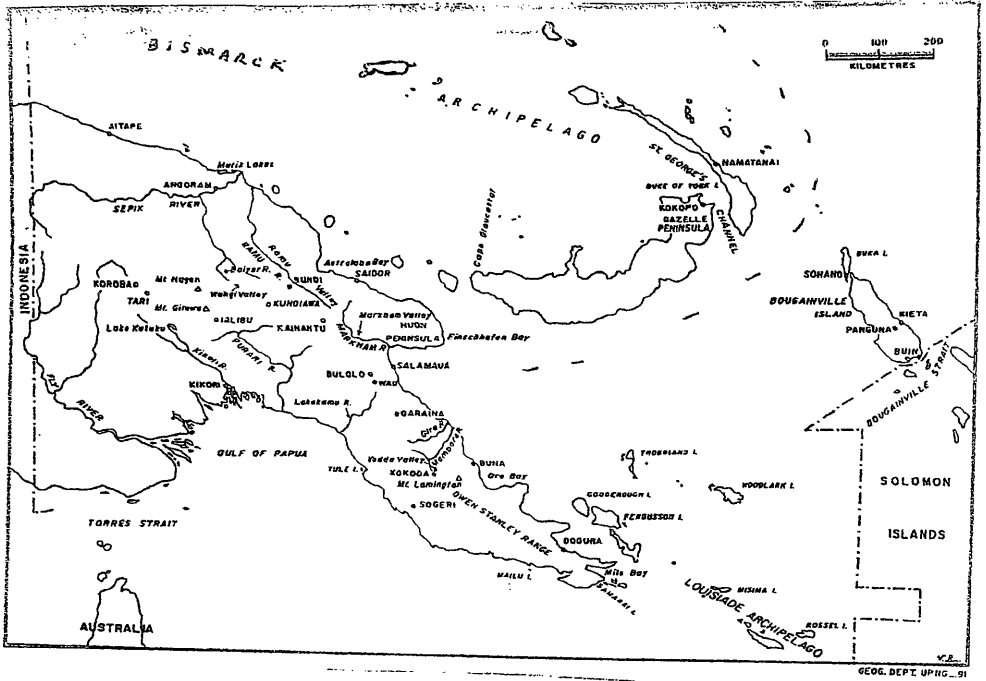
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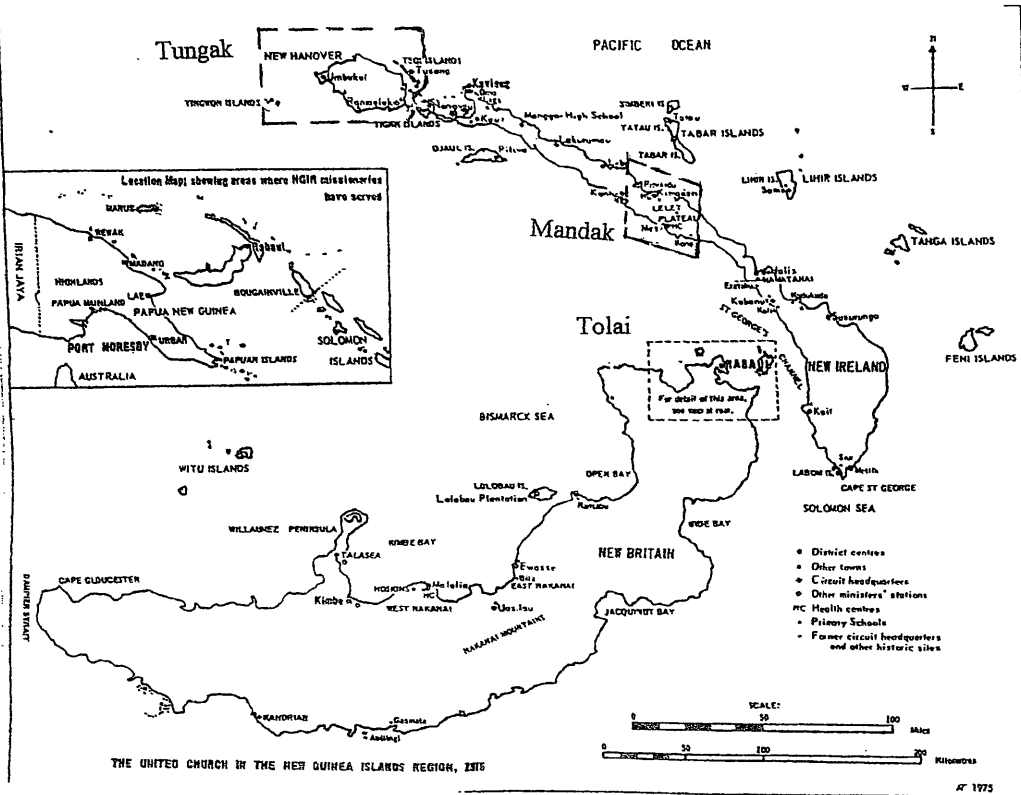
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MAP 1. PHYSICAL MAP OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA: SHOWING THE BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO



MAP 2. SHOWING THE LOCATION OF THE THREE CULTURAL GROUPS BEING STUDIED IN THIS RESEARCH

(Adapted from Threlfall 1975: front cover)

## Chapter 1

### The Problem and Its Setting

In 1990, six students from the New Guinea Islands Region (New Ireland, East and West New Britain) studying at the Rarongo Theological College had their food gardens destroyed and were served an eviction notice to vacate the portion of land on which they were gardening. The eviction notice came from the Principal of the nearby United Church George Brown Pastors' College, the Rev. Nelson Teko. Ironically, both institutions belong to the United Church in Papua New Guinea.

The eviction notice was served for two reasons. First, the Rev. Teko believed that the New Guinea Islands students from the Rarongo Theological College had unlawfully overstepped the *langun*, "boundary,"<sup>1</sup> and had trespassed onto land that traditionally did not belong to the theological college. Second, George Brown College needed all its available land for a new project (planting vanilla and cocoa trees) the college had embarked on. The pastor's college hoped that the money from the sale of the vanilla and cocoa beans would go towards subsidizing the cost of training lay pastors. An agreement was reached allowing the six students concerned six months to move out gradually.

In the meantime, one of the three major institutions of the whole United Church in Papua New Guinea, the Training In Mission and Leadership (TIMAL) Center, was also going through disputes over the land on which it is situated. The center is located in the Gazelle Peninsula on the island of New Britain on 60 acres of rich volcanic land

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<sup>1</sup> Boundaries and landmarks are two important categories in traditional and customary land tenure in the islands. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou note, "When boundaries become fuzzy, people feel a sense of chaos. When boundaries shift, people's fundamental experiences of reality are threatened. This is why people fight to maintain boundaries, because the lack of boundaries gives them a sense of confusion and meaninglessness" (1999:235-236). The fluidity of land boundaries in the islands is one reason for land conflicts: over land ownership and land use.

bordering the village of Malmaluan. Since its inception 1965 the center has depended very much on gardens to feed its student population (Threlfall 1975:204). Gardening forms a vital part of the students' life and activities.

By the 1990s, however, the land was under dispute. In 1993, I was the faculty member in charge of all the school gardens at the Malmaluan Timal Center.<sup>2</sup> One day I noticed that on one portion of the school land where the students had planted taro and sweet potato, someone had uprooted the taro sticks and sweet potato vines and in their place planted *tengete*, 'cordyline plants.'<sup>3</sup> It became a recurring event for three weeks. The message was clear; the school was being told symbolically that all gardening on this particular portion of land must cease. The message was from someone who was claiming to be the rightful owner of the land.

After consulting with the principal of the center, the Rev. Albert To Burua, I learned of the ongoing disputes over the ownership of the land on which the center is situated. Since 1990, several disputes have arisen between the church and different

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<sup>2</sup> The United Church in Papua New Guinea has three major institutions: the Rarongo Theological College, the Gaulim Teachers' College and the Malmaluan Training in Mission and Leadership (TIMAL) Center. All three institutions are going through conflicts with customary landowners, for the lands they occupy respectively. I have chosen as a case for this chapter the land conflicts involving Malmaluan Timal Center mainly because I am familiar with the particular conflict.

When the Methodist Church first established the center in 1963, it was called the Malmaluan Christian Education Training Center. The sole purpose of this institution was to train men and women to become lay Christian Education workers in their respective synods. Today the Center is still training young lay men and women to serve as Sunday school teachers, women coordinators (for their respective congregation circuit and synod women's programs), youth pastors and general lay ministry in the church. By 1989, in collaboration with the Council for World Missions (formerly London Missionary Society – LMS), the center embarked on training in mission program. In the 1980s, the missions' desk of the CWM at the head office in London coordinated and ran several workshops to encourage youth participation in the missionary endeavor of their respective churches.

<sup>3</sup> The cordyline plant is an important symbol in many parts of Melanesia. It is used in a variety of ways to symbolize healing, power and status, danger and taboo/sacredness, protection and goodwill. It also symbolizes the sense of being at home, i.e. being in a 'place' where one truly belongs. Traditional shrines or sacred places in most part of the New Guinea Islands such as the *taraiu* (Tolai), or *malanggan* (most of eastern and central New Ireland) or *makius* (New Hanover Islands) can be identified by the abundance of cordyline and croton plants.

groups of people at different times. Some of these people have come and claimed that the land was theirs. Others were simply squatting on the land, taking advantage of the long period that the land had lain idle from 1976 to 1989.<sup>4</sup>

The disputes of 1993, however, were between (1) the school and a Roman Catholic family and (2) between the school and a United Church member. Ia Autul, a young mother of the Roman Catholic family, is from the village of Tavuilu. In a quarrel with the principal of the center who caught her one day uprooting the taro sticks planted by the students, she alleged that the land belonged to her clan, and that those who were not members of her clan gave it away to the Methodist church. She further alleged that the Methodist Mission and those who gave the land to them colluded to steal her clan's land. She thought now it was only right that the land be given back to her clan.

In 1994, the Rev. Albert To Burua took this dispute first to the village court, but a decision was not handed down because those who officiated over the case had a conflict of interest. In 1995, the case was re-opened and brought to the civil court again by the Rev. To Burua, supported by the elders of Malmaluan village. The court decided in favor of the school, sent a court magistrate and a lawyer for on-site inspection of the land, and

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<sup>4</sup> It was during this seven-year period that the church was no longer running any training programs. The center became a place whereby the church ran retreats, conferences and all its other spiritual formation programs. The place was also made available to other churches within the East New Britain area to be hired for their programs. The other function the center assumed later on was that of a communication center whereby educational material for Christian education programs within the church were produced (both electronically and written). Noticing the lack of student activities due to the absence of students' presence, the people thought the church no longer needed the place or had no more use for the land, and so they thought it should rightly return to the original owners. There were attempts by some villagers to forcefully reclaim the land; they however, succeeded in reclaiming a portion of the land on which the men students' dormitories was situated.

this led eventually to the eviction of the squatters on the land and the re-affirming of the church's legal titles to the land.<sup>5</sup>

### Background of the Problem

The problem of land acquisition and ownership is set in a particular historical and geographical context. The actors are the people, the colonialists and the missionaries.

#### The People

The inhabitants of the New Guinea Islands are known as Melanesians.

Melanesian islands are located in the southwest Pacific region of Oceania. The coinage of the term Melanesia (along with Polynesia and Micronesia) was an attempt by European scholars

to classify the people of Oceania. Today, "Melanesia" has become a geographic and cultural shorthand description of the inhabitants and the chain of large mountainous islands beginning in Maluku and Timor-Flores [in Indonesia] region adjacent to New Guinea, progressing southeast through New Guinea, the Solomon, Santa Cruz, Torres, Banks, and New Hebrides [Vanuatu] Groups, to Fiji and New Caledonia. (Moore 2003:3)

In spite of the process of decolonization the people, living there continue to "describe themselves as Melanesians and conceptualize their future as part of Melanesia"

consciously identifying "themselves as 'Melanesians,' indigenizing the concept and

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<sup>5</sup> The dispute may not be over yet. As long as the problem of land shortage increases with over-population in the Gazelle Peninsula, church land will continue to be a focus of interest groups. The New Britain Region/Synod of the United Church, under the auspices of its business arm, the New Britain Enterprise, is taking steps to formalize and secure all church land in the region. It is doing so by registering all church lands with the Lands office in Rabaul (Interview with Sir Ronald To Vue and Sam To Piniau: 8<sup>th</sup> November 1999). But when survival becomes threatened by the lack of land, the church must be willing to show justice and return some land to the people.

On my recent research trip (21<sup>st</sup> June to November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004), I went back to Malmualan Timal center and found that after ten years, the people have moved back on the land, this time more defiant of the previous court ruling and any other current attempts to evict them from the land. By estimation the school has so far lost ninety five per cent of its land to squatters and other claimants. The current principal and his predecessor are both non-Tolai, thus they cannot deal with the Tolai concept of land. My argument over the years has been for the church to always include a Tolai on the faculty or as a member of the support staff of the three major institutions respectively.

divorcing it from any element of inferiority” (Moore 2003:4). Right through this dissertation I will be using three terms interchangeably: Melanesia and Melanesians, New Guinea Islands and New Guinea Islanders, and islanders to address the land situation in the New Guinea Islands.

The islands of Manus (Admiralty Islands), New Britain (East and West) and New Ireland constitute the New Guinea Islands region. All groupings include a number of off-shore islands, which range in size from small sandy islets to islands as large as Lavongai (New Hanover) in the New Ireland group of islands. The region is about 600 square miles in total area (Papua New Guinea Hand Book 1974:7; Reed 1965:95, 96).

The island of New Guinea, the biggest of the Melanesian islands and the second biggest island in the world, and “assumed to be the first part of Melanesia to be inhabited by man” (Whiteman 1983:43), was settled more than 40,000 years ago (Waiko 1993:2; Moore 2003:4; see also Whiteman 1983:43 and Rynkiewich 2004:17-22). Human settlement in Melanesia was a result of wave after wave of migration into the area over a long period of time. Eventually, those who decided to settle did settle, but over the years, ongoing internal “colonization” of weaker groups by stronger groups led to occupation and dispossession of land. In the New Guinea Islands, on the other hand, “humans lived on New Britain 35,000 years ago [and] on New Ireland 33,000 years ago” (Moore 2003:23).<sup>6</sup>

The first settlers in Melanesia are believed to have come from Southeast Asia, probably in small numbers over many years (Waiko 1993:2; Moore 2003:4). The sea

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<sup>6</sup> A detailed discussion of traditional islands societies and an individual discussion of the three groups of people in this study will be dealt with in chapter two of the dissertation.

level was lower than today so it was possible to move easily from island to island. Inter-island migration continued in the islands of Melanesia and throughout Oceania as a whole hundreds of years later. As Neville Threlfall notes,

Adventurers seeking new lands; refugees forced out of their old homes; unwilling victims of wind and sea, blown away during fishing or trading trips; group after group came. New comers fought with earlier arrivals; the winners held on to the disputed land and the losers-if they survived-were driven were driven back into the mountains or off to another island. (1975:18)

These earlier inhabitants were hunters, fishers, and gatherers of wild plants. No one knows the kind of land tenure system sustained during this period. But “land claims probably did not involve specific living places or garden lands since they did not stay put for long and did not establish gardens” (Rynkiewich 2001b:113).<sup>7</sup> At the time of European contact, however, there already existed important food crops as sago palm, yam, taro, cassava, sweet potato,<sup>8</sup> coconut, breadfruit, banana and some form of green leafy vegetables (Waiko 1993:43-46).

The cultural evolution from hunting and gathering economy to domestication of animals and food plants signified the beginning of agricultural activities in Melanesia, approximately 9,000 years. The cultural evolution was the result of an innovational process due to both internal and external forces bearing upon the hunter-gatherer societies

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<sup>7</sup> In spite of the fact that land claims were non-existence, there were incidences of bands of people protecting their hunting ground, when game became scarce, due to seasonal migration of animals and birds. Among the Tungag, legends such *Pukuntap* and *Kipang* and several others tell the stories of inter-band rivalry as a result of one group hunting in another group’s hunting ground. Among the Tungag, it appeared that prior to the formation of clans, as a result of the dispersion of all groups from the central part of the island of New Hanover, known as *Rianiatukul*, ‘place of origin,’ territorialism was very strong. Unlike Andrew Simpson’s claims about the perpetuity of territorialism among human societies; I wish to counter that by saying that territorialism ceased with the creation of permanent settlements. The process of *tanga vual* is significant to the understanding of land claims among the landowning clans on the island. (Base on my interview with Sition Gion, Pedit Anis, Paul Temetaong, Uncles Jonathan Vulaumat and Ekonia Pasingantapak, and Gerson Pasinganmalus).

<sup>8</sup> The sweet potato comes from South America, but it came into New Guinea some 350 years ago, brought by the Spanish and Portuguese to Indonesia and from thence it diffused to New Guinea. Today, there are 300 species of the sweet potato found in New Guinea alone.



of Melanesia. One of the earliest evidences of agricultural activities in Melanesia was found in Kuk in the Wahgi Valley of the Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. The finding shows that agriculture activities in this area existed 9,000 years ago. If this evidence is accurate, the people of Melanesia were among the first gardeners in the world (Waiko 1993:4; Moore 2003:27-29; see also Whiteman 1983:43-51).

The transition from hunting and gathering transformed most Melanesian societies significantly, in the following ways; first, permanent communities began to develop around the land on which gardens were made. But for the Tolai, who had just migrated from New Ireland to the Gazelle Peninsula, permanent communities began around the first *mandapai*, “burial place” or the *matanoi*, “the place where the founding big men or ancestors of the clan first settled,” when they migrated to New Britain. The *matanoi* is also a place set aside for fishing activities and taboo to women.

Second, the development of communities meant a development of a complex political system to control communities. Third, it meant also the development of ethics, values and property laws to govern behaviors towards properties, including land. Fourth, as land became more complex, so were the concerns for inheritance and ownership, because “The next generation needs to establish its rights to live and garden where their parents have lived and garden” (Rynkiewich 2001a:115). And fifth, the concerns for productivity and well being on the land saw gardeners enlisting the “help of ancestors and spirits to ensure the fertility of their group and the land. So began the quest for ‘fullness of life’ or ‘good life,’ *gutpela sindaon*” (Rynkiewich 2001b:116; see also Mantovani 2000:25-41).

Today in the New Guinea Islands, as is the case for all of Melanesia, traditional and customary land ownership, land use and transfer of ownership are “embedded in the network of relationship based on a various combination of descent, kinship, residence, exchange, trade, ritual, ceremonial and political alliance ties” (Rynkiewicz 2001b:117).

New Guinea Islands’ societies were kinship-based, and egalitarian in nature, in the sense that every person had equal access to resources. The islands’ social order was based on large matrilineal groups or clans. The clans have always been the relevant groups as far as land ownership was concerned, that is, the clans corporately held residual rights to the land. Land rights were derived from the mother’s line, except in the case of conquest or land as a gift given at a mortuary feast.<sup>9</sup> Inheritance was largely transferred from a group of siblings, through the women to their children, both male and female. The elder male acted as spokespersons in public, while the elderly females held the power behind the throne (Threlfall 1975:20; Foster 1995:82-85).

Leadership was mostly achieved. A “big man,” who in this case was often the clan elder, headed each political unit. The socio-political minuteness of the local groups in Melanesia means that the influence of the “big man” is only within his own local group, outside of which he has no authority “and so he must settle for only fame and indirect influence” (Whiteman 1983:59). There were instances where a successful warlord or fight leader became a “big man.” In reference to the power of a Melanesian “big man” Whiteman notes, “Secular and sacred power were welded together in the person of the Melanesian Big Man—one known to have a *mana*,” that is, “spiritual power”

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<sup>9</sup> The clans were variably known as *eventus* (Mandak), *vunatarai* (Tolai) or *patmani* (Tungag). Within the majors clans there were sub-clans. The Mandak and the Tolai differ from the Tungag insofar as they have two major moieties which are further sub-divided to sub-clans and /or sub sub-clans, whereas the Tungag, have 12 clans with minor sub-clans, referred to as *tus*, a reference to the breast, connoting a common female ancestral stock.

(a general Austronesian root word) (1983:60).<sup>10</sup> Traditional political units were small and lacked the highly institutionalized social stratification that one found in the chieftain societies of Polynesia and Fiji (Whiteman 1983:58-60).<sup>11</sup>

At the coming of the missionaries to the New Guinea Islands, most societies were in a state of warfare (Threlfall 1975:20). Cannibalism, as a “cultural element in many traditional Melanesian societies,” was widespread throughout Melanesia (Whiteman 1983:63). But cannibalism was not the sole motivation for inter-clan or inter-village warfare. Rather, warfare was often retributive in nature, a way of settling old scores. In the New Guinea Islands, land, women and prestige were often at the center of major inter-village and inter-clan rivalries, although there were minor reasons for the rivalries. Witchcraft and sorcery were alternative forms of ridding one’s enemy to avoid open confrontation. Sociologically, however, witchcraft and sorcery were social control mechanisms to maintain social equilibrium in societies.

Melanesians are very religious. Traditional religious beliefs and practices form the core of Melanesian worldview. The Melanesian worldview is integrated, so that there is no separation between religious and secular experiences, sacred and profane things, and the natural and super-natural world. Whiteman notes,

Melanesian epistemology is essentially religious. . . . Melanesians . . . do live in compartmentalized of secular and spiritual domains, but have an integral worldview in which physical and spiritual realities dovetail. The Melanesians are very religious people, and traditional religion played a dominant role in the affairs of men and permeated the life of the community. (1983:64)

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<sup>10</sup> Among the Tungag of New Hanover Island, a *pasingan*, ‘big man’ possessed supernatural powers, for it was said of him that *katapo pasal veri vap palau and kitapo aol ia*, ‘he walked in the company of the spirits who possessed his totality.’

<sup>11</sup> Some societies in Melanesia were stratified and marked by a greater gender difference. Fiji is a good example of a complexly stratified society. To a lesser extent this is also found among the Trobriand Islanders (Bronislaw Malinowski) and the Mekeo people (Epeli Hau’ofa).

Religion provides answers to existential questions. People look beyond the physical nature and causes of the problem in search of religious explanation. They perceive spiritual causes to all problems and therefore the solution to the problems must be sought in their religious beliefs. Only religion can provide the answer, because “religion explains the world” and “religion controls the world” (Janssen, Mennis and Skinner 1973:xiii).<sup>12</sup>

Therefore the importance attached to land must be understood within the rich religious contexts of the islanders. Land is always the vital component of their religious life and experiences (see chapter 2, pp. 33-34). The rich culture of the Melanesians, of which land is a part, is closely connected with their religious beliefs (see Threlfall 1975:19).

#### Traders, Planters and Blackbirders

The history of land conflicts in the islands also has its roots in the legacy left by the explorers, traders, planters, and blackbirders (slave traders) who arrived before the missionaries and the colonizers (Threlfall 1975:21-22; Whiteman 1983:31-42). Itinerant traders, seeking after the abundant resources of sandalwood, cedar, copra, bech-de-mer,

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<sup>12</sup> Religion meets their concerns for prosperity, explains to them the sudden death of a healthy young adult, and meets their need for longevity (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999:76). Melanesians' central concern is success, harmony, physical and spiritual well being, and right relationship with the supernatural forces and the cosmos, which is pulsating with energy and life. Traditional Melanesian religion is essentially pragmatic and materialistic; and is primarily concerned with life here and now.

For instance, during my research trip, I was in my father's village of Konelava to carry out interviews and then I had to preach the following Sunday. After the church service, I could hear my cousins and a couple of the elderly men from the village talking about their gardens being destroyed by wild pigs. The questions they started asking were: “What can we do to stop these pigs from further destroying our gardens? And, what did we do wrong that this evil has been brought upon us?” These were essentially religious questions and as such a religious explanation must be sought for. The problem was immediately identified. Silas Raping, from that village who was the head pastor in another village told the people that it was God correcting them or teaching them a lesson because the people were not honoring God with the first fruit of their gardens. The people agreed to pray about the problem, seek forgiveness from God and ask him to remove the pigs.

pearls and pearl-shells of Oceania, began arriving in the islands to trade with the Melanesians and to exploit the abundantly natural resources of the islands (Moore 2003:109, 114-116; Oliver 1951:83-141; see also Waiko 1993:23).

With the advent of capitalism into the non-Western world, the Germans like other European powers in the Pacific, saw New Guinea as an economic opportunity and venture, from which they could exploit the cheap labor and free land for their economic benefits (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:154). Due to the competitions between the European powers in the Pacific, to outdo each other and keep each other at arms length, the methods to achieve their political and economic goals were questionable, at best very unethical. The Germans for instance, without consulting the people pushed their economic plans ahead with little consideration on the serious consequences this would have on the people and their land.

German trading firms were soon established and served as instruments to achieve their ruthless economic activities. The firms were in operation in the New Guinea Islands, mainly in the Duke of York Islands and the Gazelle Peninsula in New Britain. Among these were:

- Godeffroy and Sons.
- Hershheim and Company between 1873 and 1875 (Robson 1965:20).
- Emma Coe Forsayth and her *de facto* husband, Thomas Farrell set up their own business in 1880 after leaving the Godeffroys (Waiko 1993:23; Moore 2003:116)
- A consortium that became known as the *Neu Guinea Kompagnie* (New Guinea Company) was formed just before the annexation of the northern part of New Guinea by the Germans in 1884.

Threlfall notes, “Relationships were not always friendly [between the traders and the people]. Many traders were fair and decent men, but others were greedy in their trading or harsh and violent in their behavior” (1975:23). Land was often dubiously acquired from the people, thus creating a deep sense of distrust of the traders by the people. The people resented very much the loss of their land to, and the desecration of their sacred places by the traders and planters. Often the resentment erupted into violent conflicts (Waiko 1993:43).

There was much forceful alienation of village land during the 1880s by the capitalist traders and planters (Amarshi 1979:31-32; Reed 1943:132), and there was often no proper compensation for the land from the customary owners. Plantation owners expanded their activities into village land, infuriating the people who attacked and tried to kill all Europeans (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:159; see also Robson 1965:104-113). Owing to the fact that land has always been an integral part of the social order and survival of the islanders, the loss of it to foreigners had a destabilizing effect on them, for it created social imbalances and threatened the survival of communities.

“Blackbirders” (slave traders) frequented the waters of Melanesia in search of able-bodied young men to work as indentured laborers on plantations in Queensland, Australia, or in Samoa and Fiji. They were busiest in Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides) and the Solomon Islands, but later they turned to the Bismarck Archipelago (New Guinea Islands) in the 1870s. Many of the young men were kidnapped by force and trickery, resulting in much violence and hatred between the Melanesians and the blackbirders. On some occasions, an honest trader or a missionary suffered for the

wrongs done by others.<sup>13</sup> Blackbirding was one of the major causes of depopulation in the areas in Melanesia that were subjected to heavy recruiting. It also left a legacy of resentment and distrust among the people towards any white man.

### Missionaries and Colonial Administrators

European powers extending their religious, political and economic control on the non-Western world, following the religious, economic and political consolidation of Europe from 1858 to 1914. Stephen Neill notes; “The whole world was opened to Western commerce and exploitation, and at point after point Western man had demonstrated his military superiority to any enemy that had entered the field against him” (1964:273); this was “the heyday of colonialism” (Neill 1964:273-334). Colonization and colonialism were not the major motivating factors in missions at all; rather the missionary movements came into existence as a consequence of the evangelical awakening of the 1700s in Britain (see Ward 2001:1).

Colonization of the New World which took place a couple of centuries before the colonization of Oceania provided the opportunity for Christian missions to expand their influence to those parts of the world. Spanish and Portuguese missionaries embarking on missionary journeys to the mission fields of the New World (Neill 1964:85-178) were provided royal protection by monarchs Spain and Portugal. The little separation between the state and the church made it possible for Christianity to jump on the bandwagon of

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<sup>13</sup> This was the case in the murder of Bishop John Patteson of the Melanesian Mission, who was murdered by islanders in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) who were infuriated by the blackbirders who took their young men away as indentured laborers. He had arrived soon after they left (Whiteman 1983:1-3).

colonialism in its expansion to the New World.<sup>14</sup> This brings out a notable difference in the missionary story of the New World from that of Oceania.

Missionaries in Melanesia. The beginning of Christian mission in the Oceania region, and Melanesia predated annexation by any Western power, beginning long before the end of the eighteenth century, that is, missionization preceded colonization.<sup>15</sup> A combination of the spirit of the evangelical awakening in Britain, and reports of voyages into the Pacific between 1768 and 1780 by Captain James Cook and other explorers before him, challenged European Christians to send out missionaries to “the islands of the South Seas” (Jasper 1972). By as early as 1797, missionary organizations in the West responded and started sending out missionaries to the Pacific. Christianity made its way from Polynesia (1797-1802) to the islands of Micronesia (1830s), and then to the islands of Melanesia (1870s) (cf. Garrett 1982). New Guinea was the last of the mission fields to be reached by the missionaries representing the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Methodist Missions, the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Explorers, navigators and/or ship captains who undertook voyages of discovery into the New World, often did so in the name of the monarchies and of Roman Catholicism, the leading Christian faith in Spain and Portugal during that period. They colonized and christened island groups or whole sections of the continent of South America.

<sup>15</sup> The fact that missionary activities in Oceania predated colonialism leaves no ground to support the critics’ claims that the church or missions were instruments of imperialism. In fact, it is the other way around. Colonial authorities went into many areas of Melanesia only after the missionaries brought peace among the people, through the preaching of the gospel.

<sup>16</sup> Up until the late 1920s, however, the interior of the large Melanesian island of New Guinea, “the globe’s last unknown at the end of the nineteenth century” (Trompf 1987:5), still remained isolated from outside contact and seemingly unreachable with the gospel due to its impenetrable topography. It was in the early 1930s that Roman Catholics and the Lutherans started making inroads into the eastern and western parts of the interior, and in 1950 the Methodist missionaries first penetrated the southern portion of the interior, into Mendi in the Southern Highlands. The Methodist missionaries, and the missionaries of the Unevangelise Field Mission, worked side by side reaching the people of Mendi and the surrounding Duna tribes (Garrett 1997:149-186). In the years that followed more waves of missionary activities broke into the area, proving to be one of the success stories of missionary efforts in the Oceania region.



The missionaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australasia, seventy-eight years after 1797, landed on the Duke of York Islands, on August 15<sup>th</sup> 1875, to begin mission work among the people of New Britain and New Ireland. Their counterparts, of the London Missionary Society (LMS), started work in Papua three years earlier, first on the island of Manumanu in 1872, and then eventually moving to Elevala, Port Moresby in 1874 (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:23; see also Waiko 1993:24). The Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts (MSC), following several other unsuccessful attempts, finally established Catholic communities in New Britain in 1882. By 1884, at the declaration of German annexation over New Guinea, the Methodist Mission and the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts Mission were the only two major missionary organizations working in the New Guinea Islands.

Under the supervision of the Rev. Dr. George Brown, eight Fijian missionaries (five married men and three single men) and two Samoans (married) were among the first missionaries to arrive in the islands (Threlfall 1975:28-29; see also Brown 1910:76-83). The group formed “the nucleus of the inaugural missionary work on New Britain, New Ireland and their outlying islands” (Longgar 2004:54-55). The missionary venture into the New Guinea Islands was “the first mission begun by the Australasian Church as a separate body from the British Methodist Missionary Society” (Williams 1972:106), and the first permanent European settlement in the Bismarck Archipelago (Sack 1973:65). By the 1930s, most parts of the New Guinea Islands region, were under the control of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australasia.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> When the first missionaries arrived on New Hanover in 1920, they came ashore at one of its offshore islands, the island of Kung. The *pasingan*, “big man,” of the island wanted to know who they were and how dare they come ashore in such manner? The late arrival of the church on the island of New Hanover was due to the fact that the whole New Hanover area had been placed on quarantine by the colonial

Missionaries, like plantation owners needed land to build mission stations, schools and hospitals, and to carry out technical vocational services and/or places to minister to the people. They also felt they must have “clear titles to land so they could develop plantations in order to finance their work” (Rynkiewich 2001b:213). But unlike the planters, missionary acquisition of land was not purely for economic reasons. On the contrary, missionaries thought the acquisition of land “was necessary in their struggle against the forces of evil, that is, against the other denominations” (Rynkiewich 2001b:214).<sup>18</sup> In spite of the good intention the missionaries had, by as early as 1877, there were already land problems between the Methodist mission and the people. For instance, the Rev. Benjamin Danks had his fence removed several times in the night by disgruntled villagers in Kabakada, East New Britain (Sack 1973:116-117).<sup>19</sup>

At stake are the methods and purposes of land acquisition by the missionaries from the people. The misunderstanding of the methods and purposes of missionary land acquisition are being questioned by customary landowners, who are now calling for the church to return their land (discussed in chapter 3, pp. 104-169). The United Church in Papua New Guinea today is caught in the middle of all this conflict, a missionary legacy it inherited from the Methodist missionary era.

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administration because of the leprosy epidemic that ravaged the island (An interview with my uncles: Ekonia Pasingantapak and Jonathan Vulaumat, at Umbukul village on New Hanover, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2005, see also Threlfall 1975:134-135).

<sup>18</sup> “At the same time, ‘the Methodist missionaries, like other missionaries, regarded prior occupation as the key to foiling their religious rivals’ so that for example, ‘they multiplied the number of mission stations in northern New Ireland when the Catholics entered the district’ [Firth 1986:142]” (Rynkiewich 2001c: 260-261).

<sup>19</sup> The giving of sticks of tobacco, axe heads and loin cloths to customary landowners was not a sign that the land was being purchased from the people for exclusive ownership by the missionaries. By tradition, the gifts were tokens of the use rights given to the missionaries. The missionaries could only receive use rights to the land, but ownership remained with the people. This is a clear example of the conflict of land ideologies, a conflict between traditional Melanesian property law and Western property law.

The 1960s. When the United Church in Papua New Guinea came into being on January 19, 1968 (see appendices A, p. 287), church membership and adherents in the islands stood at 62,643, an evidence of the growth of Christianity in the region (Threlfall 1975:216; see also Williams 1972).<sup>20</sup> However, Threlfall notes, “A survey in 1967 showed that of these [i.e. 62,643 members] more than forty-two thousand, or over two-thirds attended worship regularly” (1975:216). This is an evidence of, (1) early presence of nominalism, and (2) Melanesians adopting Christianity into their religious, social and cultural philosophy of life, which says “if it works keep it, if it does not, discard it or pay little attention to it.”<sup>21</sup> Although as early as 1950, the Methodist church was already struggling to address two serious issues: (1) the cultural issues such as sacred societies, sorcery and witchcraft, wife strangling, polygamy, rituals, traditional art and music, and land, and (2) nominalism and the early presence of a split-level Christianity.

The formation of the United Church was evident of the beginning of transitions taking place in Melanesia from missions to national churches and/or from missionary control to national control churches. The process of decolonization was inclusive, impacting both the political and religious situations in Melanesia. It was a time when the continuing presence of mission organizations in the area, increasingly came under much

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<sup>20</sup> By 1950 the Methodist Church continued to thrive in the islands, in spite of the havoc caused by the Second World War. Figures show that in 1941, total membership and adherents of the church was 47,639, which dropped to 36,613 in 1946 immediately after the war. The figures for the four-year period between 1946 and 1950 show a slight increase in growth from 36,613 to 41,438 (Threlfall 1975:173-174). The decade from 1951 to 1960 shows another period of significant growth, with the membership reaching 51,932. There was also an increase in the number of indigenous ordained ministers, catechists, pastor-teachers and lay preachers; hence there was also an increase in annual thanksgiving offering.

<sup>21</sup> I remember as we were growing up, my cousins and I were instructed by our grand-father, Laiagup, regarding a whole string of gardening, fishing and/or hunting rituals; saying that if any of them brought about the desired results, then they were the ones we must keep and discard the ones that did not work. Success was about discovering the right rituals and owning it if it worked, and discarding it if it did not work.

scrutiny from a radical young Melanesians. But there is no denial of the fact that, the phenomenal growth of the *lotu* in the islands showed the transforming power of the Gospel in the lives of the people.

The Situation Today. Christianity has been in most part of Papua New Guinea for almost 100 years, and currently about 95 percent claim to be Christians (Barrett 1982:552; Swain and Trompf 1995:192, see also Bartle 2001:96).<sup>22</sup> The official figures released by the National Statistic Office (NSO) in Papua New Guinea on the population of the country according to the 2000 national census revealed that 96 percent (i.e. 4,934,098 people) of the populations claim to be Christians (Zocca 2004:41). Operation World gives a figure of 97.28 claiming to be Christians, with a growth rate of +2.3 percent (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:509). Of the 97 percent who claim to be Christians, approximately 30 percent are nominal, and 67 percent have had a genuine conversion to Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Two main factors continue to pose challenges to the ongoing growth of Christianity and the churches in the islands and the country as a whole: (1) while evangelism is the strength of all churches in Papua New Guinea, based on my experiences of being on evangelism committees of the United Church and the Evangelical Alliance churches, most of the churches do not have discipleship programs in

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<sup>22</sup> There is a need for David Barrett's World Christian Encyclopedia to be updated. In view of the current increasing growth of Pentecostal groups and other new religious groups, one believes that there has been an increase in the percentage of Christians in PNG today.

<sup>23</sup> I discovered in the churches or congregation that I have been a part of, at different times that there are three types of nominal Christians: (1) there are those who use the customary practice of heritance to inherit church membership or Christianity through their parents, and (2) others turn to religion to meet a need or needs. As long as their needs are continually met by their alliance with a particular church, they remain, and (3) there are those who want to have the best of both worlds.

place to be able to disciple the new converts.<sup>24</sup> For every five people who make a decision for Christ, only one goes on, the rest revert to their former life. The problem reveals the need for teachers in the churches; those who are gifted in imparting deep truths from the Scriptures to enable healthy spiritual growth, (2) the churches continue to struggle with the problem of nominalism.<sup>25</sup>

Papua New Guinea calls itself a Christian country, but the evidences are everywhere showing that Christianity has not really made a big impact on the daily life of a lot of people. For instance, corruption in high places in the government has increased, immorality is rife, hence an alarming increase in AIDS, tribal warfare continues to flare up, robbery and rape are rampant in the towns, perpetuating the vicious cycle of violence and atrocities against innocent lives.

In the period 1980 to 2000 there has been a rapid increase in the number of new religious movements, mainly Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Pentecostal churches, between 1980 and 1990 grew from 1.5 percent to 6.7 percent of the population. In the same period “Historical Mainline Churches”<sup>26</sup> declined from 77.8 percent of the population to 68.7 percent (Zocca 1995:175; see also Ernst 1994 and Bartle 2001:98). The increase among the “new religious groups” is attributed to the emphasis on the

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<sup>24</sup> The consequences are far reaching for church growth and the future of evangelism. For instance, in my own experience as a pastor-teacher, many who are now showing attitudes of indifference to the gospel and the church are those who have had some conversion experiences and gone back. They used their “failed” Christian experiences to disprove the gospel and stay clear of the church.

<sup>25</sup> In the United Church alone, the latest figure provided by the Assembly Office of the United Church in Papua New Guinea shows its membership at approximately 600,000 members (see also Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:509). The need for the church to grow qualitatively, quantitatively and contextually continues to be a challenge today. The land issues do not only pose a threat to the quantitative and qualitative growth of the church, but also shows the need for the church to grow contextually.

<sup>26</sup> The “Historical Mainline Churches” is a term popularized by Manfred Ernst (1994) to include all the churches that have historical missionary traditions. In the case of PNG these include Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Gutnius Lutheran Church, and the United Church.

infilling of the Holy Spirit which manifest in demonstration of supernatural powers in healing, bible teaching, speaking in tongues and prophecy. Any church that does not have such “manifestation” is dead. Ernst attributes such a growth to the “new religious movements” addressing a “social and economic vacuum” left by the “Historical Mainline Churches” (1994).

With these said, the gospel has no doubt been preached and heard in Melanesia, but the persistent nominalism in the church is symptomatic of a much deeper problem. Osadolor Imasogie, an African theologian says, “The observed lack of commitment of the average African Christian to Christ is due to the lack of ‘fit’ between Christian theology and African life” (1983:12). On a similar note Garry Trompf argues that Melanesian Christians must be free to “to think out their Christian faith in a more decidedly authentically indigenous manner” (1991:263). Part of the answer is “. . . relevant theology” (Schwarz 1984:247), which is the goal of this study, to develop a relevant theology of land for the New Guinea Islands. The conclusion that emerges from my research is that, to address the persistent nominalism in the church, the discipling process must take seriously contextualizing Christian theology into indigenous contexts.

New Guinea under Colonial Administration. In 1884 Germany annexed the northern part of the mainland of New Guinea and the New Guinea Islands, which became known as German New Guinea. From 1884 to 1899, the colony was given to the Neu Guinea Kompagnie (New Guinea Company) to govern, mandated by a charter from Berlin, until the Imperial government took over the administration of the colony from 1899 to 1914 (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:154). The Australians following the expulsion of the Germans in September of 1914 were given a “C” mandate by the League

of Nations to administer German New Guinea. After World War II, in December 1946, the newly formed United Nation Organization (UNO) extended Australia's role in administering the former German colony (Waiko 1993:82-106; Papua New Guinea Hand Book 1974:13-18). Under the United Nation Organization's new mandate, Australia administered jointly the two colonies under the name Territory of Papua and New Guinea, until independence was granted in 1975 when the country became known as Papua New Guinea.

The Demographic Situation and its Impact on Land. Demographic studies have shown that population changes and/or migration patterns do impact land rights, land distribution and re-distribution (see Jackson 1976). In anthropology, any study of population changes and migration patterns takes into account also the importance of cultural innovations and worldview changes. I do not intend to enter into that discussion here, except to say I have not been able to establish from any reliable sources an up to date or the current figures on population changes and migrations patterns in Papua New Guinea. I have only depended on the historical sources and on my own understanding of the situations and first-hand experiences. I will discuss population changes and its impact on the land issues in the islands, paying special attention to four groups of people.

First, the influx of European settlers whose arrival in the islands predated formal German colonial administration is one example of the early pressure put on the traditional land tenure of the islands. In 1899, when the imperial German government took over the administration of New Guinea from the New Guinea Company, (1) it consolidated German control over the colony, (2) opened the door for more European settlers to come in, and (3) gave European settlers and/or planters more power to exploit local resources,

in the forms of land and cheap labor, hence more customary land was lost to the settlers (see Mackenzie 1934:112-113). The nature of traditional land tenure in the islands was increasingly changing, as land acquisition by the foreigners continued to defy traditional laws that govern land rights and inheritance, land use and land distribution (discussed in chapter 3).

Second, the establishment of several large-scale plantation estates in the New Guinea Islands as early as 1880 saw a steady flow of indentured laborers from other parts of New Guinea to work on the plantations.<sup>27</sup> Under the New Guinea Company and later under imperial government control, the chronic shortage of local labor was the result of many islanders refusing to work on plantations. The problem was solved through,

- Forceful conscription of young islanders as laborers.<sup>28</sup> The conscripted young men came from different areas in the islands, often times across enemy lines to work together in plantations and/or on road constructions. Group hostilities were broken as young men from enemy clans learned to work together and respect each other.
- By recruiting cheap Malay and Cingalese indentured labor from the Malaccan archipelago and hundreds of Chinese “coolies” from Hongkong and south China

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<sup>27</sup> By 1884 when Germany annexed New Guinea, the plantations were already thriving in the hands of planters and settlers who preceded the German colonial administrators (see Threlfall 1975 and also Biskup, Jinks and Nelson 1969 and 1973; and Waiko 1993).

Emma Coe Forsayth, one of the three main plantation owners of the time brought in Bougainvilleans from the island of Bougainville as indentured laborers, for two reasons, (1) she considered the Tolai people aggressive, hence she did not trust them, (2) the Tolai in fact refused to work for people who were stealing their land, thus making it difficult for planters to acquire local cheap labor (see Robson 1965).

<sup>28</sup> Rowley notes, “It was a common German assumption that the welfare of the native could best be promoted by employing him in European-managed enterprise . . . Work, it was argued, must take the place of warfare: the native fully employed as a labourer could not kill or maim as a warrior. Another common argument had its origin in popular pseudo-Darwinism. Only the fittest survived; the native had been deprived of the warfare which had kept him fit, therefore the European must provide opportunities for maintaining fitness in hard physical work” (1958:106)



(Biskup, Jinks and Nelson 1979:172; Souter 1963:72-75). The Imperial government “did not favour the immigration of indentured labour but made an exception in 1907 when it allowed the Pacific Phosphate Company to recruit indenture labour in South China for work in Nauru. . . . The recruiting of Chinese coolies in Hongkong, although supervised by the British was opened to abuse” (Bishop, Jinks and Nelson 1979:182, 184).

Waiko notes, “the number of men signing on as contract labourers increased from 1000 in 1899 to almost 11000 in 1913” (1993:46).<sup>29</sup> In 1914, 17,000 laborers were working in German owned plantations in New Guinea, with approximated 8,000 of these in the New Guinea Islands. The number of indentured laborers increased to 31,000 of which 15,000 was in the New Guinea Islands, when New Guinea came under the military administration of the Australian New Guinea Army Unit (ANGAU), immediately after WWI (see West 1966:1-20).<sup>30</sup> It is estimated that by the mid 1970s and early 1980s when labor recruitment was scaling down, almost 25,000 laborers from the East and West Sepik Provinces, the Morobe Province, Eastern and Southern Highlands Provinces of Papua New Guinea had worked on plantations in the New Guinea Islands.

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<sup>29</sup> Apart from the plantation developments, road construction was one other major form of development in New Guinea. Biskup, Jinks and Nelson note, “One of the more permanent assets left behind by the Germans, were their roads, built and maintained by forced labour normally arranged by the luluais. Most roads had little economic justification when they were built—the Germans saw them as an important ‘civilizing agency’” (1973:190). The best known and the longest of these roads was the road constructed in 1911 in New Ireland (180 kilometers) from Kavieng to Namatanai. It remained so until the construction of the trans-highlands highway on mainland New Guinea, in 1970s.

<sup>30</sup> In the 1930s labor recruiting for plantations concentrated mainly on the northern coastal areas of New Guinea mainland, and soon it was the highlands valleys after it was opened up in the 1930s (West 1966:9). From the late 1960s to early 1970s, the interior of New Guinea mainland, that is, Mendi, Ialibu and the Huli areas of the Southern Highlands, after it was opened in 1950, became another major source of labor for the plantations on the coast.

Third, urbanization in Papua New Guinea has undeniably brought about a lot of positive social, economic, religious and political benefits for Papua New Guineans; but at the same time it has also disadvantaged many. As it is with any introduced form of development, there are prices to pay; the stakes are high and competitions are stiff, hence there are few winners and many losers. Nevertheless, the trappings of urban life continue to draw the attention of the “ambivalent tribesmen” (Levine and Levine 1969), resulting in the gravitation of large rural population into the urban areas, thus putting pressure on customary land in many parts of the country.<sup>31</sup> Today, the proliferation of squatter settlements in urban areas in PNG is creating major problems for urban planners and concern for the government. This due to the fact that,

- Immense pressure is being put on the limited amenities and services in smaller urban areas.
- Squatter settlements are responsible for the upsurge in criminal activities in the towns and cities in the country, because they are breeding grounds for criminal elements.

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<sup>31</sup> In the colonial days, a “vagrancy” law was in place to prevent and control the movements of *kanakas*, “natives” into the towns, which were built only for the *masta*, “white man.” The vagrancy law required “natives” employed by the colonial masters to carry passes as proof of the legality their residency in the town. At the same time the law required all colonial masters who employed natives to provide them accommodations, usually a “boy house” at the back of the master’s family house. Other natives had temporary passes to work during the day and must quickly return home, before the 6pm curfew. Due to the distance covered daily by these locals who come to work in town, many decided to move closer to their place of work, and so through negotiation with local clan land owners, they acquired a portion of land at the fringes of the towns to build temporary accommodations with the understanding that, at the end of their contract as indentured labor they will return home and the land reverts to the original owners. It has not been the case; many of these temporary settlements of the colonial days have turned into large permanent squatter settlements today with many new ones growing up. This is currently the case for the whole of Papua New Guinea.

Today, people move into the cities and towns for the following reasons: (1) in search of employment opportunities, which are often not available, (2) seeking refuge from tribal enemies, (3) seeking anonymity away from the shame of facing up to serious wrongs committed against one’s own family, (4) in search of permanent places, especially those from areas where over population is putting pressure on the limited land available locally.

- Squatter's settlers are illegally settling on customary land, resulting in traditional landowners losing a lot of land, thus creating a lot of tension between customary landowners and squatters.<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, the current influx of Asian entrepreneurs into Papua New Guinea has increased over the last fifteen years.<sup>33</sup> Asian business interest in Papua New Guinea has seen the influx of Malaysians, Singaporeans, Japanese and Indonesians into the country. The Asian monopoly over the retailing businesses and the logging industry are telling factors. The indigenes are use as "economic pawns" by Malaysian and Singaporean businessmen to achieve their economic agenda; land on many occasions is acquired for personal use in the name of local clans. Illegal logging are carried out on the land by Indonesian and Malaysian logging companies under false promises of developing rural infrastructures to benefit local populations in the village.

In what ways have the migration patterns and/or population changes of the past and present impacted the land issues in the islands? First, former plantation laborers and/or their descendents are responsible for several of the land conflicts involving church land.<sup>34</sup> Two of the known cases include: (1) Children of former plantation laborers from

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<sup>32</sup> The concentration of squatter settlements in the major urban centers is the result of the PNG government's lack of sound urban development plans. The lack of such plans sees urban development not decentralized or fairly distributed throughout the nation, thus the problem of squatter settlements is greater in the areas where urban development is concentrated.

<sup>33</sup> In 1974, under the Papua New Guinea government's new work program, four thousand Filipinos, as a cost saving measure were recruited to come and work in Papua New Guinea as teachers, doctors, nurses, and artisans. Employing a white person was expensive for a colony that had just achieved self-government and was one year away from independence. Through a special United Nation deal the Philippines government offered to assist Papua New Guinea, with cheap skilled labor to fill most of the positions that Papua New Guinea did not yet have the skill human resources to do so.

<sup>34</sup> Many of the laborers had married local women and were able to be assimilated into the traditional land tenure systems of their new communities. They were given use rights to land either by their wives clans or by the clans that have adopted them. Other laborers after the completion of their contracts in the plantations decided to stay on in search of other forms of employment, thus moving into the towns.

the East Sepik Province and Arawe in the West New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea are squatting on portions of the land on which the Rarongo Theological College is situated, (2) forty percent of the United Church land in Halis in the Namatanai district of the New Ireland Province, has been encroached upon by people from the highlands and East Sepik, hence creating tension between them and the church. Biamak claims that former plantation laborers are the causes of some of the land conflicts in the Gazelle Peninsula with the Tolai (from an interview, July 12 2004).

Second, forty-six percent of land in the islands was lost to European settlers/planters in the later part of the 1800s and the early 1900s. Even though some of the plantation lands were sub-divided and sold to the people in the 1980s, ironically many of the original customary owners never benefited from the sale, only those with the money purchased a portion of the land. Those who claim to be the descendents of the original owners of the land, from whom the Germans stole the land, are continually harassing some of those who bought portions of the former plantation lands.<sup>35</sup>

Third, squatter settlements in the urban areas are also a major contributing factor to land conflicts faced by customary landowners. The Motu and Koitabu peoples, whose traditional land the capital city of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby is built on, are losing their land at an alarming rate to squatter settlers from the highlands and other parts of the country who are in the habit of moving onto and occupying traditional land without proper negotiation with landowning clans and/or with appropriate authorities

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<sup>35</sup> One such portion of former plantation land at Vagaramut, along the north coast of the Gazelle Peninsula, purchased by the Rev. Albert To Burua, a former Moderator of the United Church, went through several violent conflicts, which almost cost Rev. To Burua's life, but he lost his house to arsonists. The arsonists claimed that they were the rightful owner of the portion of land Rev. To Burua purchased, and they wanted it back.

from the Department of Lands. Rich businessmen and politicians from other parts of the country are bribing land officials and illegally occupy customary land. The same is true in other major urban centers.<sup>36</sup>

It is against the historical backdrop of missionization, colonization and the early spread of capitalism into Oceania, particularly Melanesia, that the land issues have their roots. The clashes of cultural values and land ideologies on the threshold of Westernization, have contributed to serious religious, cultural and social ramification; the land issue is one area where such ramifications are felt deeply by the Melanesians.

### Statement of the Problem

The stories raise several issues that inform the problem being researched in this study. Land is important and “has such a high value in Melanesian societies because it is integrally related to many aspects of life” (Giddings 1984:149), not to “be viewed in isolation from the whole of social life” (Giddings 1984:150). It is the soul and the measure of the clans and the “birthright” of the Melanesians (Whiteman 1983:52).<sup>37</sup> Land links the Melanesians with the ancestors and cultural deities, and with the generation to come on whose behalf the land is held in trust. Land keeps memories alive

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<sup>36</sup> With the resurgence of tribal warfare in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, and with the fear of reprisal or payback from enemy tribesmen, many highlanders will flee their villages to the coast or other areas that may provide them anonymity; hence the trend of encroachment on other people’s land will continue. This will put a lot of pressure on the land, creating fear in customary owners of loosing their land.

<sup>37</sup> Wala Gukguk, a distant uncle and the last surviving leader of the Johnson cult (then when I interviewed him on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2004 – but died early February, 2005), said, “if our land is taken away from us we will cease to be a people. Our Tungag-ness is inseparable from our land. The Australians tried to destroy us by taking away from us the essence of our identity as a people, which is our land, we, however, fought back not with spears and clubs, but through the solidarity of our movement [a reference to the Johnson cult]”.

and under girds identity (Tuwere 2002:39; see also Seldrake 2001). Land is central to the survival of Melanesians. They live on it, they work on it, and they die on it.

Land is important to Europeans and Australians, but for different reasons. The missionaries acquired land from the people for the purpose of carrying out their mission. However, many things have changed since those times and indigenous churches face new problems. Now “social economic changes have raised issues of land ownership, use, transfer and compensation. The churches are now facing difficulties in land use, often in contexts of mutual understanding” (Rynkiewich 2001c:347). The way that missionaries and colonialists acquired land by assuming that Western values and laws could be applied to Melanesian land has left a legacy of anger, frustration, and sorrow while creating an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. Both the church and the community must seek to resolve the differences through proper processes of dialogue.

In Papua New Guinea, during the quarter-century from independence (1975) to now, there has been a discernable increase in the number of disputes between the churches and various local communities over land ownership and use (see Narokobi 2001:5; Rynkiewich 2001a:10; Lakau 2001:35-39). As disputes escalate, so people are increasingly alienated from the church (Rynkiewich 2001c:336).<sup>38</sup> The clash of land ideologies, laws and practices arises from a historical and political context of traditional, colonial, and contemporary cultures. Some of the practices of the missionaries and churches in acquiring and using land reflect a theology that is out of step with Melanesian

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<sup>38</sup> There are proven cases whereby members of the mainline denominations leaving to the new Christian fundamentalist groups out of frustration over what they term as the misuse of their land by those mainline churches. For instance in the Duke of York Islands in East New Britain and Sohun in the Namatanai district of New Ireland, followers of the United Church are leaving because of land disputes: interview with Samuel Mitik of Namarodu village, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

culture. Indeed, the church's theology of the whole environment begs rethinking. The missionaries did not recognize the problem, and contemporary church leaders are unsure what to do. The church's theology of land has been a hindrance, thus the church is not well-positioned to carry out the mission of God, that is, to engage in a ministry of reconciliation and community-building as part of God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The problem is that increasing number of conflicts over land hinders the United Church in fulfilling its ministry among the communities of the New Guinea Islands region. The purpose of this study is not to resolve specific land conflicts, but to develop an appropriate theology of land in an effort to encourage the church and community to engage in the hard work of doing local theology. The steps in this research are:

1. To discover and understand the cultural meaning, and social context and environmental significance of land in Melanesian societies;
2. To discover and analyze the theology and practices of missionaries and churches as they have dealt with land in colonial and post-colonial contexts; and
3. To develop and appropriate Melanesian Christian theology of land and develop practices that would lead to reconciliation and peace.

### Research Questions

The research investigated these questions.

1. What is the nature of customary land tenure and use in Melanesia, and how does it differ from the Western practices and expectations?
2. What land ideologies did the missionaries and the colonialists bring with them?
3. How have the Melanesian and Western land ideologies changed over time?

4. What theologies of land, property and environment are found, explicitly or implicitly, in the Bible?
5. What are the most missiologically sound resources for developing a theology of land for the United Church in the New Guinea Islands?

### Delimitations

Not every case of land dispute involving the whole United Church in Papua New Guinea can be examined in this study, thus the study will be limited to the following:

#### Two Provinces in Papua New Guinea

The land issues faced by the churches will be limited to two Provinces in the country: East New Britain and New Ireland; which are also homes to two regions or synods of the United Church in Papua New Guinea.<sup>39</sup> Both provinces, including one other, the West New Britain province, were the main areas of missionary work by the early Methodist missionaries, which later formed the New Guinea District of the Methodist Church in Australasia, towards the end of the 1940s.

#### Land Owned by the Church

I am mainly interested in the land that is held or used by the church. The patterns of land use by business or resource developers cannot be used as a model to compare with that of the church. The uniqueness of the church context must remain, because their purposes for acquiring land was different and on many occasions land was actually given to the church by the people, who wanted missionaries to start a church in their villages.

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<sup>39</sup> Please see footnote 1 in chapter 5 for explanation on the structure of the United Church.



### Three Cultural Groups

The study was limited to three cultural groups, whose social structures are discussed in detail in chapter 3. The groups consist of:

- The Mandak of central New Ireland in the New Ireland Province.
- The Tolai of the Gazelle Peninsula in the East New Britain Province.
- The Tungag of New Hanover Island, also in the New Ireland Province.

There were good reasons for choosing the three groups. First, I have worked as a pastor and teacher among a Tolai community for six years (1989-994). My ability also to speak and understand the Kuanua language of the Tolai from the age of nine, enabled me as an outsider to understand some key concepts relating to the social structures of the people in the context of which one find the value of land. Second, I did research with the Melanesian Institute on land in seven Tolai villages (1999, 2000) and three villages in the Mandak area of central New Ireland (2001). And third, I am a Tungag, and a member of the *Siavun/Kikiu* clan, which is one of the major land owning clans on the island of New Hanover.

### Land Acquired by the Methodist Mission

The study of land acquisition will be limited to the Methodist Missions, but there will be occasional references made to land acquisitions and policies of the Roman Catholic mission, which was the only other major missionary organization in the New Guinea Islands around this period. It was a natural and an essential thing for the first missionaries into the islands of Melanesia to ask for land to build

a place to live, a place to worship, a place to garden, a place to teach and a place to heal. Sometimes the missionaries followed their own cultural practices and 'bought' land from the people or from the colonial administration. Sometimes the

missionaries followed local custom and received as a gift the rights to live and work on a specific piece of land. (Rynkiewich 2001a:9)

The Methodist missionaries were quick to realize that establishing relationship with a renowned clan elder and/or big man as the one way to be successful in their bid for land.

### The Nature of the Study

There are two other areas that the study limits itself to. First, this study is not an exclusive discussion of multinational corporations and large-scale development in the nation and their economic and political impact on societies. I alluded to them in the discussion on the impact of globalization on the land issues (chapter 4), in relation to the profound ecological damages done on the environment and the land brought about by mining and logging activities in many parts of the islands and Papua New Guinea as a whole. My focus, however, is theological, for I am seeking to address the ecological issues theologically. Of significance to this study is the concern on how the church could theologically address the issues of ecological destruction to the land and environment brought about by the rapacious acts of the mining and logging companies in the country. The theological discussion of the environmental issues will be dealt with in the final chapter of this study.

Second, any reader of this dissertation will come to realize that there are some sections in the whole dissertation, but especially in the final chapter whereby some of the theological views are mine and some belong the local communities represented by individuals interviewed and by the reflection groups I interacted with. It is important to explain here how I did and did not involve the local community in developing the theology I purposed to develop.

- In the eight reflection groups, and with the number of individuals I interviewed, I sought to bring out their theological views by making hypothetical statements such as “The land does not belong to our ancestors and our clans, it belongs to God alone.” I raised a follow-up question to encourage discussion: “What is your opinion?” Or ask them to tell their stories. Many of the villagers were comfortable with such an approach, because they expressed their opinion freely. I got some good responses through this approach. The strength of my interview with the villagers was also in the cultural and traditional religious views they held on the land. I accounted for a lot of the responses in the analyses I did on the cases, which later proved vital in the task of developing a local theology of land for the islands in the final chapter.
- In the instances where a lot of the theological views appear to be mine, I had to make an inform decision for the purpose of completing this dissertation on time. I decided to fill in the gaps created by the fact that, (1) some of theological responses were almost identical everywhere I went, (2) several times the questions were beyond the level of some of the informants to express themselves adequately, but I knew where they were coming from, and (3) my choice to fill in the gap was done on the understanding that, as an insider, I am able to represent the theological views of the community adequately. Growing up and later serving as a pastor/teacher in islands for many years, I had been continuously in dialogue with the people, and so in many ways the theological views in this study also belong to them. My interest in the study of religions plunged me deep into the area of reconciling culture to the gospel, contextualization for several years now.

## Methodology

I employed four methods in obtaining the data I needed for this study.<sup>40</sup> These were case studies, interviews, archival and library researches, and reflection on personal experience.

### Case Studies

In the land research project carried out by the Melanesian Institute in the New Guinea Islands between 1999 and 2001, several cases of land conflicts between the United Church and some communities and between followers of the United Church and Roman Catholics were identified, all of which were current. In addition to this, my library research and interviews carried out on a recent research trip to Papua New Guinea in June 2004, helped identify two historical cases of land conflicts between the people and the missions during the early days of Christian expansion into the islands, both of which I interact with in chapter 2. The cases include,

1. The conflict between the people of Kabakada village and the Rev. Benjamin Danks (1880) on the Gazelle Peninsula in the East New Britain province (see Robson 1965; Threlfall 1975).
2. And the conflict between Naumelek, an elder of the *ianga*, 'parrot' clan of Umbukul village, and the church (1920), on the island of New Hanover.<sup>41</sup>

There are several other historical cases to which I will only make references as the discussion progresses on in the study. The above cases, however, are chosen to

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<sup>40</sup> From June 21<sup>st</sup> to November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004 I went back to Papua New Guinea to carry out my research work. During this time, I re-visited the Gazelle Peninsula in the East New Britain Province and central New Ireland, but for the first time I carried out research work in eight villages on my island of New Hanover.

<sup>41</sup> Based on an interview I had with Uncles Ekonia Pasingantapak, Jonathan Vulaumat and Gerson Pasinganmalus, in Umbukul village on New Hanover: August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

demonstrate particular aspects of the land issues relevant for the study. Other cases I am also dealing with in the dissertation include,

1. The conflict between the followers of the United Church and Roman Catholics in the Nambata-Ramkubkubur area of the Kabakada circuit of the United Church in the Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain region. Ironically, the conflict is between members of the same *vunatarai*, “clan” and/or *apik tarai*, “sub-clans,” who are on either side of the denominational poles.
2. The three major institutions of the United Church in Papua New Guinea; the Rarongo Theological College, Gaulim Teachers’ College, and Malmaluan Training in Mission and Leadership (TIMAL) center, are situated on lands that are currently under dispute.<sup>42</sup>
3. The land in the Kimadan Circuit, in the Mandak area of central New Ireland, is currently going through conflicts between two groups of people; first, the relatives of the original members of the Kimadan clan which gave the land to the Methodist Church, and second, between the church and a foreign company (PACRIM) that has alienated a large portion of the church land for

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<sup>42</sup> Each of the institution has very specific case that is different from one another. The Rarongo Theological College land conflict, for instance, does not involve customary landowners but squatters from the neighboring villagers who are facing acute land shortages, thus moving onto the college land. The conflict at the Malmaluan TIMAL center is between the church and those who claim to be the customary owners of the land, and between the church and squatters from other villages, affected by the land shortage in the whole of the Gazelle Peninsula. The Gaulim Teachers College case on the hand is a perfect example of a people who brought about their own demise or undoing. The Baining people of the Toma area of the East New Britain, where the Gaulim Teachers College is situated, for many years were deliberately selling their land for quick cash, thus bringing about their own dispossession from their land, resulting in them squatting on what was formerly their land, so the conflict is between the college and former owners cum squatters.

commercial use without the permission of the United Church in New Ireland.<sup>43</sup>

4. The final case involves a participant/observation situation, the blessing of a portion of land in the village of Tiopotuk on New Hanover Island. The portion of land was purchased by a woman from her clan for her children.<sup>44</sup>

The cases represent real occurrences and dilemmas faced by the people. The purpose of these case studies is to capture past occurrences and put them into perspective, in order to facilitate discussions that lead to others, individuals, and groups, learn to make better choices or ethical choices (Stiver 2002:1). Rynkiewich notes:

The case study properly conducted, provides a holistic view of the problem being studied. . . . The case study approach keeps the researcher focused on the people and the problem at hand and prevents the researcher from being distracted by 'traits', 'attitudes', or 'values' without the attached objects, that is, the people. (2001:19)

In reality the case approach comes very close to the heart of the Melanesian way of resolving conflicts and problems, that is, a narration of a story that will eventually relate to the problem. The key to resolving the conflict or problem is contained in the story.

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<sup>43</sup> I was able to follow the cases through to the lands offices in Rabaul, East New Britain Province (July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004), and in Kavieng, New Ireland Province (August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004). In Rabaul all efforts to interview a lawyer from the lands department was unsuccessful, however, in Kavieng I was able to interview Peter Toliken (August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004), the lands' magistrate who deals with all land courts' issues in the Province. I discovered that the land courts in Kavieng has no records of the land dispute between the church in Kimadan and the company, Pacific Rim (PACRIM) in spite of the fact that my informant, Jordan Watlen in June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2001 told me the church was going to engage a lawyer to represent it in the event of a legal action against the company. The courts though had records of another case involving certain individuals; Mandik Kapin and Wilson Peni who took Bishop Gerson Kapman of the United Church in New Ireland to court over the land on which the regional synod headquarters is situated, in Ligga.

<sup>44</sup> There two notable factors about this case: first, it is not a case about a conflict but I chose to use it in the final chapter because it provides a basis or a launching pad for the task of theologizing. Second, the woman purchased the land from her clan. On the recent research trip I took, I negotiated to purchase a portion of land from my clan. I was allowed to do so. But the actions taken by both the woman and myself represent the new trend of land acquisition now taking place in the New Guinea Islands.

## Interviews

There were four factors I had to consider when scheduling my interviews: distance, transportation, time and the types of responses I would get from the interviewees.

1. The distance. Distance was one factor that affected very much my research work.

In the Gazelle Peninsula of the East New Britain Province I had planned to conduct interviews in five villages, but found myself only able to reach three villages. In New Ireland, I only got to one of the three villages; I had initially planned to visit. Although the villages in the two areas were accessible by road, getting there was a problem because a couple of the villages were not on the routes frequented by the public transport systems.

The New Hanover Island leg of the research trip was a totally different story. I walked and paddled long distances (taking three to six hours) to get from one village to another. There was one particular area in the interior of the island that holds the history of the origin of the Tungag clan system, which I could not get to due to the distance involved.

2. Transportation. The unreliability and cost factors involving transportation in some of the areas I visited also compounded the problem further. The affect of the global economic situation and the Middle East conflicts is a telling factor in the rising cost of living and the rising cost of fuel, which are affecting every

aspect of life, including the cost of private and public transport systems in Papua New Guinea.<sup>45</sup>

3. Timing. Moving from a monochronic time oriented society such as the United States where keeping to time is important; into a polychronic society like Papua New Guinea required a lot of adjustments.<sup>46</sup>

On several occasions, all factors combined in hampering my progress. Several times I could not get to my appointments in time due to non-availability of transportation and the distance I had to cover in a day. It meant I had to reschedule my interviews, but by the time I rescheduled the interviews, some of my key informants were not able to stay on. Continual postponement of scheduled interviews by some would-be key informants, led to cancellation of the interviews; for example a prominent lawyer in Rabaul. My inability to interview this lawyer starved my research of much needed data; for instance the court records of the conflicts at Malmaluan (see pages 2-3).

Reliability on the part of some would-be informants was a problem; for instance there were times I would get to the places scheduled for the interviews only to find myself waiting for some hours before canceling the interviews. In view of the unreliability of the would-be informants, there were much needed data, of significance to this study that were not collected.

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<sup>45</sup> For instance, in the Gazelle Peninsula, I calculated that for four weeks I had spent 250.00 PNG Kina (\$US70.00) on transport alone. In New Ireland I spent 150.00 kina for four weeks (\$US50.00) on transport, while on New Hanover, I only spent 50.00 kina (\$US15.00).

<sup>46</sup> E. T. Hall notes; "Polychronic time stresses involvement of people and completion of transaction rather than adherence to preset schedules. Appointments are not taken as seriously, and as a consequence, are frequently broken. Polychronic time is treated as less tangible than Monochronic time. For polychronic people time is seldom experienced as "wasted," and is apt to be considered a point rather than a ribbon or a road, but the point is often sacred" (1983:46)



In order to collect the data for this study I scheduled my interviews to be able to fit in four groups of people. Obtaining valuable data for the study was the key to my research, thus I carefully selected the four groups, knowing I will be greatly assisted by their knowledge of the topic of land. I have included a list of the people I interviewed in Appendices A and a list of the interview questions I used in Appendices B.

1. Interviews with villagers. Owing to the fact that I had previously carried out some research work on land in the Gazelle Peninsula in East New Britain (1999 and 2000) and in central New Ireland (2001), I concentrated more on interviewing new people. The interviews included clan elders, village leaders, church members and lay leaders, and a special visit was arranged for me to interview the then only surviving leader of the Johnson Cult on New Hanover, Wala Gukguk.<sup>47</sup>

I used also congregation members as my reflection groups, both on the mainland of New Ireland and on the island of New Hanover. The groups comprised seven congregations in seven villages on New Hanover Island and a congregation in a village on mainland New Ireland. The representation at the village level was very good. Most of the reflection groups got together on Sunday evenings, except in Kosai and Meteran villages on New Hanover, whereby the whole day of Sunday was given to me, to preach and do group reflections. I did not use whole congregations, but a good cross-section of the congregations.

Theologically, I found among each of the reflection groups and the individuals I interviewed a deep religious understanding of the sacredness of the land as a gift from God to the human beings. The people were also aware of the

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<sup>47</sup> Wala Gukguk died five months after the interview. I interviewed him on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 and he died in February of 2005.

need to be good stewards of the land and the environment. The destruction of the land and environment is seen as a deliberate act of disobedience to God's command to care for everything he created. Maro Kamtasol, from Meteselen village on New Hanover believes that, "*keve longo gel ani sausaupai si Kalou, nang nia kapo lau rikek*, 'any rebellion against God's ways is sin,'" hence those who destroy the land and the environment are sinning against God.<sup>48</sup> Oliver Pilo, another member of the reflection group said, "God gave us a good land but we are now destroying it. It is like a man who destroys his house and thinks he can be safe from the rain and heat of the sun"

At Kosai village, Nelson Saup and Silas Raping attributed the destruction of the village gardens by wild pigs to a punishment from God on the people for misusing the land and for disobeying God's *sausaupai*, "laws" for the land. God's law for the land according to the people prohibits the use of traditional rituals (1) to enhance fertility of the gardens, (2) for protection against curses, and (3) for rain. I found a similar theological understanding among the other villages on New Hanover and at Belik village on New Ireland.

2. Interviews with Church Leaders. Among the United Church leaders I interviewed were two bishops, a former Moderator of the church, three church ministers and four key lay leaders (see appendices A). My goal was to establish their stories behind the land and the current land issues between the people and the church,

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<sup>48</sup> Maro was a member of the reflection group at Meteselen village on New Hanover Island (September 9<sup>th</sup> 2004). I was able to establish that the impact of the logging activities carried out on the islands has made people become deeply aware of the need to conserve the land and environment. They are seeing the destruction that the logging industry has brought about on their livelihood, *na kipo vinga kui*, "and their intestines ache."

while at the same time seeking to gauge their theological views on the land. I interviewed three church ministers twice: Rev. Albert To Burua (1999 and 2004), Rev. Nelson Teko (2000 and 2004) and the late Bishop Gerson Kapman (2001 and 2004).

The issue of justice for the people who want the land return to them was raised with the church leaders I interviewed. Forty percent of the leaders believed that our ancestors gave the land to God, thus the land will always belong to God and must not be taken away from the church. The other sixty percent would like to see the church returning some portions of land not in use to the people. If the church cannot return some portions of the unused land to the people, both the church and the people can agree on deal whereby the land can be rented out to the people on a yearly basis.

3. Interviews with lawyers and land officials. From the legal professions I interviewed two lawyers: one a national/supreme court judge who is a United Church member, judge Elenas Batari from the West New Britain Province (October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004) and Peter Toliken a New Irelander, and a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses faith, who is the lands court magistrate in Kavieng (August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004). The two Provincial Land Advisors: Samela Biamak, the East New Britain provincial government lands advisor in Rabaul, and Martin Banlovo, the New Ireland provincial government lands advisor in Kavieng kindly allowed me to interview them also. The legal training of the four men did not stand in the

way of their theological conviction about the nature of the land, continually making reference to the land as a gift from God to the people.<sup>49</sup>

4. Interviews with other professionals. A psychologist, a politician, an environmentalist, an agronomist, an agriculturalist, and a project officer are among the professionals I interviewed. I also interacted with teachers and nurses, in Rabaul, Kavieng and New Hanover Island. With this group the emphases were on: better management of resources and sustainable development, the importance of better equity on the land, and caring for the environment so that the future generation will also benefit.

There are two other factors relating to the interviews, which I must also address.

1. The types of responses. There were five different responses. First, Melanesian societies conceal secrets, for secrets are keys to prosperity, power over other groups and success, thus to reveal a group's secret is to render the group powerless. In such a situation people can be very evasive, but my experience as an insider enabled me to frame my questions in ways that avoided imposing on the people's right to their secrets, which in turn helped to avoid touching on very sensitive cultural issues. I was reminded of that in one of my reflection groups at Belik village, on New Ireland.

Second, there were some Christians who held to the view that all cultural issues such as land are things of the past. Now that they are Christians they

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<sup>49</sup> In spite of the legal training and inclinations of the four individuals, they were theologically informed, asserting the religious significance of the land as a gift from God to be used wisely and shared by every member of the community. The two United Church members, judge Elenas Batari and Samela Biamak hold to the view that, the land given to the Methodist missionaries by our ancestors was the thanksgiving gift to God for the 'light' of the gospel brought to our people.

should devote their time to “seeking first the kingdom of God” for that is what matters most than fighting over temporal things like the land. These were clear evidences of the influence of Pentecostalism on the people’s theology. Third, in the villages most of the responses I got were culturally and/or clan-bound. For instance when I interviewed my uncles and an aunt, everything was just about our clan, the *Siavun/Kiukiu*, “land kingfisher” clan, although I had some success in staying above such responses, by occasionally rephrasing some questions.

Fourth, there were instances when my interviews touched on missionary land dealings with the people, that there were some anti-missionary sentiments expressed. And fifth, among the professionals the responses were those of concern, anger, theological/spiritual and legal. For instances, Robert Bino a scientist (an environmentalist and a manager of a Non-Government conservation group based in Goroka), is concern and angry at the devastative effect of logging on Papua New Guinea’s fauna and flora. Some of the rare species of birds and animals are threaten with extinction by the indiscriminate logging activities of Asian logging firms. Lawyers like, Peter Toliken is concerned about the illegal logging activities in the country which disadvantaged the rural population and believes that a tougher law be legislated to deal with all forms of land use that robs the people and deny them their rights to benefit from the land.

2. Processing the information. I sought to process the information within the context of the three theories I developed in this study: anthropological theory, colonial theory and biblical theology. I had these in mind when I analyzed the case studies

in this dissertation. The analyses of the cases were also enriched by both the interviews and the library researches I conducted.

In my search for a theological model to construct a local theology of land for the islands, using the information acquired from the interviews and library researches, I adapted the lead of Ilaitia Tuwere, whose exegetical approach uses Scripture and culture to develop a theology of the *vanua*, “land” or “place.” The exegetical approach finds rapport in Bevan’s translation model of doing theology (1992:30-46).

Ilaitia Tuwere is a Melanesian from Fiji. For ten years he was on the faculty of the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji,<sup>50</sup> becoming one of the Principals of the college. While still on the faculty of the college, he was elected the President of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma (1996-2001). Currently, he is on the faculty of the Knox Theological College in New Zealand, as a senior professor of theology. He holds a D. Th. Degree from the Melbourne College of Divinity in 1992 upon submitting a doctoral dissertation titled, “Making Sense of the Vanua (Land) in the Fijian Contexts: A Theological Exploration.” He published a book in 2002: *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific; Auckland, New Zealand: College of St. John the Evangelist.

Tuwere has been one of the few Melanesian voices that have been calling for decolonization of theology in Melanesia and Oceania as a whole. Such calls came out of a deep concern for Christianity and the gospel to be earthed in

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<sup>50</sup>The Pacific Theological College is an ecumenical regional college for all the churches in the south Pacific region, which are affiliated to the Pacific Conference of Churches.

Melanesian context. The Protestants started to seriously address the issue of contextualization much later than their Roman Catholics counterparts who were already addressing the issue. Roman Catholic seminaries by the late 1960s were already teaching courses on indigenization of theology.

In relation to Tuwere's contribution to the theology of land and his particular theological approach, I consider it relevant to the Melanesian contexts for two reasons, (1) it does not only perpetuate the understanding of the sacredness of the land as a gift from God, but it also connotes community where the presence of God is. Tuwere echoes in his writings on the land the Old Testament teaching that land is community and community is the essence of God's revelation of himself to humanity. Christ was incarnated into a particular culture and community on earth. (2) Tuwere reminds us that theology is not the product of a dominant culture being imposed on lesser cultures of the world. The safest way for the church to address cultural issues is to understand them in light of the Scriptures.

#### Archives and Library Research

The focus of the library research was on the following fields and issues: colonial theory, anthropological theory, traditional land tenure, land acquisition during colonial times, church theology on property, church and state land laws, and court cases about land. Books, journals, old newspaper clippings, old missionary reports and minutes of church meetings, and old mission records of land acquisition and registration were to provide this information. Apparently, it was difficult to obtain any of the old Methodist

Mission's records from missionary journals, letters, reports and minutes of church meetings.<sup>51</sup>

To acquire the information, library research was carried out at the following library facilities.

The Michael Somare Library. The library, established in 1966 is the property of the University of Papua New Guinea and situated in Port Moresby is among the best library facilities in the Pacific. Since its inception the library has always had a special section for Papua New Guinea studies; covering a wide range of topics that include history, colonialism, culture, religion, traditional and customary land tenure, geography, mining, and other related areas. My research was aided tremendously by the data on colonialism, and on traditional and customary land tenure.

The Melanesian Institute Library. It is one of the best research libraries in the whole country, and has volumes on every subject in the fields of the social sciences. Due to the fact that the Institute's faculty members conducted the land research, most of the original and additional data needed for this study was available from its database and library.

From 1997 to 2002 the Melanesian Institute embarked on the land and churches research project. There were four main areas the research aimed to address.

- The land held by the churches.

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<sup>51</sup> Most of the old missionary reports, minutes of church meetings, and records of land acquisition and registration were obliterated during the 1994 volcanic eruption, which totally devastated the town of Rabaul. The United Church, New Britain Regional office was totally destroyed; most of the valuable mission and church documents went with it. However, the Mitchell Library in Sydney, Australia contains a lot of information on the missionary activities of the Methodist Mission in the Pacific including the New Guinea Islands.



- The legality of the relationship between the church and other interested parties (such as former owners and the State).
- The nature of the relationship between the groups (including the church) that organize themselves over rights and interests in land.
- And, how the cultures and social structures have changed over time and how this has contributed to present situation, that is, conflicts over land ownership and land use between the church and the community (Rynkiewich 2001b: 11-12).

The aim of the research was “to provide leaders of member churches with information and guidelines to deal appropriately in land use and land disputes in relationship with traditional landowners and legal agencies” (Melanesian Institute Minutes 11-12:12:1997).<sup>52</sup>

Church Archives. Members of Melanesian Institute faculty had already obtained most of the records of land acquisition and ownership by the Methodist Mission from 1875 to 1968 from the church office in Rabaul on the first research trip in October 1999; much of the records were destroyed in the 1994 volcano eruption. There were no records of land acquisition from the same period found in the United Church office in Kavieng, because most of the records were kept in Rabaul which was the headquarter of the New Guinea District of the Methodist Church in Australasia, from 1930 to 1968.

### Personal Experiences

My research is based also on my experiences growing up in a society where the land is the soul and measure of the people, and the dependence on which and the whole environment for survival and well-being was a significant aspect of our lives. The land

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<sup>52</sup> Out of this research came two publications, both of which were edited by Michael Rynkiewich. The first was *Land and Churches in Melanesia: Issues and Contexts* (2001), and the second is *Land and Churches in Melanesia: Cases and Practices* (2004).

sustains our livelihood.<sup>53</sup> My bonding with the earth/land began at an early age, and growing up I observed every ritual performed for fertility of the crops, healing of the land, and for engaging the protection of the supernatural powers over the land and gardens. Out of this, I have developed an inward sense of respect for the sacredness of the land. One feels a sense of being surrounded by the awesome presence of invisible forces when alone in the jungle working on a new canoe or when in the field working in the garden. There is also a sense of being embraced by the land and all the forces that emanate from the land in the visible forms of the trees, stones, streams and everything else around.

In addition, my experience also as a pastor/teacher in the United Church for the last twenty-four years will have some effect on the way I write. For most United Church pastors, gardening is not a choice but a livelihood. Such an experience does not only perpetuate one's affinity with the land, but increases also one's sense of personal fulfillment and usefulness to society. The gift of the land to Melanesians by God through their ancestors serves a purpose, that is, to be productive on the land. Being productive on the land means putting the land into good and proper use, and signifies faithfulness to the cultural mandate given by the creator for human beings to be co-creators with him (Genesis 1:28). The land demands the ethical commitment of human beings as moral

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<sup>53</sup> Most Tungag mothers bring their babies with them to the gardens, build a little shade/shelter for them under banana trees in the garden, breast feed them to sleep then they go on toiling and braving the heat of the sun cultivating new crops and tending the ones already growing. If the baby is already in a crawling stage, the waking up provides an opportunity for it to explore the surrounding. The belief is that, the child must learn to bond with the earth/land and the environment at an early age, not only for the child to develop an early appreciation of the value of the land, but there was something significantly spiritual and mystical about the early bonding of a child with the land and the environment, that is, the sense of being one with the land and the environment whereby one draws spiritual strength and identity from.

In 1974, Elias Konkunep of Metemulai village and Kikvaingan of Taun village (in 1979) on New Hanover Island respectively requested for plates full of dirt/earth to consume before they died. While many saw their actions as judgment from God, others saw them as the result of their obsession with the land.

beings to carry out their responsibility on the land for the well being of individual families and the community, and in honor of the great ancestor and landowner himself, Yahweh. There is a sense among the islanders that the land comes to their rescue when they turn to it for help, and it erases the stigma of poverty.<sup>54</sup>

Being a pastor means I am a part of a system or an institution (the church) that is being accused of unethical and fraudulent land dealings, by the people who have benefited so much from its services in the past. But in the study one is not about defending the right of the church or those who feel the church has victimized them insofar as the land is concerned; rather, it is about drawing the church and the people together to the table for some serious and honest dialogue. Developing a local theology of land will provide a basis for the dialogue.

### Significance of the Study

The conflict over landownership and land use between the church and the community places the church's ministry of reconciliation and work for the well being of the community at risk. The church becomes ineffective in its task of incarnating kingdom values among the community. When this happens the church continues to be perceived by the people as a foreign institution; a relic of the colonial past. Such a perception of the church is devastating to the confidence people have placed in it as the

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<sup>54</sup> The land is a friend to those who turn to it for help. It is ludicrous or inconceivable to hear of poverty in the church when 97% of the land is still in the hands of customary owners. Poverty is self-inflicted wound, that is, many people are poor by choice, simply because they have an unethical attitude towards work. In the words of one informant "the land is an enemy to a lazy person, but it is a life long friend to a person whose sweats quenches its thirst" (from one of the reflection groups at Meteselen village on New Hanover Island).

catalyst for peace and good will in society, for many years. Thus the study is significant for the following reasons:

### Addressing a Theological Gap

The study raises a number of theological issues relating to land, hence it will help the church to re-address and redress the “theological gap” left by the missions (the Methodists) who did not think it necessary to develop a theology of land for the churches in the islands during their time. The oversight may have been due to two missionary problems.

Missionary Paternalism. The missionary paternalistic spirit of the time assumed that the national churches were not yet ready for such a theology. For as long as the missionaries stayed around a little longer, all theological answers to the islanders’ questions about the land would be provided by the missionaries themselves. This was, however, not a case of the people’s ‘theological ignorance’ or ‘theological incompetence’ being taken advantage of with the view of taking their land away from them.

A Theological Blunder. There was a theological blunder in the assumption that because the land was given to the work of God the people would not demand the return of their land to them. This reveals three further weaknesses in the missionary praxis of that era. First, Western theology was so naïve towards and had a negative view of anything Melanesian; as a result that particular theology became a weapon to control the minds of the people, a tool of indoctrination for the purpose of achieving ecclesiastical results which sought to alienate the people from their cultural values. A conversion to Western Christendom meant a Melanesian convert ceased to be Melanesian. He could not articulate the Christian message into his cultural context because the culture was

deemed “evil” or “demonic.” Such attitudes prevented the missionaries from recognizing the prior existence of a traditional Melanesian theological understanding of the land and the whole creation/environment. One cannot deny the presence of theology/theologies within every indigenous society of the world prior to the advent of Christianity, for the footprint of God is in every culture. Melanesians have always had a theology of the land and the earth.

Based on my research, I contend that Melanesian traditional theology is not Western theology and therefore must not be judged by Western theological criterion. The Scripture is the sole norm for judging every theology, including Melanesian traditional theology. Nevertheless, traditional Melanesian theology was incomplete without the fuller revelation of scriptures. But even though it was incomplete, the fact that there was a theology in Melanesia served a vital purpose: it was a stepping-stone into the culture of the people without which the gospel message would not have made sense. Traditional Melanesian theology of earth, land and/or the environment must be informed by biblical teaching on creation.

Second, a conflicting image of God as both a loving and a stern, angry God was presented to the people, with emphasis on the wrath and judgment of God. In view of this, whatever property, including land, given to the missions belonged to God, the people being warned of the danger of interfering in God’s affairs were afraid to challenge the missionaries; only the brave ones did. The fear of the wrath of God, served as a “theological fence” to keep people away from church owned land.

Third, in an uncanny way the missionaries assumed that the church they planted in the late 1800s and early 1900s will remain subordinated to missionary theology and

traditions. It never occurred to them that the theologies and traditions, upon which the churches in the non-Western world were founded, are today proving dysfunctional in local churches in Melanesia.<sup>55</sup> Also challenged is the missionary assumption that the people would always *ruru ra lotu*, “respect the church” for what it is.<sup>56</sup>

### A Balanced View of History

The study serves also the purpose of presenting to the islanders a balanced perspective of history in relation to the land issues: especially how the missionaries acquired and used the land. This is done with the hope of facilitating reconciliation between the church and the people whose relationship has been tarnished by the land issues. One also hopes that by presenting to the islanders the facts of history, it will help to correct the myth that missionaries acquired land from the people, by deception and fraud, and may lead to bridging the relationship gap between the church and the people.

The strong feelings, emotions and spiritual attachments to the land by the people were not addressed adequately by the missionaries, leaving a legacy of anger and distrust for the church. Land as a living thing, is vibrant with life because it is animated by the *mana*, the life giving force, which both sustains the people and empowers them to live on it. The Tungag of the island of New Hanover speak of the land as having *anit*, the self existing and self animating “life force” which *amanas*, “energizes” the land.

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<sup>55</sup> The dysfunctional nature of those traditions and theologies are the results of their inability to meet and address the serious theological challenges and questions being raised by globalization and post-modernity.

<sup>56</sup> I know that today’s land conflicts are problems we inherited from our mission history. The missionaries’ lack of foresight blinded them to the fact that the church of yesterday will also be the church of tomorrow. Missionaries assumed that the islanders would never question and challenge their authority in all matters concerning the church. I believe that as the church in the islands continues to grow and immerse itself into local contexts, indigenous spirituality will grow and deepen thus bringing about a new desire to theologically articulate all relevant cultural issues biblically. While it is true that the land issues come out of our mission history, the way forward must also be based on the lessons of history.

### Importance of Biblical Theology of Land

A good grasp of the biblical theology of land will help the church come to understand the reconciliatory power of the land, another reason for the significance of this study. Land is one of the key factors to reconciliation, which contributes to true indigenization among the marginalized peoples of the world, and between them and the institutions that dispossessed them of their land. Justice demands that land be returned to the original owners, a process of reconciliation that is important for healing to occur.<sup>57</sup> Healing conveys the idea of restoring people's lost identity, and the returning to them of what was taken away from them, that is, the land, their most precious gift from the ancestors.

The church needs to give the islanders in the congregation reasons to identify with its being and presence, reasons to feel that the church stands for and is committed to justice and that the church is truly incarnational in its ministry to the community. The church is also a humanitarian organization and as such it is responsible to defend the rights of the indigenous to their land against the powerful and rich minority who are out to exploit them.

By the same token the church has to be realistic about the land situation in Melanesia, that is, "church leaders will never have a solitary claim to land in Melanesia.

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<sup>57</sup> In 1967, a year prior to the union that formalized the then United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, the Methodist Church in the New Guinea District offered to sell two hundred acres of land from the Ulu plantation land at very cheap price back to the people of Kerevara and Utuan Islands in the Duke of York group of islands, following the people coming in and settling on 'church' land. One group agreed but another refused the deal in favor of having the whole island of Ulu given back to the people. Early on, in 1920, the Methodist Church had given back some of the land in the Duke of York Islands to the administration (see Threlfall 1975:209, 210).

In the minutes of the Assembly Property Board meetings of the whole United Church in PNG, there is a court record of the people of Kerevara demanding the United Church to hand some portions of the land back to them. A lawyer from the islands, Ezekiel Mesulam, represented the people. The legal proceedings are still ongoing (see Appendix 6).

There will always be other claimants and confusing complications” (Rynkiewich 2001d:339). Besides this, the church will have “to be proactive in learning about customary claims on land in Melanesia, and to enter into and work within the system as it is” (Rynkiewich 2001d:339). To do this church needs to have its priorities right in relation to administration of property and its spiritual responsibilities.

### Keeping Proper Records of Church Land

One cannot underestimate the importance of the church keeping up to date or updated records of all land dealings with customary landowners, and of updating the registration and titling of all church owned land with appropriate land offices to avoid and /or minimize further land conflicts. Verbal agreement and receiving land as a gift are things of the past. The study seeks to underscore the significance of the church taking such precautionary actions, by keeping proper records of its land.

How will this study help the people in Melanesia and elsewhere? Land claims by the indigenous against the church may be due to a change of attitudes and understanding of the nature and function of the church. Maybe the problem is due to tensions in relationship between the church and the community, resulting from the church’s failure to develop and function along traditional community patterns. Such failure makes the church’s presence seemingly irrelevant to the people and makes Christianity appear dysfunctional in society. One hopes, however, the study will foster a mutual understanding among the Melanesians and the church that recognizes that the church also needs land to do all the work that goes to benefit the people. One also hopes that the church will also come to realize the need for it to develop along the cultural patterns



without losing its identity. However, the church must respect the people's rights to their land.

There are five groups of people who may also benefit from the study. First, the landowners who feel the church has betrayed them by not honoring the initial agreement.<sup>58</sup> Second, the young generation of islanders who feel the missionaries cheated their forefathers into acquiring land from them for "ridiculously low prices" (1975:40) or for free. This generation alleges that their forefathers did not know the real values of land when they sold or gave land away to the missions. Third, are those on whose lands the mission station is situated, who feel they have been denied all the privileges to have access to schools, health centers, and other benefits. They are seeing these benefits going to outsiders and not to them.

Fourth, those who are made landless by the loss of land to multi-million dollar corporations or, like the Baining in East New Britain, who for the sake of making quick money entered into unscrupulous land dealings with outsiders whose intent was to dispossess them of their land. This study may provide both incentive and warning. And fifth, those coming in for theological training, that is, future pastors and ministers of the church. In my role as an educator I am seriously considering developing this study into a

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<sup>58</sup> For instance, Roy Padana of Malmaluan village, in the middle of which the Training in Mission and Leadership Center of the United Church in Papua New Guinea is situated, laments the lack of benefits and development among his people, in spite of the fact that center has been on their land for almost 40 years. He believes his people have been betrayed by the church (interviews: July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004). For four years, I served among the Malmaluan community, and one could obviously feel the sense of frustration among the young people at what Roy claims to be "the church's apparent lack of concern for the spiritual and physical well being of the people" (July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004).

teaching tool. Based on my research, the only way the whole church can benefit from the study is to equip those training for ministry, who will in turn pass the teaching on.<sup>59</sup>

A theology that is biblically and culturally informed will help both the church and the people to understand or be knowledgeable about four things.

- The church will learn that the religious and social values of land were important to the people before the advent of Christianity, and that the church needs to build on this if it is to be relevant in its ministry to the community.
- Both the church and the community will learn that land can actually become the basis for deeper relationships between the people and the church as the community of God in the world, just as it was the basis of relationship between the people in their traditional communities in the past.
- Both will learn that land can be the spiritual link between the people and God who is the ultimate owner and giver of the land.
- The church will learn that a strong theological stand by the Christians (church) will have an impact on the secular attitudes towards land that is creating confusion in the community and destroying clans and community.

### Summary

In this chapter the problem of land conflicts and its negative impact on the relationship between the church and the people in the New Guinea Islands is being introduced. The seriousness of the problem must be seen in light of the church facing the

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<sup>59</sup> Currently, the Rarongo Theological College of the United Church in Papua New Guinea has not developed a theology of creation, the land and ecology that embrace culturally relevant issues on the land that would serve to inform the whole church on the importance of caring for our environment. The emphasis on the theology of earth and creation is still very foreign and at best a 'theological relic' of the missionary era.

danger of losing the confidence the people have in it as a symbol of hope and goodwill and as the incarnation of the values of the kingdom of God in human societies. The research problem of this dissertation is to develop a theology of land for the United Church in the New Guinea Islands. Using the lead taken by Ilaitia Tuwere, a Melanesian, based on cultural themes, I will develop this theology.

## Chapter 2

### **Traditional Ideologies of Land**

Land is much more than the physical turf upon which people build their houses, make their gardens, hunt on, and/or disposed of. It is the soul and the measure of Melanesians, and owns Melanesians; rather than Melanesians owning it.<sup>1</sup> Symbolically, land occupies a significant place in the worldviews of Melanesians (see Tuwere 1992:20). Land was certainly significant enough for the indigenous peoples of the world, Melanesians, to defend it, fight over it and die for it. Land is not just physical; there is also a spiritual dimension to it.

In this chapter I discuss traditional land ideology in the New Guinea Islands region. Occasionally, I cite literatures dealing with traditional land tenure in other societies in Melanesia. This chapter demonstrates the cultural and religious significance of land to the New Guinea Islanders, as to other indigenous peoples of the world.

Three clarifications need to be made before proceeding on the discussion of traditional land ideology in the islands. First, anyone who undertakes studies of land tenure and other related land issues in Melanesia would always encounter a common problem, that is, the question of ownership. It does not come as a surprise that a portion of land under dispute may have several clan groups laying claims to it.<sup>2</sup> Equally not

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<sup>1</sup> The understanding that the land is corporately “owned” by the clans is perhaps a creation of the social sciences, particularly cultural anthropology, of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Clans never owned the land; they had residual rights to the land, with every member accorded the rights of usufruct.

<sup>2</sup> The goldmine at Pogera in the highlands of Papua New Guinea for instance, surprised a lot of outsiders and the mine’s managing staff by the number of compensation claims that came from supposedly landowning clan groups. Altogether there were 40 clan groups claiming compensation from the mining company for the land on which the mine operates. About 98% of the clan groups were probably non-existent prior to the establishing of the mine, and they were simply made up for the purpose of claiming

surprising is the possibility that all the claimants are probably right.<sup>3</sup> Given the history of migration of different groups into the Pacific over many years and in recent times, and given also the warring nature of all Melanesian societies, land ownership passed from one group to the next over many years. A portion of land in dispute may have had ten different groups of people successively owning it over periods of time.

In my research, I discovered that the land rights/ownership issue is as unpredictable as the movement of people had been in Melanesia, for years. It appears that ownership as a concept was made up as people moved on from one place to the next as the process of dispossession went on over the years. No one can really claim they are the sole and original owners of any land. Rynkiewicz notes, “Land rights are, by definition in Melanesia, fuzzy and open-ended. That is, different claims will arise depending on the context and the future” (2004b:65).

This difficulty was acknowledged in the colonial days too. F. J. West notes,

The first difficulty obviously lies in the concept of ownership. From the beginning it was apparent that there was no clear-cut, precisely-defined body of land law in native society but rather a range of custom and a large number of individuals who had rights in any particular piece of land . . . if all rights were traced . . . and all claimants were paid, this still left untouched the possibility that the land might in time past have been controlled by another which has been dispossessed in fighting and which, because the government had now established law and order, could not regain its land. (1966:11)

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benefits from the mine. There is now what is called the “Papua New Guinea paradigm,” which connotes the idea that people make things up as they go or move along. Some of the land pressure groups are what one may term as “perennial groups” put together quickly for the purpose of claiming compensation. Once the pay out is made to the groups, they quickly dissolve.

<sup>3</sup> My sub-clan claims rights to a portion of land at Patianging, on New Hanover Island, but currently my cousins, the sons of mom’s step-sister who belong to the *silau* clan have claim exclusive rights to the land (I interviewed my elder sister Dorcas and her husband Sion, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004). I discovered though that there are two other clans claiming rights to the land. The possibility that we all have or hold rights to that land is not far from the truth. It was for this reason that I bought a portion of land for my sons.

I do not agree with West's denial of the presence of traditional land/property laws, however, I can identify with the difficulty they faced in dealing with the issues of land ownership.

Second, I am aware of the gap between the ideal and the reality perceived today in relation to traditional and customary land tenure, due to the fact that much has changed since the first contact with the colonialists. And third, in this dissertation, I do not purport to a parochial view and attitude towards modern development. My strong view on the respect for traditional land ideology is not a negation of the need for economic development in the New Guinea Islands. On the contrary, I believe that development is both good and necessary, but development does not take place in isolation of societies and life's holistic experiences. I am aware of the fact that development, whatever form it assumes, will always have some impact on societies.<sup>4</sup>

When two polarizing worldviews meet, conflicts ensue. The colonial history of land dealings in Melanesia is an example of the conflicts between two opposing worldviews; each sustaining an ideology of land that differed from the other. The Western ideology of land (to be discussed in chapter 3) conflicted with the traditional Melanesian ideology of land, thus raising the issues being researched in this dissertation.

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<sup>4</sup> Much is happening in the area of economic and infra-structural development in the New Guinea Islands and Melanesia as a whole, from both the local and global perspectives. Owing to the global nature of most forms of development in the New Guinea Islands, this study takes into account the impact globalization has on land tenure in the region socially, politically, religiously and economically (discussed in chapter 4).

### Case Study

In 1920<sup>5</sup> the first church building was established in Umbukul village on New Hanover Island, to signify that *kitala sukal a lotu nei vunep irina*, “the church has been planted among the people, on their soil.”<sup>6</sup> Four men had paddled to the island of Soson on the western side of the island of New Hanover to request for the *lotu*, “church” to be brought to Umbukul village. Upon their arrival, on the following day, the *vosap/pasingan*, “headman” of the village gathered the people together to request for a portion of land to build a church building. The people gladly gave the land away. After sometime the people decided to give another portion of land for a coconut plantation for the church, on which they proceeded to plant young coconut seedlings.

They were soon faced with some opposition from a man named Naumelek, a *tulava*, “an elder” of the *ianga*, “parrot” clan who was not happy with the idea of coconut trees being planted on the land. After the first lots of coconut seedlings were planted he sent some men to uproot and destroy them. Naumelek had resolved that planting coconut was a desecration of the land and a waste of good land needed for planting taro. Taro is a religious and ceremonially significant root crop among the Tungag.<sup>7</sup> Initially Naumelek had set aside that particular portion of land for a big taro garden.

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<sup>5</sup> The source of the case study is an interview (September 2004), I had with my uncles, uncle Ekonia Pasingantapak, a retired schools (72 years old) and uncle Jonathan Vulaumat, a retired business officer (67 years old).

<sup>6</sup> It is significant to note the symbolic expression of the church as being “planted,” *sukal* on Tungag land. In Tungag philosophy of life a person cannot own anything that is planted by someone else even if it is on his/her land. In the case of the *lotu*, it was planted on their land and it is now their responsibility to nurture it. It counters the pot-plant image of the church brought from the West. A local theology of land will enrich the people’s perception of the church as their new clan, or something that is their own. For the church, therefore to be involved in land conflicts, it tarnishes the relationship it has with the people.

<sup>7</sup> Among the Tungag the best land is always reserved for taro. In the event of planting a new taro garden, the land is often ritualistically prepared before the taro sticks are planted. There are more rituals and taboos

Realizing they could not get past him, the village people decided to send his nephew Timot to speak to him on their behalf. They sent him with the following instructions; “Go and get a *pan vang*, [a leaf] of the cordyline plant, then go and place it on your uncle’s head and explain to him what we are doing. Please beg him on our behalf to allow us plant a coconut plantation for the church.” Naumelek recanted and said, “I will allow you to use the land but not all the land you originally requested, just a little portion of it.” The people proceeded to plant more coconut seedlings on the new plantation land. Today that parcel of land still belongs to the church;<sup>8</sup> it is a *roe i lotu*, “church land,” with the emphasis on exclusive ownership.

Some forty years before the New Hanover incident, the Rev. Benjamin Danks, in 1880 acquired some land from the people of Kabakada village in New Britain at a “ridiculously low price.” Upon the completion of the church building, he found that women and children could not attend church services because the land on which the church was built was sacred land. He also found himself in a situation whereby he thought he could build a fence around his house to indicate the land belonged to him or the mission. At night the villagers moved the fence back towards his house. It happened several times.

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associated with the taro crop than any other food crops. In fact, the status of every Tungag male is measured or determined by the number of taro gardens he has and the amount of *inangun*, ‘shell money’ he has accumulated over the years. It is the delight of every Tungag young woman to marry man renowned for his ability to plant and provide taro at every mortuary feast. Every Tungag woman will *kurek*, ‘tease’ or ‘taunt’ the others with the saying: *Napo sinong lakat kuli kirak le si kag igenen*. Symbolically, the woman is saying, “I am enjoying the prestige of being somebody brought up on by abundance of taro crops my husband produces.”

<sup>8</sup> Following the successful settling of the church in Umbukul village, the same four men who had paddled to Soson Island to bring the *lotu* to Umbukul, took upon themselves the task of paddling for almost three days to attend a church meeting on the island of Djaul whereby they requested for a missionary to be sent to Umbukul village. In response to the request the Methodist mission sent Moses Isana who remained until his death in 1975 (Interview with Uncles Ekonia Pasingantapak, Jonathan Vulaumat and Gerson Pasingan: August 30<sup>th</sup> 2004, at Umbukul village).



To put the issues discussed in this chapter into perspective, it is essential to include a brief discussion of traditional societies in the islands with special attention to the three cultural groups in this study, prior to analyzing the cases. In the discussion, reference will be made to each of the three groups in light of the particular issue being discussed; for instance, land tenure: (i) among the Mandak, (ii) among the Tolai, and (iii) among the Tungag.

### Brief Description of Traditional Societies

It is not an understatement to say that the islands' culture, embodied by the Mandak, Tolai and Tungag peoples, is so complex. But how did these peoples come to settle these islands, "to survive and developed complex institutions, intricate and pleasing arts, [and] impressive monuments?" (Oliver 1961:14). Strictly, this is not an area study; therefore the discussion of the traditional island societies will be limited to the land issues.

One of the main features of the region of Melanesia is its culturally diverse societies and communities. Being linguistically diverse, the region of Melanesia comprises approximately one-third of the world's languages. Similarly, communities and societies in the New Guinea Islands are culturally and linguistically diverse, with the presence also of differences in customary practices.<sup>9</sup> However, in the midst of such

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<sup>9</sup> Linguistically for instance, the whole island of New Hanover, including it surrounding islands and islets speak the Tungag language (12,000 speakers), but there are four dialects; something similar is true of the Mandak and Tolai peoples. Among the Tolai, the people of Lungalunga village on the north coast of the Gazelle Peninsula, speak a dialect that is unlike the *kuanua* language spoken by the Tolai. This particular dialect is related to the *susurunga* language in the Namatanai area of the New Ireland Province.

Customary practices are also very distinct. For instance, inland villages in the islands maintain some distinct customary practices from their counterparts in the coastal villages. The differences are especially

diversity, there are areas of mutuality, such as the social structure, the kinship system, and the significance of land.

### Social Structure

Social structure or social organization, “is an abstraction from patterns of actual behaviors and events – a web of relationship” (Keesing and Keesing 1971:25; see also Hoebel 1958:341-365), and concerns itself with studying “the modes of organizing social groupings that bind men [human beings] together and make ordered life possible” (Keesing and Keesing 1971:148;). It concerns itself also with “what kinds of people there are and how they are organized into social groups and networks” and the ideas that members of a society “have about their relationship, their conception about one another, the understandings and categories and expectations that guide their behavior” (Keesing and Keesing 1971:147,148; Ferraro 2001:261-263). New Guinea Islands’ societies are egalitarian in nature, sustained by a complex network of relations and reciprocal obligations.

Kinship System. For many years the focus of anthropological studies on the social structures of ‘primal’ societies has been the kinship systems and systems of marriage. Kinship system forms and provides the vital link in understanding societies. One has to make sense of kinship in order to make sense of everything else. Kinship is symbolic and as well as biological, as evidenced by the Melanesian network of relationship and inter-relationship situations, which often goes beyond the biological demarcation.

In all New Guinea Islands’ societies, social arrangements are built around kinship ties. In kinship ties, “Obligations between relatives are viewed as morally binding, and

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noticed in the ritual practices and the artifacts produced by the different communities. The difference in the inland environments necessitates the distinct customary practices of inland communities in the islands.

their fulfillment ranks high among the paramount virtues of a tribal people” (Keesing and Keesing 1971:152). In his studies of the Nuer kinship system, Evans-Pritchard notes that, “Rights, privileges and obligations are determined by kinship” (1940:182). The same can be said of the New Guinea Islands societies; whereby “extended kinship groups play major roles” in community social construction, and where kinship terms designate social statuses and reciprocal obligations.

In most New Guinea Islands’ societies, every member of a clan or community traces relationships of blood (matrilateral and patrilineal)<sup>10</sup> or marriage with one another. Marie de Lepervanche also notes that, “New Guineans often use pedigrees, kin terms, horticultural [terms], local or bodily idioms such as blood, substance or semen to express their relation of co-operation, competition and exchange” (1973:4). One also finds in the islands the existence of “other modes of social groupings based on community, age, sex [gender] and inequality” (Keesing and Keesing 1971:147; see also Epstein 1969:13-14).<sup>11</sup>

To bring these aspects into more realistic situations, I will attempt to discuss the three cultural groups in this study individually, but very briefly.

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<sup>10</sup> The blood ties does not only relate to the maternal connection. As a Tungag, my father’s brothers’ children are also my brothers and sisters because I share with them the same blood, through our fathers. My mother’s sisters’ children are my real brothers and sisters because we share the same *tus*, breast, that is, one grand-mother or a clan heroine. I relate to others in my clan on the basis of sharing the same *ung*, bird feather, a reference to the clans’ totemic symbols, symbolized by birds. My father’s sisters’ children are my *magmagau*, equivalent to the Western concept of cousins. The term *magmagau* also applies to my mother’s brothers’ children.

<sup>11</sup> Relationship and social cooperation was also based on membership in a secret society, in a group of female relatives who were going through the period *mal* (Tungag), ‘voluntary abstinence’ from consumption of taro in respect of the dead until the staging of next mortuary feast. The initiated in society belong to a different social category than those who are non-initiated. Sorcerers tend to consolidate their reign of terror on society through the exchange, *irul*, of new ideas of the trade, perhaps a much more potent ritual.

The Mandak of Central New Ireland. The Mandak occupy the central part of the island of New Ireland, along the east and the west coasts and the interior of the island.<sup>12</sup> The term *Mandak* comes from the people's term for "male," and has received a wider usage in the whole Province to refer to those who speak the language (Clay 1975:10). Apart from anthropological records on the origin of human settlements in the islands, Mandak mythology says that their ancestors were "placed in their present location by a distant creator, Moroa" (Clay 1986:15), who is also the owner and giver of the land to the Mandak people.<sup>13</sup> The Mandak language belongs to the Austronesian family of languages and spoken by a population of 3,325 (Lithgow and Claasen 1968:3).<sup>14</sup>

Traditional Mandak societies organized themselves into local units or hamlets.<sup>15</sup> Each hamlet had a distinct political structure and social organization that differed from others, except when shared with another group of hamlet in the context of an alliance,

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<sup>12</sup> New Ireland is the name given to the island, but it is also the name given to one of the 19 Provinces of the nation of Papua New Guinea. The Province "comprises, in addition to [the island of] New Ireland itself, the smaller islands of Lavongai (New Hanover), the Saint Mathias group, Tabar, Lihir, Tanga, and Feni" (Clay 1975:9). Situated between 2 and 5 degrees south latitude and between 150 and 154 degrees east longitude, New Ireland is a coral reef fringed island of the Bismarck Archipelago. It is a landmass of 3,340 square miles, 220 miles in length, varying in width from 7 to 35 miles. The island was formed on top of submerged mountain ranges that run parallel to Central Cordillera of the main island of New Guinea (Clay 1975:9). It is also the home of thirteen other distinct cultural cultural groups.

<sup>13</sup> From an interview I conducted with the Rev. Beniona Lentrut, one of the senior ministers in the United Church, at his home in Ligga, New Ireland, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2004.

<sup>14</sup> According to the recent figures on the languages of Papua New Guinea, provide by Summer Institute of Linguistic studies (1990) and the United Bible Society (1992), the number of Mandak speakers have increased from 3,325 in 1968 to 4,308 in the 1990s. According to Lithgow and Claasen, the Mandak speakers are categorized into two dialect groups; first the southern group with 2,032 speakers, comprising five dialects; and second is the northern group (Lavabura-Lamasong group) with 1,293 speakers, and comprises four dialects. The northern and southern groups together form the Mandak speaking area (Clay 1975:13; see also Clay 1986:13). In New Ireland alone two language groups are nearly extinct: i.e. Guramalum language with only 3 speakers left and the Tennis language group, with 49 speakers left.

<sup>15</sup> Settling people into big villages along the coast was a recent creation by colonial administrators to enable accessibility to the indigenous population by colonial patrol teams. According to Clay, "In the first decade of the twentieth century the Germans began to move inland peoples to coastal locations, and the Australians completed this resettlement in the 1950s" (1975:13).

politically or through mortuary rites. Today, however, the local residential unit is the village. A village

unites under one name a number of contiguous hamlets. Each village is distinguished from others not only by dialect details, but also by cultural specialties, minor rituals, ceremonial features, or technological skills. A larger cultural division includes several villages sharing the same dialect. Within such groups, however, are recognized distinctions between coastal and inland peoples. (Clay 1975:13)

While the village is now the typical local residential unit, it does not reflect the true pattern and nature of the traditional settlements or residential units. The same can be said of the whole New Guinea Islands region. The islanders are still very much attached to their traditional settlements sites. More and more people, today, choose to have two residences; one in the village and the other on the traditional sites of former hamlets; because that is where the clan land is located, it is where the history of the clan began, and that is where the ancestors are buried. Being buried on one's own clan land, on the site of former settlements was the only way to avoid having one's grave tampered with in the events of land conflicts.<sup>16</sup>

Among the Mandak, there are several ways kinship relationships are expressed, besides the matrilineal bond; chief among them are:

The Clans. Mandak societies are organized around matrilineal exogamous societies, *ebibinet*, "clans," *ewentus*, "sub-clans," and two major moieties *Emalam* and *Erangam*, named after two types of sea eagle. Clay discusses the nature and functions of the three social systems or levels of social organization in the following;

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<sup>16</sup> Among many Melanesian communities, in the event of a land disputes, relatives are often force to exhume the bodies of their relatives and move them to their own hamlets or traditional sites. In 1987, at Umbukul village, my uncle Moses Isana's body was exhumed and moved to the family's land when another uncle, Robert Kaul from the *manilava*, 'eagle' clan disputed uncle Moses' body being buried on their land.

Moiety set perimeters for marriage and in certain context constitute a duality through which social contrasts are expressed. An *ewentus* or sub-clan has a localized identity in a particular hamlet which it owns and where its members should be buried. A clan, *ebibinet*, forms a larger unity that calls for members' participation particularly in executing mortuary feasts. (1986:15; see also Clay 1975:19).

Kinship relationships can be expressed in other terms, which still maintain the closeness of the relationship. For instance,

Pedigree Terms. Mandak relationships are also expressed in local or bodily idioms of which there are three major ones. First, *ebolout*, “womb” relationship, which “conveys a social unit solidarity of particular moral force. Persons who link themselves through references to a common womb emphasize the strength of the maternal nurture between them” (Clay 1975:32). Any one from the same clan or sub clan can emphasize social solidarity through their sibling relationship by claiming they are of the same ‘womb.’

Second, is the *erus*, “breast/breast milk” relationship, another symbolic idiom to express the relationship between people of the same clan and sub-clan. The Mandak will say, “they come from the same breast.” In contrast to “womb,” *erus* “breast/breast milk” links individuals not only in sibling categories, but in other maternal nurture relationship as well. However, like the womb relationship, breast relationship also “suggests a strong moral force of shared obligations and identity” (Clay 1975:32). Unlike the Tungag of New Hanover, coming from the same breast for the Mandak does not imply a genealogical link “to one woman who nursed them or even an ancestral grandmother; rather it expresses a kind of moral obligation between them” (Clay 1975:33).

Food Sharing. Sharing of food was a symbolic idiom to express the proximity of the reciprocal relationship that goes beyond the demarcation of clans and sub-clans, and

the womb and breast relationship. In accordance to Mandak social ideology, “sharing food” becomes an inclusive social phenomenon, implying a relationship within a larger social unit, which includes moieties, clans, sub-clans or sub sub-clans, and even those of the same hamlets. The “womb” and “breast” relationship can be extended to ties within the *ewentus*, “sub-clans”. Kinship relationship among the Mandak was both immediate, and extended to include marriage ties.

The “one womb,” the “one breast,” and “one food” relationship underscores the significance of the kinship relationship and also underscores the significance of the exogamy and inheritance rules, which governs most matrilineal societies.

The Tolai. Occupying the northeastern part of the Gazelle Peninsula on the island of New Britain, are people known as the Tolai. The term Tolai as well as the concept of a group with a common identity did not come into being until the 1930s (Neumann 1992:4, see also Epstein 1969:13). Epstein notes that the “Tolai lacked most of the usual indices of political or cultural unity. They possessed no single common name for themselves as a group and designations of the land, people, and the language as *Gunantuna* or *Kuanua*<sup>17</sup> were merely usages adopted by the incoming Roman Catholic and Methodist missions respectively” (1969:13).

The statement by Epstein does not take away the fact that the active processes of internalization by the Tolai people of their Tolainess went on at the *vunatarai*, “clan” level. The existence of cultural homogeneity was a clear evidence of the process of internationalization that went on among individual hamlets, but also of the level of

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<sup>17</sup> “*Gunantuna* means ‘true’ or ‘proper’ land. *Kuanua* is a term from the Duke of York Islands that means ‘over there.’ Today, the expression ‘Tolai’... is used as a term of greeting or address” (Epstein 1969:13)

innovative processes. The term Tolai is a colonial conception (in 1930s), but the people knew whom their identity (see Neumann 1992:4).

According to Neville Threlfall, “The Tolai are believed to have come across from New Ireland to New Britain only a few centuries ago, and were still pushing their frontier inland at the end of the nineteenth century” (1975:18). They settled at the Blanche Bay area of the Gazelle Peninsula of East New Britain. Their arrival in the area saw the dispossession of the Baining people of their land, subsequently driving them inland. This in itself is a form of colonization but not with the intent of controlling/subjugating the Baining.<sup>18</sup> They occupy an area where the soils are extremely fertile and capable of supporting a variety of crops. Due to the existence of three active volcanoes, the reason for the extremely fertile soils, the whole Blanche Bay area, though small in size, is marked by a considerable degree of ecological diversity.

Henry Paroi notes that, “The Tolai have a strong sense of who they are, and they want to be faithful to their identity” (2004:91). One danger the Tolai fear most is the losing of their identity. Casper To Waninara attributes the people’s sense of Tolainess to a “twofold contributing factor . . . their own cultural distinctiveness which they appreciated, while on the other they were highly sensitive of shared experiences –with alien rule, and in the realization of their own position of advantage within the wider colonial society” (1998:124). In a bizarre turn of event, “the same forces enhancing change towards nationhood building and identity operate to generate [or to consolidate] the identity of ‘tolai-ness’ and ‘separateness’” among the Tolai (To Waninara 1998:158).

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<sup>18</sup>Epstein notes also that the Tolai had “legends of origin, but these tend to vest in particular matrilineage groups: they tell of more or less recent migration into the area from New Ireland or of movements within the Gazelle Peninsula itself” (1969:13).



Their identity is based on their relationship to the *vunatarai*, “clans,” or *apik tarai*, “sub-clans” or “lineages,” or through a common *mandapai*, “the repository of the ancestors.” People were also commonly identified with their settlements or hamlets, and with the land.<sup>19</sup> The Tolai “maintain their own ethos and identity through sustaining a cultural device, tambu [shell money]” (To Waninara 1998:34; see also Epstein 1978:44-61; and To Waninara 1979:33-44).

The Tolai speak an Austronesian language known as *Kuanau* or the *tinatatuna*, “true talk or the real language.” There are about 61,000 speakers (Summer Institute of Linguistic, 1991), though dialectical variations were and still are present throughout the Gazelle Peninsula. The dialectical variations, however, do not negate the relative cultural homogeneity among all Tolai societies (Epstein 1969:13).<sup>20</sup> Unlike their counterparts in other parts of the New Guinea Islands, the Tolai had a much longer period of contact with the “white man.” In spite of the longer period of contact with Europeans and the welcoming of new and/or alternative forms of life, the Tolai have remain faithful to their cultural values and the ways of the land.

Social life on the Gazelle Peninsula, as else where in Melanesia; was characteristically small in scale (Hogbin 1958:152-153). Epstein notes “Tolai social life was marked by an intense parochialism [because] there were also at work other countervailing tendencies equally deep-rooted in the culture” (1969:14). But the basic question that must be answered for the Tolai people relates to the “nature of the social

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<sup>19</sup> The Tolai have embraced the new changes and Western ways that had come among them, but they are still much attached to the land. Coming home from a days work in town, a Tolai will always visit the garden. Subsistence gardening still forms a big part of Tolai lifestyle.

<sup>20</sup> Due to the fact that the *Kuanua* language was used by the early Methodist missionaries as a ‘missionary language’ to evangelize most part of the New Guinea Islands region, there are 19,000 additional second language speakers of the language in the New Guinea Islands (United Bible Society 1985).

groups and categories that provide the framework for much of intra-Tolai relations and interactions” (Epstein 1992:48). How did they organize themselves in their societies?

Two specific areas hold the key to understanding the essence of Tolai social groups and categories: (i) the Tolai concept of “territory,” and (ii) the Tolai descent system. First, in relation to territory the Tolai drew a clear distinction between *a pui* and *a gunan*. A *pui*, an area of the bush, is “naturally wild” excepting when it has been “tamed” through the process of continual gardening. Cultivation has to be continuous to avoid the danger of the land reverting/returning to its original state of wildness.<sup>21</sup> A *gunan* by contrast, is a “place of human habitation.” The opposition sometimes finds symbolic expressions in certain ritual contexts.<sup>22</sup>

It is in this context that, the *gunan* represents among other things, “domesticity, it is a bounded unit where people can dwell in relative security” (Epstein 1992:49). The *gunan* also represents Tolai identity. Thus *gunan* refers to four aspects of the Tolai social organization; (i) the smallest local unit, (ii) the hamlets, and (iii) the larger unit embracing many hamlets, that is the village, and (iv) the *tambu*, “shell money” and the *tumbuan*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The Tungag believe that frequent human activities or the continual presence of human beings in an area of the bush considered to be *masalai*, ‘spirit’ or *makius*, ‘sacred’ land, enables *sain iri vap*, ‘human bodily odor,’ to help tame the area – so that the spirits will *katak tari vap*, ‘become familiar with human presence’ so that they will no longer be harmful to human beings.

<sup>22</sup> In the *namata* (ceremony for preparing young people for marriage), for instance, young men are required to undergo a *paraparau*, a period of seclusion in the bush. It is the elaborate staging of the re-entry ceremony into the village, which signifies the re-entering of the young men into the circles and cycles of social relationship within their respective communities.

<sup>23</sup> A *tubuan* is a male secret society, which is often represented by a masked dancer. The *tubuan* is a female figure that is said to be the mother of the *dukduk*, is also a male secret society represented by the male masked figure prominent in the activities of the society. The distinction between the *tubuan* and the *dukduk* is in the masks worn by the male dancers. The *dukduk* mask is much smaller than the *tubuan* mask.

The significance of the hamlet to a Tolai is perceived in “jural and emotional terms” (Epstein 1992:49). A Tolai is linked to the hamlet of birth by the fact that his afterbirths (umbilical chord and placenta) are buried there. Hamlet is also associated in perpetuity with a particular *vunatarai*, descent group, thus signifying the connection with the past; this was the place where the past was buried. The degree of association to the hamlet is such that when large-scale clan affairs were celebrated, it was at the hamlet that all congregated, not where their modern style homes are built (Epstein 1992:48-50).

In this context, “land” is the *gunan*, the “place” or “village,” where there is safety, security, identity and relationship, fulfillment and wholeness. The same could be said of the Mandak and the Tungak concept of place or village. When a Tolai says *kaugu gunan*, “my land” or “my place,” it entails or connotes a sense of being owned or possessed by the place, being of the place, a sense of identifying with everything the land stands for and a responsibility to behave in manners befitting of the place.<sup>24</sup>

Second, one other key factor in the Tolai social organization is the *vunatarai*,<sup>25</sup> “clan” or “lineage,” which for the Tolai carries a precise connotation of sharing matrilineal descent. The Tolai belonged to one or other of the two exogamous matrilineal moieties, *vunatarai*,<sup>26</sup> known as *Marmar* and *Pikalaba*.<sup>27</sup> The names of the moieties are

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<sup>24</sup> In 1996, while studying at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji; the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC), came up with the slogan, *Noqu Kalau na noqu Vanua*, “My God and my Land.” The connotation was political and racial. To the minds of the ordinary Fijians, Fiji was not for the foreigners. Fijians alone were the legitimate children of the motherland. They were the true *vakavanua*, “those who live according to the way of the land” (Katz 1983:27)

<sup>25</sup> *Vunatarai* is a compound of two words: *vuna*, meaning root, cause, and beginning; and *tarai* meaning people – hence people sharing a common root or origin (Epstein 1992:49).

<sup>26</sup> According to Neumann, “The term *vunatarai* refers to a group of common matrilineal descent. It is, however, impossible to translate *vunatarai* consistently as ‘clan’ or ‘lineage,’ for it’s meaning is flexible and depends on the context in which it is used. The use of the word also differs slightly regionally” (1992:51; cf. A.L. Epstein 1969:100, 122-126, 162-164).

not simply to differentiate one from the other; rather, they connote the concept of *avet ma diat*, “us” and “them.” a perfect example of dualism among the Tolai<sup>28</sup> (Epstein 1969:14; 1992:48-52; Neumann 1992:51-52; Waninara 1998:46). The smaller units are termed *apik tarai*, “lineage” or *kakang*, “lineages” or “sub-clans.”

The Tolai moiety system is responsible for, (i) regulating “marriages through the taboo on sexual relations between parties of the same moiety; breach of this taboo was one of the most heinous offenses known to the Tolai” (Epstein 1992:50), and (ii) regulating such other institutions as land tenure (Biskup, ed. 1974:101-104; A.L. Epstein 1969:14); leadership (S.T. Epstein 1972:40-59); and the *dukduk* and *tumbuan* male cult society (Sack 1974:74-79). Although moiety is rooted in the notion of common descent; like the Mandak of central New Ireland, it “does not have a genealogical structure at all” and “has neither internal organization nor leadership . . . it constitutes a category, not a group in the strict sense” (Epstein 1992:50). The *vunatarai* can also be understood to mean the dispersed groups or local lineages.

Belonging to a clan not only makes relationships with other members possible, but it opens up other network of relationships and privileges comprising; identification with the group’s founding leader,<sup>29</sup> contemporary or ancestor, with ultimate reference to a parcel/parcels of land associated with the founding ancestor. As part of the network of privileges, members, but especially the clan leaders, can trace matrilineal descent through a genealogical connection with the founding *patuana*, ancestor. Within this context, land

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<sup>27</sup> Alternative names to the moieties are *manigulai* and *tarangau*, both belong to the hawk family of birds. The moieties are also referred to as *makadao* and *kubar*.

<sup>28</sup> From interviews I had with Simon Pencil of Malmaluan village (7.19.2004), Rev. Nelson Teko of Raluana village (7.20.2004), and Oliver Balbal of the Vudal Agricultural University in Rabaul, East New Britain, who is a Tolai from Raluana village (7.21.2004).

<sup>29</sup> The leader is said to be the *mandapai* or *vunapaina*, a source from whom the group derives its existence.

ownership can be traced when land disputes or conflicts are arbitrated over by the elders.<sup>30</sup>

Social organization and social relationship among the Tolai can only be understood in the contexts of the hamlets, villages, moiety, clans, lineages, marriage, and/or other free associations permitted within the context of extended relationship. Epstein notes, "...individuals were free in certain contexts to stand apart from their close matrilineal kinsmen and, invoking alternative kinship links, attach themselves to another group" (1992: 51). Understanding the fact that, social organization differs from area to area, there is one bonding factor: the Tolai trilogy comprising the ancestors, the land and the *tambu* within which is the Tolai world/cosmos.

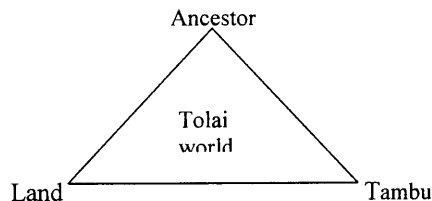


Figure 1. The relationship of the Tolai with the ancestors, land and the *tambu*.

The Tungag. The people known as Tungag occupy the island of New Hanover, also known as Lavongai, and its outlying islands and islets. The people speak an Austronesian language called Tungag (Reynolds 1973), a relational term meaning friend, brother or sister. Group identity is always locally constructed according to village, hamlets, clans, sub-clans, geographical locations or in horticultural terms.

<sup>30</sup> According to Samela Biamak, the East New Britain Provincial government lands office is using the traditional Tolai genealogical structure to help resolve some of the major land disputes in the Tolai communities. Samela is the Lands Advisor for the East New Britain Provincial Government, in Papua New Guinea; from an interview I conducted with him at his office in Kokopo, Rabaul, on the July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

Tungag mythology has it that, when the first ancestors of the Tungag people arrived on the island of New Hanover, they settled as one people at a central location in the interior of the island at a place called *Rinaiatukul*.<sup>31</sup> Following a series of internal disputes resulting from the acts of *paruk*,<sup>32</sup> “incest,” the people segmented into clans, and dispersed all over the mainland of New Hanover Island and its surrounding islands (Otto 1990:3).<sup>33</sup>

Wherever they moved, they colonized new areas, driving away and possessing the lands of the first inhabitants.<sup>34</sup> The process of *tanga vual*, “clearing of virgin forest” to settle and garden, became a significant act of claiming land in the name of one’s clan which would later become evidence of first occupation, in the event of a dispute.

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<sup>31</sup> *Rinaiatukul* is a compound of two words; *rina*, meaning village or place, *iatukul*, meaning origin or to give birth to; hence the Tungag have their origin from this place and as a people their identity was given birth to by this land.

<sup>32</sup> Traditionally, society guarded against *paruk*, a term that refers to sexual relations or marriage between two people of the same clan. The concept of *paruk* is equivalent to incest, sexual relations between siblings of the same parents or a parent with own child. The enormity and seriousness of *paruk* is under girded by the fact that every young woman from my clan is related to me through *sikei palau a ung*, ‘the one feather,’ a reference to the feather of the totemic bird that is the symbol of the clan. In a sub-clan the relationship is much closer for everyone is related through *sikei palau a tus*, ‘reference to feeding from the same breast milk,’ connoting a common female ancestor. Today, however, the *paruk* restriction is no longer strictly observed resulting in a lot of social unrests; and in fact it has become one contributing factor to internal land conflict between members of the same clan.

<sup>33</sup> Tungag societies are organized into twelve autonomous and exogamous clans, ranging from the largest to the smallest (Otto 1998:230-250). Not all the clans own land, although those who do not own land do acquire land by marriage or by a gift of gratitude during a *vag*, ‘mortuary feast.’ The gift of gratitude is known as the *kiraus ivag*. The practice of giving land as a gift of gratitude at a mortuary feast was also practiced among the Tolai and the Mandak, although among the Tolai the acuteness of land shortage due to population explosion and economic pressure on the land have contributed to the gradual disappearance of the practice.

<sup>34</sup> The last and most fierce battle the Tungag fought in their bid to secure the island for themselves, was at *Rinakilo*, remembered today as the *visvis iRinakilo*, the battle of *Rinakilo*. From two interviews I carried out in Kavieng, New Ireland and in Umbukul village on New Hanover Island. The first interview was with Dr. Sition Gion (an educational psychologist), Mr. Pedi Anis (political scientist), and Paul Taong; all three men are from New Hanover (August the 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004, in Kavieng). The second interview was with my two maternal uncles: Ekonia Passingantapak and Jonathan Vulaumat held on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004, at Umbukul village. Present also was an uncle from my dad’s side, Gerson Passinganmalus.

The Tungag are organized into 12 exogamous matrilineal clans, *mani*<sup>35</sup> or *patmani*, which are distributed unevenly around the island. Clan membership, Banks notes: “Is not based on residence but instead members reside in many different villages throughout the Island. In a village, a number of clan members represent the local segment of the clan and for the purposes of land ownership this is the most important group” (1997:8).

Tungag children will remain members of their biological mother’s clan even if another family adopts them. Any individual who may be residing in another community is still a member of the clan by birth and continues to hold residual rights to land. This arrangement, however, is increasingly being disputed.<sup>36</sup> In a virilocal residence situation whereby the wife moves to the husband’s community, the children will always be members of the mother’s clan, hence use rights to clan land.

The clan may be divided into sub-clans or affines, known as *tus*, “breasts,” relating to a common ancestral maternal figures who *pitusai*,<sup>37</sup> “procreated” the clan. My father for instance, belonged to the hornbill clan whose membership is unevenly

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<sup>35</sup> The term *mani* means bird (see also Otto 1990:3) and each clan has its own bird name including parrot (*ianga*), hornbill (*vengevenge*), seagull (*kanai*), etc. (Banks 1997:8). One of these clans, the *uk*, dove clan has gone into extinction. The peace loving clan was itself a victim of its lack of aggressiveness to survive. According to an informant, other clans used members of the *uk* clan to negotiate peace on their behalf; they were the ambassadors of peace on the island of New Hanover (interview with Paul Steven Taong, at Ligga: August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> It is no longer the rule of thumb that children who born outside of the mother’s clan and village are guaranteed the use rights to land when they decide to return. Things are changing, and it is for this reason that I had to purchase a portion of land for my children in September 2004.

<sup>37</sup> The word *pitus* has a much deeper meaning than the word *akau*, which means to give birth. Although the word *pitus* also means ‘to be given birth to,’ it connotes being carried forth into world and carries the idea of creating something new. It is also means to ‘found’ or ‘create’ something new.

dispersed around the island of New Hanover, but his sub-clan was called *tus i Luaut*, “the breast from Luaut” – his great, great grandmother was from a place called Luaut.<sup>38</sup>

Leadership. Leadership structure in the New Guinea Islands reflects a common Melanesian pattern, “lacking the leadership role defined by explicit power and responsibilities. The village does not constitute a political unit in the sense of having a central authority or specific governing body” (Clay 1975:22). Whiteman notes, “Melanesian societies, like those throughout Oceania, are all kinship based, as opposed to market-dominated societies. They are stateless and lack any central authority” (1983:56,57). Leadership is informal, with varying degrees of political power and influence open to attainment by anyone of recognized wealth and prestige. Leadership has little to do with the size of clan membership, although a “big man” must have sufficient base for operation.

The following is a brief description of leadership patterns among the three cultural groups in this study.

Mandak Leadership. Leadership is achieved by anyone of recognized wealth, prestige and who possesses “knowledge of magic, for use in sorcery and revenge against sorcery, taro gardening, bringing rain or sun, fishing, and healing. Taro and rain magic are among the most important skills of a Big Man, since they can be used to increase wealth and are important features of the feasting complex” (Clay 1975:23).

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<sup>38</sup>My mother belonged to the land kingfisher, but her sub-clan is called *siavun/tus i Patianging*, because my great grandmother was from a place called Patianging, so the land there belongs to my sub-clan. From an interview with my sister Dorcas Nekombatvala (third eldest in the family) and my brother in-law Sion Vekas at Metemana village on New Hanover, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004.



A number of local terms are used to describe and address men of influence; one in particular, *emasa*, a man with recognized power and respect. There can be any number of *emasa* in the village.<sup>39</sup> People listened to him for he was the voice of the ancestors to the people and his advice on all manner of affairs was sought after. Land disputes were often brought before the *emasa* and other clan elders. Apart from the *emasa*, internal clan disputes were presided over by the *erandi wuruk*, older male members or the “big men” of the clan. Clay notes that, “The oldest active male is the one who actually makes the decisions, but deference is always given to the most ancient representative of the social unit” (1975:23).

Tolai Leadership. The founding ancestor of a clan is called a *patuana*. The leader of the *vunatarai* is called *lualua* or a *ngala*, “big man.” A *lualua*’s reputation depends on his, “occasionally her, oratory skills, *tabu* and money resources, knowledge of customary, genealogical, and land matters, and amount of controlled land. The better the reputation and means to take care of followers, the more people will align with the particular *lualua*,<sup>40</sup> and the bigger his, occasionally her, *vunatarai* will be” (Neumann 1992:51).

The *ngala*, “big man,” is a “financial as well as a political leader” who takes advantage of his prestigious role to sponsor and organize a variety of ceremonies of different kinds, thus converting his prestige into power for the purpose of social, political and economic monopoly over others; e.g. the “big man” Talili in 1875 (see Threlfall 1975:43-46). Like most areas in Melanesia, leadership is contested among the Tolai,

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<sup>39</sup> The *emasa* was almost a sacred individual, receiving differential treatment: the *emasa* is the first to be served at feasts and be given the best pieces of pork; which others would carry to his house. Children were not allowed to play or talk loudly in his presence, and no one must walk behind him.

<sup>40</sup> Occasionally, at the death of a renowned *lualua*, clan elder/big man, the *vunatarai* split into several different *vunatarai*, local lineages.

whereby reputation plays a major role in the selection of the leader. In many instances the *ngala*, clan big man was distinct from the “warlords,” a *lualua na vinarubu*.

Leadership among the Tungag. Traditional clan leaders were called *vaitas* or *pasingan*,<sup>41</sup> an overall “big man” among the Tungag. The qualification for a leadership role comprised: accumulation of wealth, sponsoring initiation rituals, having magical knowledge, possessing oratory skills, and being successful in battle. The *vosap* or *volava*, “warlord” or “war leader” was another category of leadership whose role was to take and lead his clan into warfare against enemy clans. Those under the command of the *volava* in battle were the *maratibtib*, who were the “novitiates” or “trainees” in the Tungag’s school of leadership.

Because the *passingan* was expected to be “the man of the people” he has to be hospitable, thus qualifying him to be polygamous, so that the wives can be able to feed the many people that come to him for advice on about every issue. A *maratibtib*, “novitiate,” in order to become a *pasingan*, a “big man,” has to successfully go through four other stages.<sup>42</sup> Most land disputes were arbitrated by a *pasingan*, for he was well

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<sup>41</sup> According to Dr. Gion and Pedi Anis, there was a distinction between *vaitas* and *pasingan*. *Vaitas* was one stage lower than the *pasingan*. To become a *pasingan* one must begin as a *maratibtib*, novitiate, and then move up to *vaitas*, *vosap* and then finally *pasingan*. There can only be one *pasingan* at a time, a position that can be contested (Interview: August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004). “A *passingan* was a man who had already been recognised as a leader and who was recognised beyond the clan as a strong man and leader in the community. He was an important man whose co-operation was sought [after] in all matters of any consequences” (Banks 1997:9). The words *volava*, *vosap* and *pasingan* have found their way into the theological expression of the people: e.g. the title Lord Jesus is *Pasingan Iesu*, and God is referred as the *Volava* or *Vosap*.

<sup>42</sup> A *pasingan*, “big man” was schooled in everything relating to the Tungag worldview, traditional values, the bio-cosmic relationship of the Tungag to the natural environment, and the whole Tungag cosmology. In the past the role of a *pasingan* was mystical, because there was an aura of supernaturalism in and around the individual. Often the people would say of the *pasingan* that *kapo pasal veri vap palau*, “he is always in the company of the spirits” or *ri vap palau kipo aol ia*, “he is being possessed by the supernatural powers,” hence he was always the final authority to appeal to when disputes could not be solved at clan or community levels. The ancestral spirits were the sources of the *pasingan*’s wisdom, knowledge and guidance; which he sought for through dreams and rituals.

versed in the land issues, often assisted by a council of clan elders. Negotiation and consultation among the different levels of leadership and the people was the strength and main trademark of Tungag traditional leadership (Tobul 2003:6).

Today, modern day leaders have emerged, overshadowing the political leadership of clan leaders. Political leadership is now located at the community level in the form of elected community leaders. Older male villagers believe they perceive in most elected leaders qualities of traditional leadership, more so than in the young leaders who negotiate with companies on behalf of the people (Otto 1990:3-5; Banks 1997:10). There is a tendency among young leaders to co-opt big man attributes. However, clan leaders still play an important role in representing clan interests in land and land disputes, and in the distribution of benefits from the land, such as royalties from logging companies. The strength of their leadership is the area of consultation with other clan members, something lacking in the young leaders of today.

Some common features of New Guinea Islands' traditional pattern of leadership comprise; (i) The ability of a leader to command the respect of other leaders within the community or other neighboring clans and communities, (ii) The diplomatic know-how to establish alliances with neighboring groups through trade, marriage, a gift of land and gift giving toward a mortuary feast, (iii) Negotiation and group consultation was the strength of the islands' pattern of leadership, and (iv) Leadership was a religious role as well. Theophany would be a term to describe the fact that the ancestors ruled societies and communities in the persons of the big men.

Traditional Economy. A combination of shifting agriculture, fishing, and foraging<sup>43</sup> for the abundance of wild life on the land, characterized the subsistent economy sustained by the islanders. Apart from being subsistent horticulturalists, the islanders also domesticated pigs, chickens, and dogs for hunting purposes. Traditionally, the slash and burn agricultural method was practiced when clearing the land for new gardens, but the people were bound by traditional laws to allow used land to lie fallow for two to three years before being put into cultivation again.

Shifting agriculture was an important method of enabling previously cultivated land to rest and replenish nutrient inputs. Unlike those in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, the islanders never had any traditional methods of fertilizing or replenishing the nutrient value of the land in use apart from the fertility rituals/rites performed to ensure plentiful harvest. As was the case in other parts of Melanesia, “Almost the only divisions of labour are those based on age and sex [gender], and economic life is fairly uniform . . . [even though] particular regions tend towards economic specialization” (de Lepervanche 1973:3).

In pre-contact times, the islanders were also involved in a network of bartering, exchanges, and trading with their neighbors, across clans and language boundaries. The trade or exchange routes must have been extensive because there was evidence of a number of foreign shell money in use among the Mandak “the sources unknown, were

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<sup>43</sup> Foraging was seasonal, necessitated by the need for supplementary diet during the transitional period between planting, maturation of the gardens, and harvest. Or it could also be brought about by ritual restrictions on the consumption of certain food crops and food cooked by women. This is the same everywhere in the New Guinea Islands, except among the urban dwellers.

obtained in trade and circulated throughout New Ireland, Lihir, Tabar, Buka, and New Hanover” (Clay 1975:18).<sup>44</sup>

The traditional mediums of exchange among the islanders included canoes, fish nets, ceremonially significant food crops such as taro, yams, banana and sago, and most important of all the strand of shell money variably known as *evenugun* (Mandak) or *tambu* (Tolai) or *inangun* (Tungag). Today, many, if not most, island exchanges involve a combination of shell money and the national currency of Papua New Guinea, the kina. Significantly, the items of trade or exchange were products of the land, and not just any land, but one’s clan or sub-clan land.

### Land Tenure

This section will briefly discuss the different land tenure systems known to the three cultural groups in this study.

The Mandak. The clans and sub-clans and/or sub-sub clans hold land rights. The Mandak use land mostly for gardening and home-sites. They “distinguish between the use of land for residence and subsistence gardens and land as sites for ‘pulling in wealth’ (shell valuables or money). Land for gardens involves a wide degree of flexibility between gardener and owning social unit” (Clay 1986:142). The rule of ownership strictly applies to the use of land for the purposes of deriving wealth, whereby one is required to use one’s own land or sub-clan land. Traditionally, the distinction applied mainly to rain or taro magic sites, since performing the rituals was compensated in

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<sup>44</sup> The presence of the Lapita pottery in New Britain, New Ireland (in the St. Matthias islands), New Caledonia, Fiji and Tonga, gives evidence to the possibility of wider networks of trade and exchanges that the islanders may have been involved in over many years. Whiteman notes, “One of the outstanding features of the people associated with Lapita pottery was their superb seamanship, enabling the establishment of elaborate inter-island exchange networks which of course characterize many of the later trade systems found throughout Melanesia” (1983:45).

wealth. Cash-cropping is classified by the Mandak as a wealth drawing activity and so by law such cash crops as coconut and cocoa have to be planted on the recipient's own land or the sub-clan land.

While inheritance of the land is through the clan, there is a greater degree of flexibility. For instance, a man's clan and/or sub clan land may be passed on to his offspring, at a price, shell money in the past or cash presently. It can also be passed on to the children by virtue of them contributing to the mortuary feast in honor of the father's death. In spite of the inheritance law, no two clans even from the same moiety can claim ownership of the same land. For instance, the Katanuat clan<sup>45</sup> is one of several clans of the *Emalam* moiety. By law, it is not possible for another clan of that moiety to claim the Katanuat clan land.<sup>46</sup> However, there is one exception to the rule, and that is; "Broad contiguous [open] areas of land belonging to ebibinet [clans] of the same moiety are found throughout the Mandak areas" (Clay 1975:20; see also Powdermaker 1971:157-160). Each clan within that same moiety has the right of use to the land, for collecting building material, hunting and collecting of wild roots.

There is a strong connection between the Mandak's complex networks of kinship system, leadership, economy and the worldviews, and their traditional land tenure. Land ownership and land use affects all these other aspects of the Mandak life and existence, as much as they too affect the land. Land according to Beniona Lentrut "is everything to us. It is the essence of our personhood, of who we are as Mandak. You cannot be a leader without land and you cannot relate to others well if there is dispute over land. You are a

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<sup>45</sup> The Rev. Beniona Lentrut belongs to the Katanuat clan. I interview the Rev. Lentrut on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2004 at his home in Ligga, Kavieng of the New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea.

<sup>46</sup> Within the Katanuat clan, there are eight landowning sub-clans. Similarly, none of the eight sub-clans have the right to dispossess the other sub-clans of their land.

worthless individual if you are not rooted on the land, and contribute to the wellbeing of the community.”<sup>47</sup>

Land Tenure among the Tolai. Where does land fit into this structure? The *vunatarai* holds residual rights to the land, and gives out provisional rights/user rights to every member of the clan or lineage, at the end of which land reverts to the clan when no longer in use. Like their counterparts in New Ireland and New Hanover, women are the custodians of the land, and the men are the spokespersons. Since the roots of the clan rests with the mothers or women, land is passed down from the mother’s line to the children. A man will not pass down land and property to his children, but will hand land over to his sisters’ children and this keeps the land within the jurisdiction of the *vunatarai*, clan.

Sanita Waiut notes, “Land is a tangible property meaning that it is fixed or permanent” (2001:44). Land cannot be moved but user rights could be accorded to some one outside of the clan and at very special cases ownership can be transferred. Through special alliances and arrangements between two *vunatarai*, some land can be given as a token of that special relationship.<sup>48</sup>

Today, many couples are buying land for their children from either the mother’s clan or from a clan other than their own. Buying land for the children seems the logical thing to do, but in the long run, it is having some serious repercussions,

It threatens the traditional convention in terms of management, distribution, occupation and inheritance rights. No new land is being added, yet the population

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with the Rev. Beniona Lentrut at his home in Ligga, New Ireland: 30<sup>th</sup>, July 2004

<sup>48</sup> There were exceptions in the practices of land alienation and distribution that had to be addressed, and the Tolai had ways of dealing with those exceptions. One example of the exceptions is that when a couple have only boys, the boys will only hold rights as long as they live, but in death, the land reverts to the clan. Their children will inherit land from their own mother. But if a couple has only girls, then land of course will be passed down to their children.

is growing. The time has come when land is scarce. The more the couples buy land for their children, the more clan land becomes unavailable for clan distribution. (Paroi 2004:93).

Of course, the generation to come, on whose behalf the land is being held in trust by this generation of Tolai, will have nothing to be born into. In the past there was not such a thing as family land, although families like everybody else were accorded the user rights. Richard Salisbury claims that in the past, in accordance with Tolai tradition, couples buying land for their children did so with the understanding that the land did not exclusively become family land. The so-called “family land has more commonly been created by the purchase of cleared land (*a kunukul*); though such purchases despite the payment of large sum of *tambu* or shell money, do not make the land into family land in perpetuity” (Salisbury 1970:70). The purchase in shell money can only be seen as a deposit, because when the buyer dies, the original controllers will return the shell money and the land returns to the clan. The buyer, on the one hand, can make a special wish before he dies that the land be distributed according to the rules of matrilineal inheritance, by which the land reverts to the clan’s jurisdiction (Salisbury 1970:70).<sup>49</sup>

Among the Tolai today, as it is in the whole of the New Guinea Islands,

The matrilineal system of distributing land may be under pressure by both land shortage and the extensive areas under cash crops which are resulting in men seeking to purchase land from their *vunatarai* to enable them to be able to pass it on to their children, a trend which is giving rise to increasing disputes. (Cundall, et al., cited in Regan 1997:310)

What it means here is that, every time someone buys land from the clan, residual rights is automatically forfeited by the clan, because it is transferred from the clan to the new

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<sup>49</sup> The buying of clan land by families is brought about by the economic push due to the impact of the global economy on families who are struggling to survive in such a harsh economic situation. The buying out of clan land is creating a conflict between residual rights and provisional rights, a common issue in the Pacific today.



owners/users, who may not always be members of the *vunatarai*. When this happens Paroi notes; “the rules that govern such land [clan land] will no longer follow *vunatarai* land laws because these laws are only limited to clan needs and decisions. The result is that the *vunatarai* loses its control over such areas of land” (2004:94; see also To Waninara 1998). Shortage of land will not abate; it will continue to be a problem for the Tolai. Colonial practices of the past reduced the amount of Tolai land by forty-nine per cent. The problem is made worse by the 1994 volcanic irruption, which displaced 30,000 villagers (see To Waninara 1998), the increasing population and the expansion of cash cropping in the Province.<sup>50</sup>

Land among the Tungag. Clans and sub-clans hold property rights and co-operate when arranging marriages, funerals and mortuary ceremonies. The most important economic unit is the household<sup>51</sup> (Banks 1997:9; see also Billing 2002:17). But a household can call upon the assistance of the local clan as well as from paternal relatives and affines if required (Otto 1990:4).

Strictly, “a person only owns his mother’s land. He may use his father’s land if he gives a pig or a *mias* [*inangun*] (red shell bead currency) on the death of his father, but he cannot, in theory, pass the land on to his children” (Billing 2002:17). In a virilocal situation, the children, if they wish to remain in the father’s village, may be permitted to live on and use their father’s clan land but not own it. The land always remains the

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<sup>50</sup> The village of Raluana has the highest growth rate of 2.8 than any other parts of the Gazelle. In fact the population growth rate is even higher than the national population growth rate of 2.6. The high growth is creating a lot of problems for the people of Raluana; land to garden and to reside is now a major problem. The pressure on land is also due to the increase in cash crop activities which resulting in excessive use of large portions of traditional land (interview with Oliver Balbal: 23<sup>rd</sup>, July 2004; Simon Pencil, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004)

<sup>51</sup> A household includes the married couple, their unmarried children and may include the grandparents or a married son or daughter and spouse (Banks 1997:9).

property of the clan. While it is true that an individual may claim right of use through the local clan cluster, through which land inheritance was also derived, the situation is changing for the Tungag. Dorothy Billing makes reference to some of the changing scenarios in which; more and more young Tungag are turning towards their father's clan more than their maternal clan land. Individual ownership is also rapidly becoming the current trend among the Tungag

Billing notes that among the Tungag: "A comparatively low sense of ownership seemed to derive from the absence of a strong continuing ownership group in New Hanover, which jointly defended the claims of individuals. In New Hanover, an individual instead tried to defend his own ownership claims in the name of the clan" (2002:17). The increasing pressure for economic gains through the use of land brings about the situation. When this happens, ownership becomes a very fractious issue. The practice of *kag roe*, "falsifying claims over land," has led to many land disputes, even among members of the same clan and sub-clan. A person who habitually falsifies claims over land or any other properties is a threat to the solidarity, peace and well being of the community.

Land use among the Tungag is for the purposes of: (i) subsistence activities characterized by the slash, burn and shifting agricultural methods (Billing 2002:16), (ii) cash cropping, mainly copra and cocoa, and recently vanilla (Holdsworth et al 1983:161), and (iii) construction of new homes. It is a labor-intensive society, with a clearly demarcated sexual division of labor, but in most cases men and women work together in some social, religious and economic activities.

The staple food is taro in most parts of the island. Both taro and sago are ceremonially significant in mortuary feast and other major ceremonies. Like the Mandak, the ceremonial significance of taro requires being planted on the best land. While fishing and foraging are carried out, it is only supplementary, carried out in the interval periods between planting, maturing of the gardens and harvesting. The forest still provides much of the material for constructing houses/homes, for artifacts and for much of the paraphernalia for ceremonies.

In addition to land being inherited, there are two other practices among the Tungag whereby land was distributed to members of other clans.

Lease Payment. The practice called *katam*, “lease payment,” involves some one from another clan, paying *inangun*, “shell money,” to the land owning clan for the lease to a portion of land. The land owning clan has the power to reject or accept the *katam*. If the *katam* is accepted, a *vang*, “cordyline plant,” is planted to symbolize the transaction. The leaser may only use the land for gardening purposes at the end of which the land reverts to the original landowners at time of the leaser’s death. But if in his lifetime he wishes to have outright ownership of the land he can *seukopos* or *pulkopos*,<sup>52</sup> “pay in full” or “make a full payment” for the land.

Land as Gift. The practice of giving land as a gratuity gift or as an ex-gratia to some one from another clan was called *kiraus i vag*. At a *vag* or *matanangan i mat*, “mortuary feast,” the clan members of the deceased, out of gratitude give a parcel of land to someone who continually gives his energy and efforts to organize the clan’s mortuary

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<sup>52</sup> From an interview with Uncles Ekonia Pasingantapak, Jonathan Vulaumat and Gerson Pasinganmalus at Umbukul village, New Hanover Island, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

feasts or some other service.<sup>53</sup> In this situation, the land does not revert to the original owners at the death of the recipient of the *kiraus i vag*, it will, however, pass on from him/her into the normal system of inheritance through the recipient's clan. Tuwere speaks of a situation in Fiji that is also true of the New Guinea Islands.

The transfer of land from one clan to another clearly demonstrates the close relationships between land, time and event. Such transfer often marked an event to cement a friendship or to act as living witness to an agreement or covenant or to mend a broken community. (2002:39).

Outside of these culturally defined methods of land distribution and alienation, no one has the power to give land away.

### An Analysis of the Cases

The cases demonstrate five key aspects of traditional land ideology in Melanesia.

#### 1. The Sacredness of the Land

One notes that in the Umbukul case, Timot, the nephew of Naumelek was instructed to get a leaf of the *vang*, 'cordyline plant' and place it upon his uncle's head,<sup>54</sup> before begging him to reconsider his decision about not giving the land to the church. In

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<sup>53</sup> In 1996 Kambi from the *valus*, wood pigeon clan, was given a large parcel of land by the *ianga*, parrot clan for his numerous helps over the years in organizing a string of mortuary feasts for the parrot clan. Interview with Pedi Anis and Sition Gion: August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004. Another act of *kiraus i vag*, was accorded to Moses Isana from Djaul Island in the New Ireland Province who came as a missionary to the people of Umbukul on New Hanover Island in 1940, and because of the excellent work he did among the people as their pastor, he was given land (interview with Uncles Ekonia and Jonathan: August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004). This has also been the way some of the smaller non-landowning clans have acquired land from the bigger land owning clans. A woman from one of the small non-landowning clans marries into, say the *manilava*, eagle clan who owns a lot of land, tries her best to offer her services in cooking and other duties in the preparation for a mortuary – after a couple of years her services is recognized, hence she is accorded the *kiraus i vag*, a land she will later pass on to her children or clan.

<sup>54</sup> Notice that in a matrilineal society it is the nephew-uncle relationship that is very import. But one other notable factor here is the placing of the cordyline leaf on the head on the head of Naumelek by his nephew, Timot. In the Tungag culture it is taboo to hold someone on the head, for the head is where growth takes place, strength and power dwell, the soul of a person departs the body at death or enters the body when recalled by a shaman in the event of healing ceremony. A corpse is buried with the head towards the east for easy transition to the next life.

a ritualistic manner, Timot was required to walk on his knees towards the seated elder/big man, before placing the cordyline leaf on his head. Initially Naumelek had agreed to give the land to the church, but upon learning that the land was to be used for planting coconut and not taro, he changed his mind and withheld the land. The withholding of the land was based on the belief that, to plant any other crops other than taro on the land desecrates the land.<sup>55</sup>

The land is sacred to the people of the New Guinea Islands, as is the case of all of Melanesia. Among many things, the cordyline leaf symbolizes taboo in association with the sacredness of an object or property and/or the status of an individual. There is a connection between the cordyline leaf and the sacredness of the land. When the leaf was used in this case, it signified both the sacredness of the land and the significance of the authority of the one upon whose head it was placed. The sacredness of the land was not just an abstract idea; rather it was an integral part of the Melanesian worldview.

A Gift from the Ancestors. It is the property of the ancestors who gave it as a gift to their off-spring (Giddings 1984:149-172; Tuwera 2002:33-51; see also Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999:83). It “was [is] an ancestral trust committed to the living for the benefit of themselves and generations yet unborn... it was the most valuable heritage of the whole community, and could not be lightly parted with (Zoloveke 1979:4). The ownership of the land by the ancestors is a significant factor, for it provides a significant frame of reference in the event of land disputes. Land as a gift from God to the ancestors is closely tied to the people’s identity.

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<sup>55</sup> The Tungag people believe that, *man a roe kapo sipongan, kirak ka kini emung*, ‘when the land is desecrated the taro crop will not be the best.’ Because of the ceremonial significance of the taro, its cultivation requires a lot of rituals, and requires the best land.

Mediates Salvation. The ancestors through the land mediate life and salvation for their progeny. The concept of salvation is not confined to a spiritual interpretation. In traditional Melanesian religious beliefs, salvation is holistic, that is, it is physical, spiritual and psychological. Melanesian psychology of salvation concerns itself with deliverance from, (i) physical danger and natural calamities, (ii) barrenness in both human and animals, (iii) curses that affects fertility in the gardens, and (iv) other evils that lead to forfeiture of the *gutpela sindaon*, “life in abundance.”

Unlike the emphasis of Western Christendom on individual salvation, Melanesian concept of salvation is communal; it is the whole community that must experience the favor of the ancestors, through healing of the land, healing of barren women and animals, healing of gardens and the sea. In the Old Testament salvation was both holistic and communal. Tuwere holds that, “Life as birthing and dying is controlled by one’s relationship to the land, a relationship that traces its origin to the divine source” (2002:39). The land is the stage upon which the ‘saving’ activities or deliverance of the ancestors are perceived and realized. Through the land and on the land, the ancestors channel their blessings and make their ways known to the living. The living must adhere to the ways of the land set forth by the ancestors, in order to receive their favor.

A Link to the Ancestors. Land links the people to the ancestors/gods and the cosmos. The link entails a bond or a fellowship of the living with the living dead, and the generation to come. It holds the memories and bears the footprints of the ancestors, whose activities on the land are the reason for clan holding residual rights to the land. Residual and use rights had been passed on from the ancestors through the clans to

individuals and families for generations. People come and go but the land remains. This implies that human beings do not own the land; rather it is the land that owns the people.

There is a significant correlation between the land as a link between the living and the ancestors, and the belief held by Melanesians that the land has feelings and can be hurt, angered and/or pleased. Unlike the West, indigenous people believe that the whole environment is alive, life emanates from everywhere; they feel and live with it. As Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou note: “Animals and plants are part of everyday life in all societies, but in most societies they are not seen simply as natural beings. Many are believed to have their own spirits that interact with humans and gods” (1999:63). By attributing human characteristics to land, the trees, animals and everything else, Melanesians believe in the personhood of the whole environment with which they live in harmony. These can be illustrated in the following.

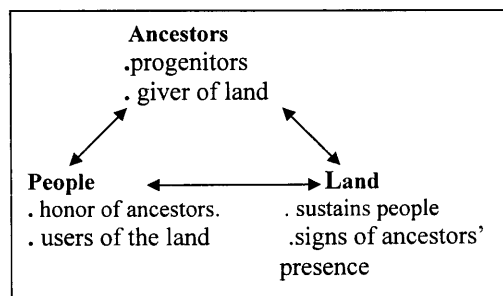


Figure 2. Ancestors, People and Land (adapted from Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou [1999:109])

Encodes People’s Theology. It encodes the theology of the people told in local myths (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999:111). Melanesians point to a tree planted by the founding ancestor of the clan, to a hill where the local gods live, and to a river, which marks the place where their ancestors fought a final and decisive battle over an advancing

enemy. The land is the dwelling place of the ancestors, the totems, cultural heroes, and creator gods whose footprints the earth bears.

Apart from the concept of traditional shrines, where the local totems, *masalai*, “spirits” and cultural heroes reside, clan lands and/or territories are the domains and thoroughfares of the ancestors and other supernatural powers/beings. On the land the continuing presence of the ancestors is felt, as they regulate the behavior of their progeny towards the land, rewarding or punishing every action accordingly. They have the power and “can bring blessing or curse depending on whether or not a community lives according to the beliefs, values and practices of the vanua [land]” (Walker-Jones 2001:85). Theologically, Melanesians believe that because land is a gift from the ancestors it must be used and cared for in their honor.

In relation to the discussion on the sacredness of land, a crucial distinction needs to be established between the concepts of *a pia tabu* (Tolai), “no-go-land” or “sacred land,” in the New Guinea Islands, and the general understanding that the whole land is sacred by virtue of it being a gift from the ancestors. There are two references to the concept of *a pia tabu*, “sacred land.”

Land Set Aside for Religious Purposes. It refers to certain portions of land that are set aside for the purpose of performing customary and religious ceremonies in honor of a long chain of ancestors, local deities and cultural heroes. Rituals for fertility of crops and domesticated animals such as pigs are also carried out at these sacred sites. These sacred sites are also the abode of clan totems, and the locations of traditional shrines.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Among the Tolai sacred land is inclusive of the *taraui* (sacred place of the *tubuan* and *dukduk*, ‘male cults’), the *moromoro*, *mandapai* and *matanoi*. Among the Tungag sacred land includes the *rinapukpukis*, *rinakavang*; and *ringmasalai*; and among the Mandak one finds the *eantuing*, *malanggan* enclosure, and men have their enclosure to prepare for the *eanis* or *tatanua* masked dance.



This is where the concept of taboo has a much deeper meaning and implication, because it has to do with ethical behavior and/or ethical obligation towards these benevolent forces that contribute to the well being of the community.

Dangerous Land. It is a reference to areas of land where malevolent spirit powers and *masalai*, “serpentine spirits” lurk. The people feared these sites much more than the other portions of sacred land. In many instances it was the *masalai*, “haunted” land people gladly gave away to the missionaries. The *masalai*, “spirit” lands were given to the missionaries as a way of testing the power of the new God the missionaries came to tell them about. If the missionaries did not fall ill and die, then their God was powerful than the local spirits, so they must embrace this new God and the new, foreign religion.

## 2. Traditional Property Laws

Melanesians had property laws that were equally binding as Western property laws.<sup>57</sup> Melanesians have law and, therefore, they have property. There is no property without laws to govern its use and to ensure maximum benefits for all involved. Enshrined in the Melanesian property laws were land laws which stipulated residual rights, rights of usufruct, land distribution and redistribution, and the respect for the authorities of clan elders over any clan owned property.

Traditionally, authority was vested in the clan elders. They were the final authority in matters of land use and distribution; the 1920 Umbukul case is a perfect example of respect for authority of the elders over the land. Among the Tungag, clan elders, usually older males, made decisions about land in consultation with the *ainapeu*,

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<sup>57</sup> The distinction between the Melanesian and Western concepts of property is much deeper. In Melanesia property is embedded in complex network of relationship. In the West on the other hand, the value of property is not perceived in terms of relationship, rather property is a commodity to be bought and sold.

‘matriarchs’ of the clans who are the custodians of clan land and the power behind land rights. Naumelek, the clan elder/big man of the *ianga*, “parrot” clan had to be approached twice for his permission to be granted for the land to be used. This was done in accordance to the traditional laws for protocol, which demanded respect and honor for those in authority, the elders. Woodley notes: “Indigenous people around world also have measures of protocol. Over time, manners and customs have been developed that allow us to show respect for those in authority. Native Americans cherish the wisdom of elders, and we honor our elders for this reason” (2001:151).

Like the Native Americans, Melanesians respected the authority of the elders, for the elders were the representatives and mouthpieces of the ancestors in the communities.<sup>58</sup> Customary land laws seek to protect clan rights and individual rights of usufruct, and among many other things, demands respect for the authority of clan elders over the land. Any violation of that law threatens a whole way of life, endangers a whole network of relationship, and jeopardizes the normal cultural process of inheritance.

At stake in this case was the church’s relationship with the community had the group of men not sought the permission of Naumelek to use the land for the mission plantation. Melanesian property law was always concerned with maintaining and restoring social balance in the community (see Sack 1973:1-18), not seeking for losers and winners. Most Methodist missionaries are credited for their respect for the authority

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<sup>58</sup> In the past, traditional protocol laws were strictly observed, because it was a matter of life and death. Prior to and at the advent of the coming of the white man, there were a number of *pasingan/vosap*, ‘big man’ at different locations on the island of New Hanover, who had the habit of paying courtesy calls on each other. For instance, the big man of the Umbukul jurisdiction, Gapi and the big man Rangai of the Meteran jurisdiction paid each other courtesy calls. Prior to making these visits, emissaries were often sent out *sikei a ulen aino*, ‘a month earlier’ bearing gifts of bundles of taro, several bunches of betel nut, one or two live pigs and some shell money to the one who played host to the other, in respect and honor of his authority over that area. In the past if the gifts were accepted, it was safe to visit, if they were rejected it meant danger. In many parts of Melanesia, it is still a practice today for one visiting to bring a *sevusevu* (Fijian), ‘gift’ to the hosts.

of the big men in the different areas they went to in the islands, when they negotiated for land to be given for mission work (see Threlfall 1975). Others did not, and along with their colonial counterparts showed little regards for traditional laws, thus creating tensions between them and the indigenes.

### 3. Land is Symbolic

The cases demonstrate that land is symbolic of a whole way of life in the New Guinea Islands, as is the case of Melanesia as a whole (see Tuwere 2002:33; Ravuvu 1987:14 and Walker-Jones 2001:84-86). In the case of Danks, his relationship with the people was affected by the fact that he desecrated their sacred ground by building a church on it; only to find that women and children could not attend. The whole way of life is inclusive of the religious, cultural and social dimensions of land. Land has religious, cultural and social significance to Melanesians and/or to all indigenous peoples of the world. To put the issues into perspective it is essential that I briefly discuss the three dimensions individually.

Religious Significance of the Land. I made references to this particular issue when discussing the sacredness of the land. What remains to be said, however, is this; land is an inseparable part of the religious worldview of the Melanesians. Land being an inseparable part of the religious worldviews of the people means, significant religious explanations are sought for in relation to infertility of the land, unhealthy growth of crop, poor harvests, and the failure in major mortuary feasts. Rituals play vital roles in bringing about healing and in restoring spiritual vitality to the land, only through which fertility can return, thus healthy crops, abundant harvest, successful mortuary feasts and the *gutpela sindoan*, “life in abundance.” By countering the negative forces brought on

the land, it does not only restore balance to every aspect of life, it perpetuates the centrality of the land as a means to realizing the *gutpela sindaon*, ‘life in abundance.’

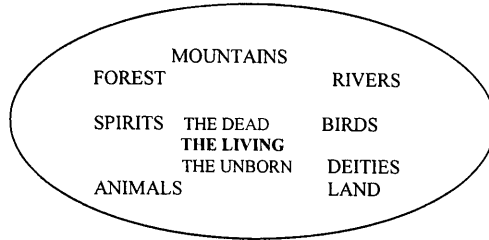


Figure 3. Melanesian Worldview

The Cultural Significance of Land. Land is an integral part of both the material and non-material components of a people’s culture. Land, like rituals and chants or one’s knowledge of art (carving artifacts) and knowledge of *malira*, “magic,” and/or labor are components of the people’s culture and are important property of the persons who own them.<sup>59</sup> An islander is taught very early the importance of land and its use in sustaining the whole or in holding life together. The Tungag compared land to a *laka*, “container” or *tepe*, “basket” that keeps everything safe and secure, and sustaining a whole way of life; once the container is ruptured, one loses everything. Among the Tungag the saying, *sinong kuli roe*, “rooted on the land” or *na siang nei roe*, “entering into the land”

<sup>59</sup> Unlike land, which is not a commodity for sale, any ritual for fishing and hunting, knowledge of magic and sorcery or a particular dance, can be bought with shell money by another clan or lineage. In 1989, at a graduation ceremony of the George Brown Pastors College of the New Britain Region, of the United Church in Papua New Guinea, several village groups performed traditional *singsing* dances. There was one particular group that performed a dance that was new and very different from any other. There was something different about the body movement, the lyrics, and the paraphernalia. The crowd was not only astonished but many were moved to tears. While the group was still dancing, a *ngala*, big man from one of the *urur*, ‘community’ on the north coast of the Rabaul with some of his clan members, in accordance with the Tolai culture threw *tambu*, shell money at the feet of the dancers to indicate they were purchasing this particular dance, the property of the other group to be theirs. While further transactions were later settled with the creator and composer of the dance, in accordance with Tolai customs, the lyrics of the song and steps of the dance must now be taught to the new group.

or 'being possessed by the land,' connotes the significance of being one and at peace with the land, entering into its security and/or being owned by the land.<sup>60</sup>

By its existence and uses, land contributes to a total life way and the wellbeing and maintenance of the whole community. Tuwere notes, "The *vanua* [land] is a social fact which holds life together. To be cast off one's *vanua* is to be cut off from one's source of life: one's mother as it were" (2000:36). For instance, for ten years (1989-1998), the Rorovana landowners of Bougainville, in Papua New Guinea struggled to regain their land; during and after they were forcefully evicted off the land by the Australian colonial administration, to allow Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia (CRA), the Australian mining giant, to mine the rich copper deposit in the Panguna valley.<sup>61</sup>

The struggle by the people to regain their land was symptomatic of the social, cultural, and economic imbalances and the spiritual void in the lives of the people caused by two factors: first, the forceful eviction of the people of their land and, second, the

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<sup>60</sup> Entering into the land also connotes one's characters as being formed within the community, so that the person's behavior characterizes the community out of which he/she comes. Wala Gukguk, the then last surviving leader of the Johnson cult on New Hanover Island said to me during my interview with him; "Tungag people are people of the land. We live, move and act as the land wants us to be." (September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004). It is therefore unethical to act contrary to one's Tungagness.

<sup>61</sup> In the early 1960s, a very rich copper deposit was discovered in the Panguna valley to the south of the island of Bougainville, the home of the Rorovana people. It was not only one of the richest copper deposits in the world, but by the time it was in full mining operation, it became the second biggest open cut mine in the world- second to South Africa. From 1968-1969, the landowners revolted against their forceful eviction off their land, by the Australian colonial government. It was the women who were in the forefront of the initial struggle. They "pulled up the survey pegs that would steal the land from beneath their feet and threw themselves in front of bulldozers.... The male landowners responded that it would be better for the Government to kill them rather than take their land" (Havini 2004:xvii). After twenty years of mining, the landowners felt they were not benefiting at all from the mine. This led to a renewed revolt against CRA, thus triggering off a pan-Bougainvillean revolt against the Papua New Guinea Government, and Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia (CRA), beginning in 1989. After ten years, and through the peace efforts of the international community, normalcy gradually returned to Bougainville. Although the mine has ceased operation, irreparable damage has been done to the immediate environment and has left physical, psychological and spiritual wounds in the peoples' life that may take three generations to heal. The permanent destruction of the land and ugly hole left in the middle of the Panguna valley will always remind the Rorovana people that the 'womb' which conceived them has been ripped open and the umbilical chord that attaches them to mother land has been severed, thus their survival and identity is destroyed.

removal of the land from their total life's experience. Removing land from the people is tantamount to pronouncing a death sentence upon them, because land is an inseparable part of the people's being and survival. Theodore Miriung, John Dove, and Melchior Togolo, educated Bougainvilleans from the mining area, write:

Land is our life. Land is our physical life – food and subsistence. Land is our social life; it is our marriage; it is status; it is security; it is politic; in fact, it is our only world. When you . . . take our land, you cut away the heart of our very existence. We have little or no experience of social survival detached from the land. For us to be completely landless is nightmare which no dollar [no amount of money] in the pocket or dollar in the bank will allay; we are threatened people. (2004:xix)<sup>62</sup>

It will certainly take many generations for the Rorovana people to re-establish their roots and regain their identity and sense of belonging to the land.

The people in the New Guinea Islands perceive life holistically, land therefore is an integral part of their integrated/holistic life's experience, so that what happens to the land affects every other part and aspect of life. When destruction, in whatever form is brought upon the land, a whole community is affected and the threat to the livelihood and wellbeing of the next generation is no longer the figment of one's imagination but a reality. For instance, in September 1994 the twin volcanic eruption in Rabaul on the Gazelle Peninsula in the East New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea, changed forever the lives of the villagers directly affected and the Tolai as a people; some 30,000

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<sup>62</sup> There are societies or people groups in the world today whose existence and identity have been destroyed or are on the verge of being destroyed through forced alienation of their land by outsiders: Aboriginal Australians, Native Americans, many South American peoples and the Rorovana people of Bougainville. And then there are those groups whose dislocation from the land of their birth as the result of natural causes, who also feel they have lost their identity; for instance the Tolai of the Gazelle Peninsula in Papua New Guinea is a case in mention. Then there are those who live as immigrants (20% of the world's population) in other parts of the world. And over 50% of the world's population who live in cities with no connection to the land. While the Mandak and the Tungag have not experienced dislocation from their land like their counterparts, the Tolai and Bougainvillians, it is a reality of life that land has always been and will always be a valuable part of the social, religious and economic equations for the islanders.

Tolai villagers were displaced. Caspar To Waninara notes, “Their relocation was not only a physical factor but even more so a psychological impact due to their social dislocation. The Tolai communities had been torn away from their traditional roots” (1998:v).<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, the rapacious actions of multi-million dollar mining and logging companies are contributing to the destruction of the livelihood of hundreds of people from New Ireland and New Hanover who depend on their land for everything.<sup>64</sup> Mining and logging destroy the land and alter permanently familiar traditional landmarks, which served significant social and religious purposes in the lives of the people. Culturally, land exists in connection with other cultural values that contribute to the total experience, well-being and maintenance of a community; and yet land is life itself. Without land, a person or a community does not have roots and therefore does not exist. In the New Guinea Islands, to be landless is to stop existing.

The traditional knowledge and perception of, beliefs about, and attitudes and behavior towards land and its values in traditional Melanesian societies are acquired, learned and shared behavior, by virtue of an individuals’ membership in a community or

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<sup>63</sup> In the major settlements to which the government relocated the people affected by the 1994 twin volcanic eruption, there is a deep sense of displacement in and among the people. They do not feel they belong to the land, it is foreign to them and they are foreigners in it. Their real homes are where their sacred grounds are; that is, their *mandapai*, ‘burial places, and ‘*matanoi*,’ sacred fishing grounds, ‘*taraiu*,’ male cult places, and their *moramoro*, ‘shrine.’ It may take two to three generations before the people can truly feel a sense of belonging to the place. Currently, the people feel they are sojourning, on their way back to the real *gunan*, ‘place’ away from the wilderness experience they are currently going through (Based on interview with the Rt. Rev. Albert To Burua, July 12 2004).

<sup>64</sup> On my research trip in 2004 (June 21<sup>st</sup> –November 15<sup>th</sup>), I went back to Papua New Guinea, and I saw the irreparable damages done to the land in many parts on the mainland of New Ireland and on my island of New Hanover by Malaysian logging firms. In my own village, the environmental damage is evident everywhere. The river that was once navigable by boats and supported the livelihood of my people is silting up and becoming shallow. When I was returning to the US, I stopped over in the capital city of our nation, Port Moresby for two weeks, and met up with Pastor Ernest Mata, a former student of mine from theological college (1978-1982). Ernest was leading a delegation from his area and was in Port Moresby to alert the government authorities of the untold damages being done to the environment and the land in his area by a Malaysian logging firm who are illegally logging in the area.

the clan. In order to understand the cultural values attached to land and the way people behave the way they do towards land, one has to seek to understand the cultural context of the people. Learning the ‘strange’ ways of other people is the key to understanding them (Keesing and Keesing 1971:21).

A proper perspective of land based on cultural beliefs and knowledge is important for the reasons that: (i) it will help the task of formulating a local theology of land for the United Church, to address the current ongoing land disputes between the community and the church, and (ii) it provides an alternative to the dominant Western philosophy of development, that commoditizes land for the maximum benefits of a minority and denying the relational aspect of land whereby the whole community benefits. The western philosophy of development also negates the spiritual or religious values people attach to land, thus in the process the sacredness of land desecrated.

Social Significance of Land. Socially, the significance of land in the islands is rooted in the complex network of relationships it sustains. This network of relationship is futuristic, cosmic and/or ecological. That is, islanders do not only relate to one another, the network of relationship is inclusive of the ancestors and other non-empirical beings whose help is always solicited, the yet-to-be-born generation on whose behalf the land is held in trust, and the natural world of animals, birds, trees, rivers and more. The land sustains human communities, in which people live, grow up to achieve their dreams, celebrate life, venerate their gods, and die.

Socially the land connotes alliances, ceremonies<sup>65</sup> and ritual activities carried by people who inhabit the land. The Tungag have a term *vaiang musungan*, “the land” or

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<sup>65</sup> Arthur Walker-Jones writing on the Fijian perception of land notes, “The ceremonies emphasized corporation, mutual support and kinship ties in the land. Moreover, this kinship and mutuality includes



“place” or “village is infested with people,” thus connoting the idea that land or place or village is alive, warm and *marias*, “beautiful” because of people inhabiting it. Tuwera notes, “Without the people, the *vanua* [land/place] is like a body without a soul” (1992:21; 2002:35; see also Walker-Jones 2001:85)

Relationship means the people work the land together and share the benefits of the land with each other. Community, clan members and individuals solicit the help of others to clear the land for new gardens, to perform customary rites and to carry out mortuary ceremonies in honor of the dead. Such social interactions served to consolidate old relationships and to establish new ones. Ironically, today, land which entails relationship has become the source of social friction and disharmony, due to land conflicts.

When there is land dispute, relationships are strained and the sharing of the benefits of the land is affected. Land sustains community and community entails reciprocity and/or reciprocal obligation of one group to another. Hoebel holds that,

Reciprocity<sup>66</sup> is the basis of all relationships for there can be no social relationship without interaction. Human beings are so constituted... that dependence without interdependence is not readily or for long accepted by the giver of services. He who gives would also receive. Through the building of a network of giving and receiving of services a society expands its potentialities... as human societies rest on reciprocity in social relations. The flow and exchange of goods among peoples is an important aspect of life. Gift exchange symbolizes in concrete form the existence of mutual interdependence between individuals and groups. (1958:346,462; see also Keesing and Keesing 1968:254-255)

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Earth. Ancestors and ancestral gods are in the land and many ancestral gods or totems are flora and fauna” (2001:85). The same can be said of the New Guinea Islands.

<sup>66</sup> Reciprocity in the New Guinea Islands is demonstrated through the acts of: (i) exchange of food, gifts, exchange of marriage partners, and land; (ii) in redressing wrongs through reciprocal payback in warfare, working of sorcery and witchcraft against the *embar*, enemy; and (iii) in the seizure of property or its destruction.

One major aspect of reciprocity is gift giving, but gift giving is not about the transfer of the title of an object from one person to another; rather the gift expresses and cements a social relationship (see Marcel Mauss 1925). This is also true of land given as a gift by one clan to another; it establishes and consolidates relationships.<sup>67</sup> Keesing and Keesing note; “A gift is a statement about the relationship between the giver and the receiver” (1968:254).

Land is safe when in relationship. Once it is taken out of the circle of relationship, the survival of clans and communities is threatened, because the basis and foundation of their survival is lost forever. A lineage or clan benefits from the network of relationships through which land is passed on from one generation to the next. Land given away within the circle of exchange relationship is always expected to be returned or is always at least available in the end. This is true of any other valuable objects given in relationship (Rynkiewich 2001:336-337). In the context of relationship no one forfeits his/her accessory rights to the land. Accessory rights to the land will always remain theirs by virtue of their membership in the land owning clan.

Traditionally, land provided for and sustained the bartering and exchange systems in the islands. The bartering and exchange systems contributed much to the consolidation of political alliances and perpetuation of ceremonial activities. The products of the land, which were harvested, carved, engraved, woven and tempered, became items of trade and exchanges. Many societies in Melanesia benefited directly and indirectly, through the network of bartering and exchanges carried out in the region for many years. Like

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<sup>67</sup>This was one big misunderstanding on the parts of missionaries and colonial administrators. For instance, refusal by the ‘white man,’ who took land from the indigenes, to accept reciprocal obligations, by virtue of him possessing their land is possibly one of the basic reasons for growing resentment between them and the villagers

everything else in Melanesia, religious rituals played a major part in the bartering and exchange activities, for it was the key to their success. The right use of the land, the course for Naumelek's concern, was underscored by the need for producing taro in abundance to meet the demands of *vag* or *matanangan i mat*, "mortuary feast" or *asesel*, "exchanges."

#### 4. Corporate Rights

It is the clans that hold corporate residual rights to the land. Chowning notes, "Title to land is vested in a corporate group, membership in which is likely to be based on descent, residence, or some combination of the two" (1977:38). Danks found his fence being moved several times in the night by villagers in Kabakada village, a symbolic gesture, signifying that land is not anyone's private property. When Naumelek of Umbukul village gave the portion of land to the church, he acted on behalf of the parrot clan, which held residual rights to it.

The New Guinea Islands' societies, like most Melanesian societies with the exception of Fiji and the eastern part of Vanuatu, were less stratified and had smaller political organizations. But characteristically, large matrilineal descent groups or clans are important features of the islands' social orders (Longgar 2004:43). The clans are the main groups that hold residual rights to the land,<sup>68</sup> and administered the land collectively. Every member of a clan has a "possessory right of usufruct, but not ownership" (Hoebel 1958:351), for ownership of the title was always vested in the clan, and/or sub-clans/lineage.

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<sup>68</sup> There were much smaller clans who did not own land, but can acquire or use land by marrying into the major land owning clans. In the case of the Tungag and Mandak, at mortuary feasts a member of one of these small non-landowning clans can be given as gifts, a portion or portions of land, by the members of one the major landowning clans in recognition of his contribution to their deaths.

Even though residual rights to the land belongs to the clans, they are at the same time the custodians of the land on behalf of the ancestors and the generation to come.

According to Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou;

Land has special meaning in many traditional societies. . . . Land is not a secular commodity that can be bought and sold. It is the symbol of a people's corporate identity . . . in most tribal societies land belongs to a vast family of whom many are dead, a few are living, and countless more are still unborn. It is the trust and sanctuary of the departed ancestors and the heritage of the yet unborn. The living is only temporary caretakers of it. (1999:64)

Melanesians defended the land at all cost in honor of the ancestors and the generation that was yet to come.<sup>69</sup>

The possessory rights of usufruct did not give an individual and family group the power to dispose of land to any outsiders. "No right of a person to dispose of land was recognised; for the ancestral spirits must have their place and the unborn generation must be provided for" (Rowley 1966:115). All land dealings had to go through the clan. Selling land is not the norm; it is a very rare practice that only happened under special situations; such as the sub-clan is from one of the non-landowning clans. However, land can be an object of exchange in a peace process, marriage, and/or be given has a gift to any foreigner adopted by a community, but strictly not for sale. Land given as gift to any foreigner is not classified as a "right" but as a "privilege."

While land is always inherited from the mother's line, matrilineal systems have alternative ways of gaining land rights. Children can and are able to secure user rights

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<sup>69</sup> Prosperity and blessing on the land depended on faithful adherence to the ways of the ancestors. In addition to this, Melanesian traditional beliefs, was more concerned with their own immediate locality. Their deities were not universal; and one group cannot share its ancestors with many other groups. Their frame of reference was their local community, local deity and their land, which they defended, at all cost.

of their father's land in two ways. First, the fathers, by rights recognized by the community or clan, can arrange for one or more of the children to remain on the land and to inherit whatever he planted on the land (Foster 1995:85). Among the Tolai, it is always the eldest child that is allowed to remain with the father's line and has the user rights of the land even after the widowed mother and the rest of the siblings have returned to their maternal land. According to Salisbury, an offspring without land may request use rights by appealing to the blood connection he/she shares with the father:

*"Iau laun tara gapu kai tamagu, I live by the blood of my father"* (1970:73).<sup>70</sup>

Second, in the case of the Mandak and the Tungag, the children bring pigs, shell money and taro both as contributions towards the feast for their father and as a token of homage to their father. The same is true of the people of Tangga Island in the Namatanai district of the New Ireland Province, who refer to such contribution as *marmaris na male* (Foster 1995:85). These were somber signs of respect for their father, and a gesture that cannot be ignored by the father's clan.<sup>71</sup>

##### 5. A Sense of Identity and Belonging

Land provided the people with a reassuring sense of identity and belonging. For Melanesians, identity with the land gives one with the overwhelming sense of being owned by the land. Wala Gukguk, the last surviving leader of the Johnson cult on New

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<sup>70</sup> Such a request cannot be denied. For a person to deny this request is tantamount to saying he cannot live up to his moral obligation.

<sup>71</sup> My dad died when I was 4 years, in 1958. By customary law his nieces and nephews should have inherited whatever belonged to him. However, my aunt Sera, my dad's sister, who did not have children of her own, quickly made a move to adopt my elder brother and I. With the adoption came the *seukopos* fees, 'redemption fees,' redeeming the land and everything my dad planted on the land, from dad's *vengevenge*, 'hornbill' clan, and gave that over to my brother and I. While aunt Sera broke with tradition, traditions tolerated such actions. But aunt Sera's action was validated by the fact that, uncle Sokut, mum's brother, had contributed a pig on behalf of my brother and I to the *vag*, 'mortuary feast' in honor of my dad.

Hanover Island said to me; “Tungag people are people of the land. We belong to the land, just as we belong to our ancestors. We live, move and act as the land wants us to be. It is the essence of our Tungagness. Take the land away from us and we will never know who we are.”<sup>72</sup> Tuwere, a Melanesian notes, “Man and land are one. He derives his name and therefore his basic constitution as a human being from the *vanua* [land], which is both turf and people” (2002: 49). Katz affirms this; “The substance of the *vanua* is thus the intimate relationship between land and people, a relationship both expressed and guided by tradition. *Vanua* then becomes a dynamic statement about how to live traditionally” (1983: 27).

Land is perceived “as means of livelihood, as a calendar of understanding time and organizing activity, as a link to the ancestor and a reassurance sense of identity”

(Tuwere 1992:23-36; see also Rynkiewich 2001:117). Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou note;

Land has special meaning in many traditional societies. Hilltops, rivers, caves, and great rocks are commonly seen as sacred places. Land is not a secular commodity that can be bought and sold. It is the symbol of the people’s corporate identity. . . in most tribal societies land belongs to a vast family many of whom are dead, a few are living, and countless more are still unborn. It is the trust and sanctuary of departed ancestors and the heritage of the yet unborn. The living are the only temporary caretakers of it. (1999:64)

New Guinea Islanders are often known by where they live. The equation of the islanders with their land and the ancestors of that land is foundational to their view of the world.

Traditional land use in the New Guinea Islands serves three purposes. First, a clan or community expects its members to be productive for productive member is an asset to the clan, which depends on its members to contribute effectively and meaningfully to the ritual activities, comprising gift exchange, mortuary feast and others.

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<sup>72</sup> From an interview I had with Mr. Gukguk on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 in his home at Meteran village.

Second, land procures the status of a person because it in the garden or gardening “that manhood is proven, a proof of the successful controller of deities of fertility and of the ancestral spirits is the successful crop. The exhibition of the garden produce is central to feasts which mark the great transition of individual life” (Rowley 1966:115). In some areas of Papua New Guinea for instance, a man’s fame as a gardener-sorcerer depends on the size of the yams or taro he harvests. And third, belonging to a land owning group erases the stigma of being a drifter/vagabond due to being landless. Every person is a child of the land, upon which one finds sustenance and contributes to the longevity of the land by caring for it and cultivating it.

#### 6. Land and Ethics

Land, its ownership, usage and distribution are strictly governed by the values and ethics of the people. Ennio Mantovani notes, “Ethics is understood as the principles and rules of behavior. The values give the motivation for the behavior and ethics present the way people usually act when motivated by these values” (1991:8).<sup>73</sup>

Perceived in this context, land “is not primarily a question of money, it is an ethical question. The same way as one cannot sell one’s mother, one cannot sell one’s land. The land can be used but not sold” (Mantovani 1991:6). Land is not communally

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<sup>73</sup> In the Melanesian hierarchy of values, community is one of those key values. The wishes of the community have to be carried out and the well-being of the community is at the center of every person’s intentions and behaviors. An individual does not decide whom he marries; it is the community that decides. The community consists in webs of relationships, that have to do with blood, marriage and land; and these relationships sustain and build the community. If these relationships are strained or destroyed, the community is sick and experiences loss of life. “The law which directs the behavior of the Melanesians seems to: “What helps the community is ethically good, what harms the community is ethically bad and what is indifferent to the community is indifferent”” (Matovani 1991:9).

owned, rather it is cooperatively owned by the clans, and it is how the land is used and allocated that should ensure maximum benefit goes to the whole community.<sup>74</sup>

Among several cultural values governing one's behavior and attitudes towards land, I have chosen to interact with three: (1) respect, (2) hospitality, and (3) human sexuality.

Respect. The virtue of respect/honor, like other ethical virtues is enshrined in the ancestral laws, and sanctions community behaviors and attitudes. The virtue of respect has a distinct religious meaning to it. Respect begins with one's veneration of the ancestors, and flows out into everyday relationship with one's fellow men. To respect is to be thoughtful and to be controlled in one's attitude towards the foundational values, which makes the people who they are, hence consolidating their identity has a people.

Generally, respect was demanded for elderly people, women (especially the *anapeu*, "matriarchs" of society) and elders of the clans, and younger female members of the clans and communities. Gender laws are strictly observed. Incest and greed are serious offenses and are destructive to the survival, harmony and unity of the clans or society. They stand in antithesis to the virtue of respect. Among the Tungag, the opposite of respect is *nauvaras*,<sup>75</sup> "being amoral" or "unethical" in one's behavior, which amounts to moral and ethical bankruptcy. Respect has much to do with the fact that New Guinea Islands' societies are shame societies. Extreme shame leads to individuals committing suicide.

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<sup>74</sup> The long-term benefit the whole community derives from the land is not so much in monetary terms, but in the perpetuating of harmonious relationship between every member of the community; where peace at the absence of conflicts reigns or prevails.

<sup>75</sup> *Nauvaras* is a compound of two Tungag words; *nau* which means one's face and *varas*, is nakedness or to be naked. The word therefore implies having a 'naked face.' One who acts outside of societal norms figuratively leaves his/her face uncovered; but one who acts within the jurisdiction of societal values has his/her face covered.



In the context of the topic of land, among the many things that must be respected are: (1) properties owned corporately and individually;<sup>76</sup> (2) the rights of others to use the land, (3) the authority of the clan elders over land, and (4) the environment and sacred sites. Disrespect of land and the rights of other to use the land is not tolerated by society. “Boundaries,” *pulis* (Tungag) or *langun* (Tolai) are important to protect and safeguard the sacredness of the land against trespassing, and the wrongful acquisition and use of land. Trespassing and conquest brings shame and anger, it amounts to an act of *kong* (Tungag), “rape,” violating the personhood of a female through forced sexual relations. If the violator of the land is a clan member, the action amounts to *paruk* (Tungag), sexual relations between a man and a woman of the same clan. The disrespect of indigenous land by outsiders makes them violators of: (1) the sacredness of the land, (2) the personhood of the people whose livelihood depends on the land, (3) the indigenous land rights, and (4) the virtue of respect, placing the security of the land and the people at risk.

Hospitality. Visitors to Melanesia often have difficulty adjusting to local hospitality. In group-oriented societies of Melanesia where hospitality is the key sign of identification with the people and the culture, one cannot avoid it. Homes are open to friends and relatives who come in unannounced and stay uninvited for a meal or two. Generally, all possessions belong to the community and must be lent when others in the family, village or clan needed them. To withhold these was to be branded greedy and selfish. Melanesian societies survived through sharing, greed therefore was a serious

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<sup>76</sup> The concept of property includes both the material component of culture (sacred objects, land, old burial sites, old settlement sites, fish nets, canoes, etc.), and the non-material component of culture (chants, charms, healing formulae, etc.).

unethical act against society.<sup>77</sup> There were, however, certain sacred objects and properties that could not be used by every other persons in the community except the experts in ritual knowledge.

In relation to land, the Tungak say, 'the land is more hospitable than human beings for it hides nothing from the eyes of a beholder. It lays before us its array of good things and invites us to come and get.'<sup>78</sup> It was inconceivable for a clan to refuse or deny any of its members the possessory rights of usufruct and/or to deny a member of any non-landowning clan access to land through a special lease arrangement known as *katam* by the Tungak of New Hanover. Hiebert notes,

Occasionally, when a lineage has extra land, it lends plots to members of another lineage or to strangers who join the hamlet. These people, in return, offer gifts of thanks for the right to use the land. On demand, however, they must return the land to the lineage, for it belongs not only to the living, but to the living dead and the unborn as well. (1995:103)

In view of what Hiebert says, the ethics of any society governed the actions of its members; as such it allows societies to devise social mechanism to fulfill ethical obligations.<sup>79</sup> Traditionally, societies in the islands condemned any falsifying of land

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<sup>77</sup> In some Melanesian societies, such as in the Sepik and among the Trobriand islanders in Papua New Guinea, greed is a much more serious crime against society than 'adultery.' In these societies wife swapping was a common practice. In the New Guinea islands a greedy person was stigmatized and occasionally ostracized. Generally, islands' hospitality was sometimes a problem for missionaries. Missionaries did not know what to do with 'natives' frequently fronting up at the mission station uninvited or how to respond to invitations by the indigenes to attend their ceremonies.

<sup>78</sup> These words came as we were advised against stealing other people's produce on the land. For instance, one may see a bunch of ripe bananas in someone else's garden, but he must learn to say no to the silent invitation of the land, enticing him to get the bananas.

<sup>79</sup> To facilitate accessibility to the land by everyone in the village or community, there were in existence three main customary land rights comprising the following: clan residual rights, rights of usufruct accorded specifically to clan members of the landowning clan, and public rights. Public rights refer to accessibility to land categorized as public or open land. There are some areas in the islands that distinguished between three types of land: (i) residential land, (ii) garden land, and (iii) the bush (see Bolyanatz 1956:47). For example among the Lesu people of New Ireland, there were usually two kinds of land and land rights: (i) clan land, and (ii) reserved land, also called open land or village land. The village land is owned and used communally by all members of the community/village, for gardening, hunting and gathering of seasonal supplementary food like bird and turtle eggs (see Powdermaker 1971:157).

claims that deny others of their rights to and/or use of the land. And while it is true to say, not everyone had residual rights to land, yet everyone had access to the use of land. The ethical commitment of every member of society to be hospitable to one another made the sharing of land possible. Today, however, there is a shift from corporate ownership to private ownership of land. The shift is to accommodate the economic pressure brought upon the people by the global capitalist economy, which perceives land as a commodity to be sold and bought, not a part of the network of relationship in society.

Honoring the Femininity of the Land. The feminine image of the land is a common phenomenon in many Papua New Guinea societies. The Huli and Duna peoples of the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea hold the belief that there are certain times of a month, when the earth menstruates. The earth menstrual blood comes in the form of particular oil obtained from the earth for body decoration during a ceremony.<sup>80</sup> For the Huli and Duna peoples, as long as the earth menstruates, the land is warm, fertile and alive.

Among the Tungak of New Hanover Island, a yellow-brownish substance found in many creeks is said to be the *tai i vuangai*, “excrement of a female spirit” which inherits the belly of the earth, while among the Sau Enga of Kompiam in the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea, the same substance is attributed to the menstruation of mother earth. All these signify the capacity of the mother earth to conceive and give birth to all forms of life on the land.

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<sup>80</sup> The recent discovery of a rich oil deposit in the area led to a large scale drilling work by two multi-million dollar companies Chevron Niugini and Oregon. At the beginning of the drilling work, the local were so fearful of the anger of the spirits in retaliation for destroying the earth.

Another aspect commonly associated with the feminine face of the land is the relationship between the land and sexuality, that is, human sexuality and the sexual activities of cultural heroes in primordial times. Habel notes, “Many Melanesian societies believe there is a strong connection between the sexual intercourse of humans and the fertility of their gardens and herds . . . intercourse in the garden is considered a stimulus to the fertility of the crops” (1979:5). In most New Guinea Islands’ societies such activity is taboo for it affects the growth of crops, but there is a common belief in the sexual relationship between mother earth and the cultural heroes in primordial times.

The feminine image of the land/earth as the mother is a very powerful one in most Melanesian societies, and calls for greater honor.<sup>81</sup> To sell land is like violating the personhood of the mother. No one parts company with the mother, unless one decides to disown the mother and everything else motherhood symbolizes.

### Ecology

This section will discuss two issues relating to the Melanesian understanding of ecology. First, I will discuss human beings relatedness to the environment (land, trees, rivers, rocks, caves, animals, birds, fish and the supernatural powers); and how that relationship shows itself in the Melanesians behavior towards the environment. And second, one other vital factor in the traditional understanding of the environment is bound up in the concepts of place and boundary.

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<sup>81</sup> The word for land in Fijian is *vanua*, *fonua* in Tongan, *fanua* in Samoan, *fenua* in Maohui Nui (French Polynesia) and *whenua* in Maorian. All of these relate to land not just as turf but womb. So for the Pacific peoples, the land and sea are not just soil and water, but mother as well.

## 1. Defining Ecology

Ecology is defined as ‘the science of the interrelations between living organism and their environment including the physical and the biotic environment, and emphasizing interspecies as well as intra-species relations’ (Allee et al 1949:1). Leonardo Boff notes that, “Ecology stands for the relations, interaction, and dialogue of all existing creatures (whether alive or not) among themselves and with all that exists” (1995:7, 9). Each species within an environment is “a part of a complex web of interconnectedness, an ecosystem” (Keesing and Keesing 1971:131). This interrelation is vital for maintaining the balance in the cycle of life. Each contributes to the state of equilibrium in the system. Human beings must play their part in maintaining that balance.

## 2. Relatedness to Environment

In 1990, a tree that was said to be thirty-five years old and had grown to some forty-eight feet in height was felled at the instruction of the Rev. Albert To Burua, the principal of the Malmaluan Timal Center in Rabaul. Because it was so old and tall, the danger of it falling over a faculty members’ residence during a storm was becoming a major concern to the school. In the first place, however, cutting down the tree was itself a major problem, due to the fact that there was hardly space to fell the tree without causing major destruction to the other school buildings.

The problem was solved when the principal, the Rev. To Burua, surprising everyone walked up to the tree and started talking to it. In talking to the tree, he begged it to be obedient to him by falling to a spot he will be standing at, beckoning it to come.

That is exactly where the tree fell; a little space between another faculty member's residence and the male students' toilet.

A Melanesian, perceived in ecological terms, is a component in a complex web of interrelationship with the physical environment and other organism around him. He/she relates to them and converses with them and receives responses from them. Melanesian cosmology is inclusively of the natural and supernatural, of which a Melanesian perceives him/her as an integral part. The whole ecosystem for a Melanesian pulsates with life and exists for the purpose of perpetuating life, here and now, and in the next. It is not for exploiting just to meet one's own selfish intentions, but to be used in a sustainable way for the sake of the next generation of users. The reality, however, is far from the ideal.

With the experience of intensive logging by Malaysian firms in the New Guinea Islands, a great environmental imbalance has been caused in the area. Longgar says,

For every tree that is cut down, we hear the whole forest scream in terror and we too feel the pains. It is hard for the foreigners to hear the cry of terror from the forests because they speak a foreign language, but we can hear the cry of terror, for we speak the same language as the trees in our forests, our rivers and every *manmanik*, 'insect,' animals and birds. For every source of water that dries up, we feel and hear the cry of the perched land to be quenched of its thirst; and we too increasingly feel the same longing to be quenched of our thirst, physically, spiritually and emotionally from our once free flowing creeks, brooks and rivers. For every tree that is felled, for every animal that is killed and for every stream and creek that dries up, the next generation is denied the right to a place to live.<sup>82</sup>

Keesing and Keesing note that humans see themselves as "in nature – and not against nature" and may "symbolically express unity with plants and animals in totemism"

(Keesing and Keesing 1971:137). In a similar way, the New Guinea Islanders perceive themselves as inseparably part of the environment.

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<sup>82</sup> From a sermon I preached on October 2004, in my father's village of Konelava.

The relatedness to the environment is based on the belief among most Melanesian societies that the land or the earth is their mother, out of the womb of which they emerged. They express their relatedness to the environment and the whole ecosystem in rituals such as, first, the burying of the afterbirth symbolizing the union they have with mother earth and/or the land. Second, their identity with the land is expressed in the naming of children after a specific tree on the land, or a place or a landmark. Tuwere says, "Naming not only indicates, it also creates. It establishes belongingness" (2002:90).

And third, gardening is far more than just an act of survival, it is part of a process in the whole rhythm and cycle of life, a mirrored expression of human fertility. Just as the womb of a human mother brings forth life, so does the womb of mother earth. Gardening as a ritual binds an individual to the land. All the activities involved in the making of the gardens, such as clearing the bush, tilling and tending of the soil, and planting of crops are done with a lot of care to avoid hurting the land, which may create imbalances and interfere with the rhythm and cycle of life.

Leslie Boseto, a Melanesian, continues to echo that sense of relatedness to the environment saying that,

Our tropical forest is the home and gardens of many species as well as our human communities. Our clean, fresh and cold water is from our forest. We cannot treat our forest as though they are not part of our existence. Our land and seas are us and we are them. This intertwined relationship makes us feel hurt or feel deep suffering when the earth is suffering. (1995:69-70)

Nestor Caoili, a Filipino writing on the experience of his people, echoes a similar sense of connectedness to the environment, shared by the New Guinea Islanders in these words;

The indigenous people see themselves as an integral part of Nature, and hence, one has to live in productive harmony with Nature. . . . the indigenous view of Nature is not something to be dominated. They live with the land. The land is viewed not as a resource to be exploited for profit, but the source of the group's

being. . . . The land possesses us all and is not something we can possess . . . . (1997:20; see also Whiteman 2001:52, 56)

Melanesians hold to the belief that the whole ecosystem pulsates with life and spiritual vitality. The forest or jungles gives one a sense of being engulfed in the mystic presence of a source of power greater than human power. Pragmatically, Melanesians believe the land and the whole ecosystem has feelings, and can be angered, and/or pleased.<sup>83</sup> By attributing human characteristics to land, the trees, and animals, Melanesians believe in the “personhood” of the environment. A careful study of the Old Testament reveals that ancient Hebrew culture shared similar perception of the environment as Melanesians do.

### 3. The Concepts of Place and Boundary

There is a sense in which the whole environment is perceived as one whole *vainagoan* (Tungag) or *gunan* (Tolai), place or village or home, in which human beings and everything else, natural and supernatural all live together. Each member of the village has the right and freedom to live and walk the village thoroughfare.<sup>84</sup> It is inconceivable in Melanesian thinking, that one would destroy his village and still expect to live in harmony with everything else.

The concept of boundaries in the New Guinea Islanders not only relates to land demarcation but also, is inclusive of all relationships and activities. There are social boundaries, religious boundaries, etc. Taboos and regulations are enforced to ensure observances of these boundaries maintain harmony. While the whole concept of the

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<sup>83</sup> A plentiful harvest signifies the pleasure of the land; otherwise a bad harvest shows that the land is not happy. A Tungag sees a plentiful harvest as evidence of the ‘*roe kapo sinong talang iau*,’ ‘the land is seated with its face towards me.’ The whole environment is said to be alive and spiritually charged by the presence of spirit beings that regulate its use and management.

<sup>84</sup> In a typical Melanesian village setting, animals and humans have the corporate rights to roam the village freely.



environment as being one big village is true, boundaries are set to include: (1) the distinction between the bush and the village; (2) day (light) and night (darkness); the spirits should have the rights to access the village thoroughfare at night, that is why people retire to their houses immediately after dark; evil also lurks in the cover of darkness (3) the ‘no-go’ areas and accessible areas; the shrine and communal land; and (4) which animals are to be killed for food and which are not to be killed. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou note that, “When boundaries become fuzzy, people feel a sense of chaos. When boundaries shift, people’s fundamental experiences of reality are threatened” (1999:235).

Currently there are problems with the fluidity of the boundaries. This is understandable because in the past there was no fixating of boundaries, and/or it was not agreed upon by neighboring clans. Individual clans and villages conceptualized boundaries, so that only clan members knew physical landmarks that demarcated one clan land from the next.

### Summary

Traditional land tenure was certainly complex to the mind of an outsider. Land ownership is vested in the kin group or clan, it is inconceivable that any one would have the right to permanently alienate land from the group. Societies had to have a highly adaptive variety of cultural mechanisms to deal with land conflicts and of land allocation in order to ensure an equitable balance between land resources and population. Land was highly symbolic and held emotional meaning to the people as “the repository of the

ancestral remains, clan origin points, and other sacred features important in tribal mythology” (Bodley 1975:83).

Traditional pattern of land-use was such that it makes the concept of waste or unoccupied land as irrelevant as the concept of private ownership. The method of slash and burn shifting agriculture practices among the New Guinea Islanders enables them to exploit their land in long-term cycles. Due to this practice, large areas are left unused for a long time to allow the land to recuperate before the resumption of its usage for gardening purposes. Clans had their sacred land, which every member was expected to respect and to fear.

Land is the sum total of all islanders’ relationship and activities that enhance social and spiritual equilibrium in society. Islanders’ cosmology comprises the ecology, the clan land, the ancestors, and the sacred objects, all of which are pulsating with life, from which an islander draws his/her strength, livelihood, identity and a sense of belonging. But painfully, one realizes that the reality perceived today, is far from the ideal.

## Chapter Three

### Western Ideology of Land

This chapter surveys the Western conception of land in contrast to the Melanesian understanding of land. The focus is on the impact of the Western ideology of land on the customary land tenure system, which is among the reasons for the land conflicts between the United Church and the people.

The traders, missionaries and colonialists who came to Melanesia needed land to build residences to live in and to construct other infrastructures in order to carry out their economic activities, missionary work and to assert political control over the indigenous people. The need for land meant acquiring large portions of arable land from the indigenes. But land to the Melanesians has a different and much deeper meaning than to the Westerners.

The ongoing tensions and conflicts between the church and the people in over what is called 'church land' or 'mission land' acquired by the missionaries from the people in the early mission era, among many things, is connected to the introduced Western ideologies of land and property into Melanesia.

The discussion in this chapter based on the analysis of the case study will bear in mind three specific areas related to the Western ideology of land. First, it relates to the colonial and missionary methods of land acquisition. The key players comprised the traders and planters; the missionaries; the New Guinea Companies (NGK); the Imperial government,<sup>1</sup> and the Australian colonial administrators. Second, there will be a

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of consistency, I will be mostly using the term 'Imperial government' to refer to the German colonial administration that took over sovereignty of the colony from the New Guinea Companies. I will not be using the term 'Reich' except when quoting other sources that chose to use the term.

discussion on the colonial and/or missionary legacies which are coming back to haunt the church on the islands; thus having a negative impact on its relationship with the people. Third, I will discuss the root causes of the land conflicts between the people and the United Church. The role of church in impacting communities in the islands with the values of the Kingdom of God is one of the concerns of this study. When the United Church becomes entangled in land conflicts, it loses its integrity and relevance in the community.

### Case Study

The United Church land in Kimadan was purchased from one of the major clans in the Mandak area of central New Ireland, the Kimadan clan, after which the land was named. In 1907, the Rev. George Pearson bought this land for 20 Pounds, two pigs and several bundles of taro. The original landowners' only surviving son, Martin Mas, provided one of the interviews for this case.

The dispute over this portion of land, which consists of 1,070 hectares, involves two groups of people. One group consists of Martin Mas' son and nephew (his sister's son). According to Jordan Watlen, another interviewee, they are under pressure by an outside group demanding that the church provide more compensation for the land. They argue that the initial payment was insufficient in the light of the current value of land. To show their frustration over the lack of payment, they moved on to a portion of land.

Another group is associated with a company known as the Pacific Rim (PACRIM), initially known as the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC). This company runs a number of large oil palm plantation schemes in Papua New Guinea

and the Solomon Islands. Without consulting the United Church in New Ireland, the company went ahead and planted oil palm seedlings on 100 hectares of the church land. This creates a real problem for the church. If the church prepares a lawsuit against the company, then the company likely will issue a counter suit. The church risks paying a substantial amount in lawyer and court fees, and even if they win, they may have to pay a substantial amount for the improvement the company has put on the land (Longgar 2004:81).<sup>2</sup>

### Historical Context

Land conflicts between the church and the people in the New Guinea Islands have their roots in the colonial history of Melanesia. Contact with the West through the instruments of colonialism and missionization exposed Melanesians to Western technology (metal tools), economy, Western goods and a foreign religion. They became fascinated by the “white man’s cargo,”<sup>3</sup> a fascination leading to seeking means to acquiring some of the “cargo.” The means to acquire the cargo had to be through trade with planters and traders or by working for wages as servants in expatriates’ home or as indentured laborers on the plantations. The introduction of wage earning activities had a far-reaching sociological impact on local communities. For instance,

- There was a disruption of people’s time and commitment to the land. As young men spent longer time away from the village on plantations the general leadership

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<sup>2</sup> From an interview with Martin Mas, Jordan Watlen, Rev. Timothy Gapi and the elders of Malom United Church; June, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Cargo is a collective word used in the Melanesian Creole or *tokpisin* (*kago/kako*) to speak of western, manufactured goods in their abundance.

in customary land tenure systems suffered, irrespective of the fact that women were the custodians of clan land.<sup>4</sup>

- Young men returning from plantation duties saw their labor input as a commodity they must sell and no longer a means to enhance relationship within the community.
- The contacts with Europeans on plantations, mission stations and in their homes, and the acquisition of European goods gave one a psychological and an economic edge over others. It created a class system of the haves and the have-nots, thus affecting the network of reciprocal obligations.

The contact also did much to expose Melanesians to Western worldviews, values and ideologies, most of which made lasting impacts on Melanesian ideals and values resulting in profound religious and social ramifications.<sup>5</sup> The people had little knowledge of the fact that these Western values, ideologies and technology were soon to change their lives forever. One aspect of the people's life which never changed was the cultural and religious significance the land.

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<sup>4</sup> About 15 kilometers from the city of Suva in Fiji, is the community of Wailoku. The community comprises descendents of plantation laborers from the Solomon Islands who were recruited by the British to work on the sugar plantation, in the late 1800s. This goes to show that many of the young men recruited for indentured labor assignments never returned to their land of birth. The Wailoku community belongs to the Church of Melanesia (Anglican Church). In 1996 I met in Suva, two members of the indigenous order of the Melanesian Brother-hood within the Church of Melanesia who serve among the community. In north Queensland of Australia, there is a big Melanesian community who are second and third generation descendents of former sugar plantation laborers from all the Melanesian islands.

<sup>5</sup> Garden production increased because the use of steel tools meant more land could be cleared in less time than the use of stone-edge tools. Fishing methods changed tremendously with the use of nylon strings, nets and metal heads for spears. The possession of steel tools and Western cash created a new social division of the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in the villages, giving a new leash of power to the 'haves' over the 'have nots.' The religious ramifications came in two forms: first, the islanders saw some 'white men' as the reincarnation of their ancestors or cultural heroes and heroines. And second, the abundance of the 'white man's' goods and the desire to possess it was the reason behind the proliferation of cargo cults in most part of Melanesia; such as the submarine cult in East New Britain; the Kivung Group in Toma also in the East New Britain and the Johnson Cult of New Hanover Island.

Melanesians found themselves having to deal with the Eurocentric attitudes of the colonialists and some missionaries. One needs to know the purposes for colonization, in order to understand the extent of the Eurocentric attitudes of the Westerners, which I do not intend to go into detail. The foreigners were in Melanesia with dual purposes. First, was to civilize and subjugate the “savages” into embracing the “white man’s” ways and to liberate their souls from darkness and savagery by converting them to Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Second, was to extend political control over the colonies for the purposes of expanding economic control of the region, obtaining cheap labor and the exploitation of the rich, untapped natural resources of Melanesia.

As such, the colonialists did not see as their prerogative the learning and understanding of indigenous worldviews, cultural values and ideals. They were convinced that there was nothing they could learn from a very “primitive” people, who at best lacked the intelligence only found among “real” human beings (see Trompf 1991:7-

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<sup>6</sup> When the Church of Melanesia (Anglican Church) missionaries first arrived in the Solomon Islands, they immediately proceeded to teach islanders “English, the arts of civilization and the rudiments of Christianity” (Whiteman 1983:104). Much of the education emphasis served as a process of alienating people from their cultural and religious values. Most of the missionaries failed to articulate the fact that the region of Melanesia was not a religiously virgin land or in a state of *tabula rasa*. Melanesians are very religious peoples.

In the New Guinea Islands, credit is given to the Methodist missionaries, for being sensitive towards the religious richness of the culture of the region, hence seeking to recognize the roles of the big men in the sacred societies, whom they approached about their needs for land. They also permitted the people to keep their *malagene* (Tolai) ‘traditional dancing,’ minus the magical rituals. People danced at major church festivals, such as celebrating the church’s annual *vartabar* (Tolai) ‘Thanksgiving Day’. They also saw the importance of the local vernacular in evangelizing the islanders, and so they worked hard in language learning and translation. Nevertheless, they too, like their counterparts in other parts of Melanesia failed to contextual theology into the culture of the Islanders. Most theological words were borrowed from Fiji and Tonga: e.g. *Kalou*, ‘God’, *matanitu*, ‘kingdom’ or ‘country’, *lotu* (Tonga) ‘worship service’ or ‘church’ etc...

12).<sup>7</sup> Such attitudes manifested in the way they behaved towards indigenes land and property.

Everywhere colonialism expanded, the colonialists alienated land from the indigenes. Peter Elder notes, “The imperial expansion of the nineteenth century made cheap land available to the emigrating poor from Europe enabling them to settle down and exploit the so-called waste lands of the Americas, Africa, Australasia and Oceania” (1998:1). On a similar note Paul Johnson says,

Never before or since in the whole of human history had it been so easy for the poor to become landowners. There was cheap land, in seemingly unlimited quantities, all over the world – in Argentina and South Africa, in Australia and New Zealand, as well as the United States and Canada. Of course the price was paid by the ‘backward’ races – the Bantu, Red Indians, Aborigines and Maoris. . . who were being dispossessed or killed off. (1998:2)

The way the land was acquired from the indigenes is one of the main concerns in this research. Melanesians like other colonized peoples of the world, fought to defend their land against the invading colonial forces. No matter how hard they fought, they found themselves overrun by the superior invading opponents.

Conflicts, however, are bound to happen when two cultures with opposing values and worldviews meet. On that note, land conflicts were the results of

Misunderstandings over property concepts [which] have caused endless troubles wherever Europeans and native peoples have come into contact. Both generally agree on what property is; seldom, however, do their ideas as to its meaning coincide. . . . The manner in which Europeans acquired land [and] the difference in the concept of land tenure and land ownership was a frequent cause for serious misunderstanding [sic]. (Reed 1943: 41,117).

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<sup>7</sup> Had the colonialists and missionaries taken the time to appreciate the Melanesian values and ideals, they would have found that the significance of land is embedded in the network of relationships among the people rather than a commodity in a capitalistic system. Hopefully this would have alleviated some of the conflicts currently experienced by the church.



European property laws among other things state that, “ownership meant not only ownership of the trees on the land, usufruct of the land simply while it was under cultivation, but outright possession” (Reed 1943:118). This obviously conflicted with the islanders’ traditional understanding of user rights and ownership of the land.

With this background in place, I will proceed to discuss the missionary and colonial land ideologies. For the purpose of clarity, the discussion on the missionary land ideology will confine itself to the Methodist mission’s cases, with occasional references made to their Catholic counterparts, where it is applicable.

### Missionary Ideology of Land

Missionaries came to the islands with a Western understanding of property based on the Western property laws which differed tremendously from traditional Melanesian property laws. At times the disputes between the missionaries and the indigenes over parcels of land were largely due to the clashes between the different property laws. The missionaries’ relationship with the people and their attitudes to indigenous properties, especially land, obviously reflected the Western socio-cultural contexts from which they came. The following will be a discussion of the socio cultural contexts of the missionaries, and a critique of the missionary tradition in relation to their land dealings with the islanders.

The Socio-cultural Context of the Missionaries. The missionaries who came into Melanesia, generally speaking, were men and women of their time. Langmore notes,

The mores, values, assumptions and aims they brought with them to the mission field were inevitably molded by their cultural and subcultural backgrounds, as much as their religious formations.... The nationality of the missionaries was, predictably, closely correlated with the missions in which they served. (1989:8)

The Methodist Mission in the New Guinea District had a strong Australian, German and Pacific Islands' components. The Australians and the Germans were the products of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe; likewise the south sea islanders were products of their own cultures.

To substantiate my claim that the missionaries were the products of their culture, I wish to give a brief discussion of two of the major historical events in Europe that shaped European thinking, and which may have also shaped missionary thinking. By the mid 1800, most of Europe had gone through social, religious, political, economic and scientific transformations resulting from the Reformation, the period of the Enlightenment and the aftermath of the industrial and agrarian revolutions.<sup>8</sup>

First, the agrarian revolution among many things did much to alter the outlooks of land tenure systems in many European societies. Social changes took place as the basis of communities' livelihood (land) was deeply affected by the shift from small farmsteads to large estates. New laws came into being to accommodate the shifting situation, which in the long run benefited the rich and powerful aristocrats, the landlords who monopolized land rights and use. Land became a commodity to be bought and sold for

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<sup>8</sup> John Bodley argues, "The industrial revolution can be called nothing less than explosion, because of the total unparalleled scope and catastrophic nature of the transformation that it initiated. Phenomenal increase in both population and per capita consumption rates were the two most critical correlates of industrialization because they quickly led to overwhelming pressure on natural resources" (1975:3). Therefore, he further argues that, "Industrial civilization is a culture of consumption. Industrial economy is founded on the principle that consumption must ever be expanded, and complex system of mass marketing and advertising have been developed for that specific purposes" (1975:4). But it is the rich and powerful minority that benefit, the masses are marginalized, hence industrial civilization is responsible for the creation of social stratification.

Technologically Europe was advancing, with the manufacture of steam engines, thus enabling traveling and navigation to be a lot safer, faster and efficient than in the days of sail boats, with machinery in factories that revolutionized the production of goods such as the replacement of hand-loom in clothes factories, and the mechanization of farmsteads to bolster production (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:49-85).

the economic benefit of the rich, and no longer the basis of livelihood for small farming communities and their families.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the nineteenth century saw also the “spread of Enlightenment thinking based on Platonic dualism and science based on materialistic naturalism. The result was the secularization of science and the mystification of religion” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999:89). Science became the king, and scientific knowledge the only true knowledge; based on facts and reasons, it seemed to provide answers to every human question and problem.<sup>10</sup> Missionaries who belonged to the evangelical version of Protestantism were influenced by the Enlightenment worldviews (Bebbington 1989:74).<sup>11</sup> Brian Stanley notes,

The Enlightenment has been blamed by many for making Westerners more arrogant and racist; yet it has been credited by others with making them more tolerant and open to learn. Some authors have identified the Enlightenment confidence in progress as one source of the missionary imperative, while others have seen the Enlightenment values as fundamentally subversive of the missionary Christian project. (2001:6; see also Bernstein 1995:338)

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<sup>9</sup> This served to intensify the mass gravitation of the rural population into the cities in search of work, mainly in factories. Because of the monopoly by powerful landlords, which saw small farmers struggle to survive, farms were abandoned as families sought alternative livelihoods. This was also the beginning of the proliferation of class systems in most of Europe.

<sup>10</sup> Due to the fact that Western Christendom came out of that socio-cultural milieu, critics claim that Christianity is therefore an inseparable part of the Western culture (cf. Gaquere 1984:146-147).

<sup>11</sup> “The evangelical version of Protestantism,” according to David Bebbington in what has become the standard work on evangelicalism in Britain, “was created by the Enlightenment” (1989:74). David Bosch also asserts “the entire modern missionary enterprise is, to a very real extent, a child of the Enlightenment. The entire western missionary movement of the past three centuries emerged from the matrix of the Enlightenment” (1991:274, 344). Andrew Walls states that missionaries to Africa, “were generally speaking, children of the European Enlightenment, their Christianity came adapted to Enlightenment values, they expected its transplantation to Africa...” (2002:122). The Western missionaries to Melanesia were no different to their counterparts in Africa.

There are others, however, who are arguing that the term (Enlightenment) has been abused and the whole Enlightenment discourse has been unfairly accused of ideologies that had stemmed out of other eras (Bernstein 1995:338).

In view of this, the spirit of the Enlightenment gave rise to several ideologies that influenced reasoning and worldviews all over the world.

For instance, the Enlightenment with its separation of fact and value (Newbiggin 1989) and with its general dichotomous worldviews may have contributed to Western Christendom's secularizing impact in many parts of the non-Western world. The impact of the Enlightenment worldview is evident in the features that are distinctive of the conduct of Christian mission within the modern Protestant tradition, particularly in relation to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Among many things, the land issue involving the church and the people in the islands and among other indigenous peoples of the world is an example of the influence of the Enlightenment paradigm on the church's attitudes towards the sanctity of the land.

Due to the influence of the socio-cultural milieu of their time, one source of the missionary imperative was their confidence in progress and development (Stanley 2001:6). Elizabeth Isichei writing on the Nigeria missionary experience notes, "In the middle years of the nineteenth century, British Evangelicals tended to believe that Christianity and Commerce went hand in hand. They envisaged an African producing raw materials, such as cotton, for British industry and purchasing the products that resulted" (1995:83).

Contrary to the African situation, in the New Guinea Islands the acquisition of land by Methodist missionaries was not for major commercial purpose that was trans-corporational in nature. Nevertheless development and progress were in the thinking of the Methodist missionaries. It was, however, a concept of progress and development

that was uniquely evangelical. The Methodist missionaries were more concerned about 'integral human development,'<sup>12</sup> a concept that was compatible with Wesley's teaching.

The industrial mission programs of the missionaries, which saw the acquisition of land for plantation was a means to an end; the training of Melanesians to be industrious<sup>13</sup> and the ongoing support of the mission work.<sup>14</sup> Within the mode of development and progress, labor and hard work are virtues; they are keys to achieving holistic development and progress. C. J. West notes another side to holistic development, which promoted the virtue of labor:

It is easy to be cynical about the belief that development and the best interest of the natives were complementary, but even in missionary and philanthropic circles it was generally agreed that hard work was the principal means by which the native could achieve his religious and social salvation, although these circles

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<sup>12</sup> The Methodist's concept of 'industrial missions' (plantations schemes and other technical programs), was not all just about profit for the mission work; it also had the following aims: (i) to teach habits of industry and useful agriculture to the workers and the college students; (ii) to give education and Christian teaching to the workers; and (iii) to reduce the dependence of the local church on overseas financial handouts (Threlfall 1975:83, Tippet 1967:45-69). My own experiences as a student in a mission run school affirmed the 'integral human development' concept, which formed the crux of mission education programs. The approach continued into the early 1970s. The mission run schools sought to develop students spiritually, mentally and physically. They sought to demonstrate that there was value in hard work/labor. The focus was on the usefulness of an individual to society (through the church), socially, spiritually, economically, etc. This was no different to the expectations of traditional societies in the islands, for every member to be useful individuals to society, because the survival and well being of every society hinged upon the contributions each member made to his/her community.

<sup>13</sup> The issue of being industrious is a thorny one, and was the course of some major relationship problems among the missionaries and Melanesians. Some missionaries saw Melanesians as 'lazy,' 'loafers,' and 'lying brutes.' But the missionaries missed two significant aspects of Melanesian life: (i) their concept of work was different from the western understanding of work. In Melanesia work was communal and ritualistic, and (ii) unknown to the missionaries they were dealing with a polychronic society whereby time is not considered as a waste, as long as the job is done no matter how long it takes.

<sup>14</sup> This is my personal perception based on my understanding of history, my own research into the mission history of Africa, Asia and Oceania and my own experience as a product of missionary work, growing up in the Methodist Church. I chose to differ in my opinion about and my assessment of the missionaries and their activities in the islands. There is so much to convince me that by comparison to the African situation, the Methodist missionaries did exceptionally well in the islands. The general impression of Methodist missionary work in the New Guinea Islands is still very positive today. During my research trips back to the region (1999,2000,2001 and 2004), I interviewed several former key leaders of the Church (the right Rev. Albert To Burua, former Moderator; the right Rev. Sir Saimon Gaius, a former bishop; the Rev. Robinson Butut, the Rev. Pulagis, etc...), finding among them a similar understanding. Having said this, the real thorny issue, however, is land.

might deny that this hard work should be performed for a European settler of entrepreneur. (1966:4)

There was, however, one other side to the notion of integral development, that is, the missionary goal was to civilize the indigenes while converting them. A converted and developed “native” is one who has accepted the “white man’s” ways. Critics of Western Christendom in Africa alleged that, “Christianity was responsible not merely for the glorification of European ‘civilization’ but also for the ‘conquest of the [black] mind’” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:4). Likewise in Melanesia, the Melanesian Mission (Anglican Church) in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and the Solomon Islands are accused of running education programs aimed at alienating Melanesians from their cultural roots (see Whiteman 1983:104-105). The boarding schools run by Methodist missionaries in the New Guinea Islands were one aspect of the alienating processes.<sup>15</sup>

The Pacific island missionaries (Fijians, Samoans and Tongans) were also products of cultures that were in some ways similar and at the same time different to the culture of the New Guinea Islands. A notable difference was the political structures found in Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, which were larger and more complex than the much smaller political structures in the New Guinea Islands. But they all shared a common affinity to the land.

Among the Pacific islands missionaries, their cultural differences often times were causes of internal conflicts.<sup>16</sup> The Samoans were the products of a culture which

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<sup>15</sup> A sentiment shared by several my informants, one person in particular; Oliver Balbal a Tolai from the East New Britain Province.

<sup>16</sup> There are accounts of near clashes between the Fijians and Samoans. The Fijians resented the abrasive attitudes of the Samoans towards the New Guinea Islanders. The Tongans were the more layback and non-aggressive group. It was the Fijians and the Samoans who set about to introduce new art forms, music and to substitute island dances they considered sensual and evil. The famous spear dance known in the New Guinea Islands as the *rumu* dance was a version of the Fijian famous *meke* dances. All three groups impacted also the gardening style of most areas in the islands.

deemed itself superior to other societies of the Pacific; especially the Melanesians.

Melanesians to the Samoans were inferior, culturally and intellectually. This perhaps explains the difficulties the Samoans had relating to the Baining and Tolai peoples. The Fijians were much closer to the New Guinea Islanders than their Samoan counter-parts (see Latukefu 1978:91-108).<sup>17</sup>

Critics of the Missionary Activities. My literature reviews revealed, that critics of the missionary movements and activities of the 1800s in Africa, Asia and the Oceania, accuse missionaries of the following.

Ethnocentrism. Most critics claim that like their countrymen, missionaries were agents of European imperialism. They are accused of working “hand in hand with colonial powers for the subjugation of the black people and the territorial extension of the imperialist power” (Pityana 1973:59; see also Gutierrez 2002:1-18). Pius Wakatama writing about the African situations notes,

Because of ignorance as well as ethnic pride, missionaries have often exhibited a negative attitude towards other cultures. They have looked on them as aberrations, their own being the norm. . . In some cases missionaries shared the same imperialistic ambitions that the rest of their country men had. (Wakatama 1976:14, 15)

But a careful reading into the history of the missionary movement into the Pacific reveals that not all missionaries were ethnocentric in their attitudes toward indigenous cultures. Christian Keysser, a Lutheran missionary to New Guinea (1899-1921), believed in the importance of “preserving people’s consciousness” into which the Christian message could be articulated (see McGavran 1978).

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<sup>17</sup> Several of the Fijian missionaries had the chiefly title *Ratu* at the beginning of their names, but perhaps their chiefly identity were overshadowed by their missionary vocation and commitment to serve their fellow Melanesians. Several of the Fijian missionaries married Tolai and New Ireland wives.

Hiebert notes “the West’s obvious superiority over other cultures proved the superiority of Christianity over pagan religions” (1994:55; see also Dharmaraj 1993:xvi).<sup>18</sup> The missions held that Christianity was true; other religions were ‘false’ and ‘pagan.’ It was therefore their prerogative to replace the false religions and change the local cultures. The problem was the changes were too disruptive because in their enthusiasm to replace everything ‘evil’ and ‘false,’ they ended up destroying a lot of the valuable aspects of the people’s culture and/or drove underground practices such as witchcraft, sorcery and magic. Contextualizing the gospel message into the peculiar cultural contexts of the indigenes was a non-issue at that time. In the long run, however, it created a problem for any attempts to do theology in the local churches in the islands today.<sup>19</sup>

What was the Melanesian situation like?<sup>20</sup> The nationalistic spirits and new theological thinking of the 1970s, hallmarks of the process of decolonization taking place in Melanesia, echoed similar sentiments.<sup>21</sup> Joe Gaquare a Melanesian from the Solomon

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<sup>18</sup> This did not only imply technological and military superiority, but intellectual superiority as well whereby the ‘white man’ saw himself as intellectually superior to an African, a Melanesian and an Asian. The non-Western person was ‘primitive,’ and of the lowest form of human specimen. Because some missionaries held this view, Western Christendom was perceived as an inseparable part of the Western culture (see Mucherera 2001:25-54).

<sup>19</sup> Any attempt to introduce cultural elements into the worship of the church is often met with the common phrase; “the missionaries told us these are evil.” My attempts to contextualize the Eucharist by using baked sweet potato and liquid from a young coconut fruit is greeted with enthusiasm by some and frowned upon by many.

<sup>20</sup> One needs to know that the Melanesian colonial legacies cannot be compared to the African situations, for three reasons: (i) African colonial legacies and experiences are much older and longer than the Melanesian colonial experience. One is talking here of almost two centuries of colonial experience in Africa compare to almost eight decades in most part of Melanesia, (ii) the British were not interested in Melanesia, they were more interested in Africa, for one thing, they felt they could get more out of Africa than out of Melanesia, and (iii) Africa is too big to be compared to the smaller region of Melanesia.

<sup>21</sup> As a student at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) from 1972 to 1976, I observed that African literature (on education, politics, etc.,) sold so well at the University bookshop. Many aspiring political science students embraced African political ideologies indiscriminately. Many student activists espoused



Islands notes; “Christianity came [to the Solomon Islands] with Western civilisation. Political colonisers and missionaries arrived about the same time. Thus Christianity was seen as the colonizing race’s religion” (1982:146-147). Melanesian critics claim that, the ethnocentric attitudes of the missionaries, showed neither respect nor appreciation of Melanesian traditional values, cultures and laws. Such attitudes, critics claim, were portrayed in the missionaries’ methods of acquiring land from the people. The missionaries are said to have grabbed all the good land from the people and helped colonizers exploit ‘native’ populations.<sup>22</sup>

Paternalistic Attitudes. Missionary paternalistic attitudes, critics claim, continued to undermine the indigenes’ ability to articulate the gospel message into their cultural contexts, and denied them the ability to reason with missionaries on vital issues such as land. Diane Langmore notes,

The child analogy that dominated responses to the Papuans in all four missions [London Missionary Society, Methodist, Roman Catholics and Anglican] acted as a sanction and a rationale for this relationship. . . . The dominant group, the missionaries, exercised a benevolent despotism over their subordinates, the Papuans, whom they saw as inferior, childish, immature, and irresponsible. (1989:127)

Similarly, the Methodist missionaries in the New Guinea Islands are accused of being very paternalistic, as perceived through the authoritarian controlled they exercised over

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the ideologies of three main figures: Julius Nyrere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Influenced by their thoughts and ideas, the student activists organized political forums and public demonstrations calling for independence for Papua New Guinea. On many occasions there were calls from student activists for missionaries to go home, accusing them of destroying Melanesian cultures, belief system and robbing of people’s land. Many of us, who believed in the good works the missionaries did among the people of Melanesia, went on the defensive.

<sup>22</sup> The dispute over the Methodist/United Church land in Ligga, New Ireland Province, is one such case whereby the Methodist missionaries are accused of showing little respect and disregard to traditional protocol, thus acquiring the land in the name of the Methodist Overseas Mission. The claimants; Balane Penias, Mandik Kapin and others accused the missionaries of misdemeanor in the acquisition of the land from the people. But reliable sources have it that a big man named Leri gave the land to the Methodist Overseas Mission: (Interview with Thomas Rambalis of Maiom village: June 29<sup>th</sup> 2001).

the islanders.<sup>23</sup> The missionaries saw the islanders as ethically and spiritually incapable of making right judgments and decisions.

Fearing the indigenes may relapse into their old ways, new converts were extracted from their villages to the mission stations for further Christian instructions,<sup>24</sup> and the young men and women were uprooted and taken away from their communities to be educated in mission schools.<sup>25</sup> It never dawned on missionaries that the alienation of people from their communities meant alienating them also from their land. In the process, the system of inheritance was disrupted, as young men and women who were next in line to become custodians of clan land rights were away in mission schools.

Missionary paternalism extended to include land. Caring for the souls of the people also meant taking care of their land, from which the proceeds will go towards caring for the indigenes, was one of the reasons behind the establishment of mission

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<sup>23</sup> It is said that it was the South Seas missionaries who were much more authoritarian than their white counterparts in their attempt to impose their understanding of Christianity on the people. They were so passionate about the way of the *lotu* and wanted the people to be as passionate as they were about the *lotu*. They introduced new forms of dancing, gardening, house and canoe building, handicrafts, fishing techniques and so on (Brown 1908: 199-200; see also Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:24).

<sup>24</sup> There were, however, some missionaries who were opposed to the practice of isolating new converts from their communities. For instance, Christian Keysser, a Lutheran missionary to New Guinea, repeatedly guarded "against undue or ignorant paternalism and constantly urges the ability of New Guineans to manage their own affairs" (McGavran 1978). In chapter 5 of his book, *A People Reborn*, William Carey Library, 1980; Keysser emphasizes the fact that it is the duty of every missionary "to form a congregation out of various villages and clans". Taking out people individually and forming them into a new congregation was not helpful to the people and to the growth of the church. Missionaries should recognize the preexistence of the social organism of the village or tribe; expose them to God's will and God's Word, thus "transforming it into a Christian tribe". One of the key concepts that Keysser talks about is 'the corporate mind' to imply that New Guineans do not think and make decisions individually, they do so corporately in communities. He argues that the power of 'the corporate mind' will come to the fore when people of like minds will become a church. In this case making a tribe or a village into a church will perpetuate the power of the corporate mind, enabling them to theologize corporately.

<sup>25</sup> Some missionaries resorted to scare tactics, frightening people about the judgment of God on them if they went back to their old ways or if they did not abandon their 'evil' cultures and customs and follow the missionary ways (not the gospel). It was the missionaries who decided for the people what was 'evil' in their culture. For some missionaries everything in the people's culture was evil; it was therefore their Christian duty to save the souls of the Melanesians from the evil of their culture that provoked the judgment of God (cf. Wayne Dye, *Cross-cultural Definition of Sin*; Robert Priest, *Conscience*).

plantations and other industrial mission programs (Rynkiewich 2004a: 35; Threlfall 1975:82-84; Tippett 1967:45-69). The missionaries saw themselves as custodians of ‘native’ lands, until they were mature and wise enough to protect their lands.<sup>26</sup> For instance, the missionaries of the London Missionary Society in British New Guinea (Langmore 1989:226-227) and the Presbyterian missionaries in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) in the 1870s acquired from the people and secured titles to large tracts of land from the people, not for themselves, but simply to keep the marauding planters and colonizers away from the people’s land (see Tippett 1967).

Lacking a Theology of Land. Is it true that the missionaries did not have a theology of land and/or creation? The library research I carried out and the interviews I had with some church leaders of the United Church, revealed that the missionaries did have a theology of creation and environment that was profoundly biblical. But I discovered a major problem, it was the missionaries who interpreted the Bible and theologized for the people. The result was, the missionaries were at times addressing issues that were irrelevant to the people. Theological answers were given to questions no one was asking; as such relevant issues regarding the land were not addressed theologically.

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<sup>26</sup> There was also the fact that the people themselves felt they could not stand a chance of defending their land rights before the ‘white man’s’ law, but the missionaries could because it was their laws, and so they could protect their land. For instance, the people of Kerewara in the Duke of York Islands called on the Rev. Isaac Rooney (1881) of the Wesley Methodist Mission to protect their land from the planters. So the Methodist Mission stepped in on behalf of the people. Sack notes, “Until then the Methodists had been unable to secure land for mission purposes” (1973:121), but the now the people were willing to part with their land by placing it as reserve land in the hands of the missionaries. The mission did purchase ‘a large tract’ from the natives ‘under these conditions’ (Deane 1933:279-280).

In spite of the positive impact of Christianity on Melanesians, theology was far from contextual; it was still a foreign import.<sup>27</sup> It fell far short of addressing indigenes' realities such as the religious significance of the land and the environment.<sup>28</sup> Other major issues that were not addressed included the fertility and infertility of the land, relationship with the ancestors, the inseparable connection between human beings and the rest of creation, clan rights to the land and the social and spiritual values of the land. The failure to deal with these areas theologically is a critical issue needing more discussion, in light of the purpose of the study: the developing of a theology of land for the New Guinea Islands.<sup>29</sup>

In this chapter, I purpose to submit some of these claims by the critics to historical investigation. First, I want to establish the facts and provide a balanced view of mission

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<sup>27</sup> The Right Reverend Leslie Boseto one of the three former Melanesian moderators of the United Church in Papua New Guinea, in his term as the moderator of the church (1972-1980) started calling for the United Church to become a truly indigenous church. In his writings and dialogues with the leaders of the church and other churches, he brought to their attention the fact that "the church we now have and inherited from the missionaries is foreign; it is still Western, it is a 'pot plant church' still being nourished and sustained by Western theologies and structures. It is high time we took the church out of the pot and plant it in Melanesian soil to be nourished and sustained by Melanesian theologies, spirits and structures" (Port Moresby, 1979). Others who shared his vision were his successor, the Rt. Rev. Albert To Burua, and the then following young radical ministers: Rev. Sebulon Seli, Rev. Esau Tuza, late Rev. Joe Gaquare, and intern (Alexander Dawia), and others.

<sup>28</sup> Like many other young people of my generation, I grew up in Methodist Church introduced to the *Buk Na Tinir*, (Tolai), A Book of Questions, which was the Tolai version of the West Minister Catechism. The Catechism was divided into 15 sections beginning from Creation to the return of Christ. In the Creation section, I still can recall the first five questions: (i) who created you? (ii) How did God create human beings? (iii) In whose image did God create human beings? (iv) For what reasons did God create human beings? (v) What else did God create or what is the extent of God's creative work? In the section on the Fall of Man, two questions relate to the discussion on land: (i) why did God place Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? The answer is: So that they can till and care for the land and worship God. (ii) Did they obey God's command? The answer is: No they disobeyed God and so they were driven out of the Garden.

<sup>29</sup> My own experience growing up in the church makes me regret not meeting Christ as my Savior earlier in life. This is due to the fact that the theology of the transcendence of God presented to us by the missionaries, denied us the right to see a God who was relational in his character. He was presented to us as not interested in my gardening, fishing, hunting, the land or the birth of new piglets. Religious experiences were very private and compartmentalized. Was God really interested in our activities on the land? Did he care much about the sow that was having difficulties in giving birth? Could God reverse the curses someone spelt upon my garden? These concerns were left unanswered by Western theologies.

activities so that due recognition can be accorded to the missionaries for the work they did among the people of Melanesia. It is, however, not an attempt to exonerate missionaries from the mistakes they made, but they must be fairly represented. Second, I want to establish that if some of the claims are true, then the landowners have a legitimate case that calls for justice to be accorded to them. And insofar as justice can be addressed theologically, I will seek to address some aspects of that in this study.

Land Acquisition by the Missionaries. One of the factors in the conflicts between the church and the community over land is the myth that missionaries stole all the good land from the people. The claim appears preposterous, but it is crucial to establish the facts behind the myth.

Purposes for Acquiring Land. There were several purposes for the acquisition of land by the Methodist missionaries. First, the missionaries needed land to settle on and build missionary residences, church buildings, and for agricultural purposes.

Rynkiewich notes:

When the first missionaries came to the islands of Melanesia, they asked for a place to live, a place to worship, a place to garden, a place to teach and a place to heal. Sometimes the missionaries followed their cultural practices and 'bought' land from the people or from the colonial administration. Sometimes the missionaries followed local custom and received as a gift the rights to live and work on a specific piece of land. (2001a:9)

The missionaries, by nature of their task, needed land mostly to establish mission stations to plan and carry out their mission/ministry programs. As mission activities grew and expanded, more land was needed to build new mission stations. With the expansion came the increasing need to evangelize, teach and heal the local population, thus the missions provided schools, health services through hospitals and clinics, which the colonial administrators could not provide for the people. The provision of such services

needed the building of infrastructures to accommodate and access the services; which meant the need for more land to construct roads and aerodromes (later in the 1930s). Financial support for these services meant establishing income-generating ventures; hence sawmills and small business enterprises were established (Tippett 1967:33-76). Faced with these tasks, the missionaries went to the people to request for land.

Second, the distance and the unreliable transportation movement during that period made support from home sporadic. And much later, the world wars contributed to the dwindling financial support from home churches, making it very difficult for the missions to carry on their work. These circumstances necessitated the steps taken by the missions to acquire large parcels of land from the people to establish plantations and animal husbandry for the purpose of generating income to support mission work.

Third, some mission agencies tried to acquire land just to keep other missions out of the area. The Methodist missionaries, “like other missionaries regarded prior occupation as the key to foiling their religious rivals” thus “they multiplied the number of mission stations in northern New Ireland when the Catholics entered that district [province]” (Firth 1986:142; see also Sack 1973:168-169). The Methodist mission’s direct challenge came from the Missions of the Sacred Hearts (MSC), who in spite of the attempts by the Neu Guinea Kompagnie to apportion land appropriately to each mission agency, tended to “extend Catholic landholdings within the Methodist domain” (Firth 1986: 143-144; see also Hempenstall 1975:53).

Rival mission groups were not the only reasons for the Methodist mission concerns. The Methodist missionaries were concerned about protecting the people and their land against marauding traders and planters (settlers), seeing it necessary to make

their presence felt in as many places as possible, to ward off any attempts by planters to acquire land from the people by deceit and fraud.<sup>30</sup> They were equally concerned about the general lack of moral constraints among the settlers, and the impact that might have on the people they were seeking to convert. There were instances of strained relationship between particular missionaries and the planters. For instance, most traders and planters did not get along well with the Rev. Benjamin Danks who always appeared to be interfering in their affairs by his constant defense of “native” rights to their land and his disapproval of their immoral lifestyle (Robson 1965: 104-113).

Methods for Acquiring Land. While missionaries were part of their culture, their method of acquiring land was very different than the planters and settlers, the Neu Guinea Kompagnie (New Guinea Company), and the colonial administrations. The missionaries were honest and fair in their land dealings with the people. They acquired land, first, by purchasing land from the people, a practice that began very early when they first arrived on the islands and made contact with the people.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In 1999 and 2000, in the company of my faculty colleagues from the Melanesian Institute, I did some research on land owned by the Methodists from 1875 to 1968 in East New Britain. The research trips were for the major land research project; Land and Churches in Melanesia undertaken by the Melanesian Institute. Then in June 2001, I undertook another research trip to my Province of New Ireland. On these first three research trips I began observing an interesting pattern in relation to the location of the Methodist mission land and mission stations. It took my recent research trip from June to November 2004, back to Papua New Guinea, especially to East New Britain, mainland New Ireland and New Hanover Island to confirm my observation. Methodist mission stations, I observed, were strategically placed near major plantation estates. I discovered that the missionaries never really trusted the planters to treat the people humanely, to show justice and fairness in their relationship with the people. This goes to show why the missionaries were a constant source of discomfort to the planters and traders, and it also goes to affirm reasons for the missionaries’ determination to make their presence felt everywhere as much as possible.

<sup>31</sup> Upon arrival in Port Hunter, the Rev. Dr. George Brown of the Methodist mission proceeded to acquire land for a mission station. Even though Brown and his colleague, the Rev. Benjamin Danks who joined him in 1878 (Robson 1965:107), bought land from the people who were not owners of the particular portions of land, at very “ridiculous small figure,” there is at least a record of the purchase made.

All transactions were carried out in cash, in local shell money, and trade goods such as axe head, tobacco and loincloths. By today's standard, as critics claim, these media of exchange appear worthless in comparison to the value of the land. However, our ancestors looked beyond the media of exchange, no matter how valuable they were, to see the value of the relationship that the missionaries had established with them, as worthy of the land they gave to the missionaries.<sup>32</sup>

In 1910, the Rev. Cox purchased from the people the land in Halis, on New Ireland at the cost of 20 English pounds, four pigs and an undisclosed number of bundles of taro (Longgar 2004:79). The land was purchased for the purpose of setting up a Circuit Training Institute (CTI), which later became the campus of the Methodist Teachers College.<sup>33</sup> Three years earlier, in 1907, the Rev. Pearson purchased two large parcels of land in the Mandak area. One was a parcel of land at Pinikidu village (the cost not known), and the other at Kimadan, from the Kimadan clan, as noted, at a price of 20 Pounds, two pigs and some bundles of taro (Longgar 2004:81).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This is one of the points that the critics of mission's land dealings are contesting. The media of purchase are the problems, when one thinks of the actual value of the land – not only in economic terms, but social, religious and cultural as well. But they fail to see that the significant element in the missionaries' land dealings with our ancestors was relationship. Our ancestors experienced it and they could tell that the missionaries were different from the planters and colonizers, for they "walked softly" among them.

<sup>33</sup> The college has since moved to its present site in Gaulim (in 1967), in the East New Britain Province.

<sup>34</sup> I interviewed Martin Mas, the only surviving son of the original land owning clan (Kimadan clan), at the Kimadan mission station in June 26 and 27, 2001. With him also were Jordan Watlen, Rev. Timothy Gapi and some elders from the Malom United Church. There are other major portions of land that were properly acquired through purchasing in trade items and cash; that I do not intend to discuss here. The records of purchase are well attested through missionary and government records (most of which were destroyed during the 1994 volcano eruption), and in the stories still told today by descendants of those who first "received" the *lotu*, church and the *misinare*, missionaries. All the land was registered under the Methodist Overseas Mission (MOM) as freehold land.



Second, the missionaries received land from the indigenes as gifts.<sup>35</sup> It was customary practice in Melanesia for land to be given to trading partners, refugees or any individual from another clan in gratitude for assistance in mortuary feasts, in exchange for political alliances and “in the hope that the new comers would be a help to the community. For it is the community well-being that is important in Melanesia” (Rynkiewich 2001a: 9). As long as the alliances last, the land remains in the use of the recipients, however, in the event of the alliances broken, the land reverts to the original owners.

Land as a gift to the missionaries comes in two forms. First, land was given to the missionaries out of gratitude for the good the *lotu*, “church” or “Christianity” and the missionaries brought into the villages and communities. There were clear evidences of social, cultural and religious transformation in the villages and communities. For instance,

- Decreasing substantially was inter-clan rivalries and witchcraft and sorcery activities.

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<sup>35</sup> According to Oliver Balbal (one of my informants: 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2004), it was the sacred society of the *Tumbuan* that invited the *lotu* from Duke of York Islands to his village of Raluana (one of the Tolai villages) in the Gazelle Peninsula, about early 1876, and gave a large portion of land (40 acres) to the mission. It was his great grand father who was the leading *tumbuan* in the village who invited the *lotu* to Raluana. In the Tolai society the *Tumbuan* is the overall and final authority in all matters relating to the life of the community. For an invitation to come from such a high authority, the missionaries had to obey. Of course one may argue that the motive behind the invitation by the *Tumbuan* for the *lotu* to come to Raluana had to do with coveting the new powerful (new source of *mana*) *malira* (Tolai), magic to add to the ‘collection.’ However, regardless of the motives, this is evidence which serves to disprove the myth that missionaries by deceit and fraud alienated land from the people.

On New Hanover Island, the Methodist mission station at Ranmelek was a *alilis* (Tungag), ‘gift’ to the missionaries from the people; so was the mission land at Umbukul village given to the Church in 1920 by an elder of the *Manilava*, Eagle clan: (interview with Uncles Ekonia, Jonathan, and Gerson; August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004).

- People were getting healthier than before with the introduction of western medicine and they were getting into the “white man’s” secret for the *gutpela sindaon*, “life in fullness,” through mission education (cf. Threlfall 1975:39).
- Food production has improved quantitatively, due to the fact that people were able to spend more time in their gardens without fear of being killed by enemy clansmen.

People also felt that the missionaries respected them. Unlike the traders, the missionaries did not push their way in; instead they “walked softly” among the people. They had the practice of making courtesy calls on the “big men” of the communities before carrying out their mission work in any new areas. They were more tolerant with the people than the colonialists. For instance, the Fijians tolerated the aggressiveness and “thieving” behaviors of the people of Kalil on the west coast Namatanai in the New Ireland Province. Their calm and fearless witness to the power of the gospel resulted in many being converted to Christianity, which further resulted in a change of attitudes towards the missionaries and Christianity (see Threlfall 1975:35-41). For these reasons the people gladly gave the substance of their livelihood, their land to the missionaries.<sup>36</sup>

Second, the land was also given as an exchange for the *lotu*, which the people saw as an alternative powerful form of magic, a new source of *mana*, “occult power” that they had to have. The hymn singing of the missionaries impressed the locals into thinking the hymns were new and powerful *malira*, “magic,” being chanted in such powerful voices.

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<sup>36</sup> Some examples of land given free to the mission are Malmaluan (1960) in Rabual on the island of New Britain; Ligga in Kavieng, New Ireland given to the mission by a man named Leri in 1929, and Ranmelek on New Hanover, given to the mission in 1935. These were major parcels of land given as a *vartabar tadav ra Kalou* (Tolai), gifts to God, for the purpose of establishing mission stations and training institutes to train church workers and church leaders.

The people perceived a notable difference in the hymns from the *tapialai*, “songs composed for the *tubuan*.” In many areas within the Gazelle Peninsula, New Ireland and New Hanover, people traveled and/or paddled long distances to buy the *lotu* with shell money.<sup>37</sup> When the people requested missionaries to come live and work among them, they provided the land for the missionaries to garden, build their homes and church buildings, and set up clinics and schools.

Total Land Acquired by the Methodists. By the early 1960s the Methodist Mission had a considerable amount of landholdings to its name. With the ongoing problem of people encroaching/squatting on church land,

Technically, the church has not lost land to squatters because the church still has the exclusive titles to those portions of land. If a calculation of all the Methodist’s land is made, it would be clear that the Methodists have acquired as much land as their Catholic counterparts, whom they had bitterly accused of land grabbing. (Longgar 2004:74)

In the early years of mission work in the islands, it was always a tricky business entering into land deals with indigenous landowners, but for the first nine years the Methodists had the advantage that there was no overriding law. Under the Imperial government, the colonial administration was not too friendly to any mission work. The irony was, “colonial enterprise tended to follow the Prussian line of thought, which was Protestant,

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<sup>37</sup> On New Hanover, when the church was first established on Kung Island and spread to Sosson Island, in 1925, the people from Umbukul village sent four men to go and bring the *lotu* to Umbukul village. Two of the men were Lakauas and Maripas. Not knowing what the *lotu* looked like, they brought huge *vebe*, ‘containers’, and bush vines to tie the *lotu* up and carry it back to Umbukul. They tied the *lotu* in the containers; for fear that it might escape enroute. The church had come from Butei in the Tigak islands to New Hanover through the island of Kung: (Interview with Uncles Ekonia Pasingantapak, Jonathan Vulaumat: 15<sup>th</sup> August 2004).

There are accounts of people from other parts of central New Ireland coming to Pinikidu and later Kimadan to request for pastors. Up in the Lelet plateau, once notorious for savagery was open to the gospel through the insistence of a local headman for the *lotu* to come Lelet.

and thus favoured Lutherans and Methodists over Catholics” (Longgar 2004: 74; see also Rynkiewich 2001e: 270-271).

The Methodists were able to acquire more freehold land in the New Guinea Islands than anywhere else. The rights of ownership to most of these lands were automatically transferred to the United Church of Papua Guinea. Over 60% of the United Church land in the New Guinea Islands is titled as freehold land. The remainder is leased under titles of Mission, Agriculture, Pastoral, Residential, business or special titles.

**Table 1. United Church Land in the New Guinea Islands**

Province	Lots	% Of all United Church Land	Freehold Titles	Mission Leases
East New Britain	178	5%	144	34
New Ireland	152	4.5%	80	72
West New Britain	39	.1 %	11	28
<b>Total</b>	369	9.6%	235	134

(Figure 4. United Church Land in the New Guinea Islands. Adapted from William Longgar 2004:74. Statistics calculated by Michael Rynkiewich).

Summary of the Purposes and Methods of Land Acquisition. The Methodist missionaries did make a lot of mistakes in their dealing with the islanders, but to allege they acquired land from the indigenes by deceptive and fraudulent means lacks historical validation. Obviously there are problems with these allegations. The claim of deceit and fraud is not new. Prior to the advent of Christianity, Melanesians went to war because one group accused the other of defrauding its members of their land and women. Today,

the trend has changed very little; Melanesians are still accusing each other of *kag roe* (Tungag), “land grabbing”<sup>38</sup> and taking each other to court.

My research has uncovered stories contrary to the allegation of deceit and fraud against the missionaries. Evidences of missionaries’ acquiring land from the people honorably are strong. Big men of the villages were consulted in the event of acquiring land; negotiations were carried out until all parties were agreeable to the purchase. History attests that, “in many cases it was the ancestors who invited the church and offered the land as a gift. That is, it was not the church making claims on the land, but the people giving land to the church” (Rynkiewich 2001b:68).<sup>39</sup>

The allegation that missionaries took advantage of the people’s ignorance of the true value of land at that time and that the people were unaware of what they were doing when they gave land away to the missionaries, falls short of the historical evidence (both the oral and written evidences) available today. Based on my research, the evidences are in favor of the fact that the people knowingly and purposely gave land away to the missionaries. They did so for four reasons,

- As their *vartabar* (Tolai) “gifts” to God,<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The practice of *kag roe*, ‘land grabbing,’ among the Tungag is a serious offense against any one person and/or a group(s). There have been many instances of rivalries and open confrontation over land between members of two opposing clans or between members of the same clan. Nowadays, people are making use of the mechanism of the land courts to settle their disputes. It is not a new problem, but it is serious when unjust means are employed to acquire land from others or when the use rights of others are impeded upon. This problem is bound to continue as long as the economic push to make a living will drive people to resort to illegal and unc customary means of acquiring land.

<sup>39</sup> I have found in my reading and literary observation that history always has its critics (bad critics), based on three factors: (i) ignorance, (ii) a general sense of intellectual dishonesty, whereby one sees the truth but refuses to acknowledge its existence, and (iii) when history is politicized for ones greed/selfish gains. Mission history in Melanesia has suffered a similar fate.

<sup>40</sup> The Rev. Albert To Burua (the second and one of the three former Melanesian Moderators of the United Church), the Rev. Sir Saimon Gaius (a former founding Bishop of the then New Guinea Islands’ synod/region of the United Church, 1968-1978), the late former Bishop Nason Waisale, Bishop Gerson

- As exchange for the *lotu*, “church” which the people perceived as an alternative form of magical power to give them control over other groups,
- Out of gratitude for the good work the missionaries doing among the people.
- Out of envy for the villages that had missionaries working among them. People in other villages were seeing the changes in those villages that have accepted the *lotu*, and wanted those changes also. The truth is, in most of the New Guinea Islands; people were ready for change. Land became the medium for bringing that peace to the people, hence staying true to its nature as the object of peace offering.

It is ironic to claim that the mission got all the land, when national statistics or records show that 97% of the land is still in the hands of customary landowners.<sup>41</sup> The other claim that the missions alienated all the good land also conflicts with historical evidence. Not all the land the missionaries acquired were prime land- many were swampy but through much hard work, the missionaries transformed the land into habitable places: one such place was Ranmelek on the island of New Hanover. There were also portions of land that the people were glad to part with because the land was

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Kapman, Bishop Ezekiel Tioty and several key lay people whom I interviewed all claimed that the ancestor of the New Guinea Islanders gave land to the Methodist mission as a gift to God. One of my former colleagues from the Melanesian Institute, the late former Bishop Simeon Namunu once said; “Our ancestors gave to God two most valuable things; their lives and their land” (1998).

My problem with the claim that people gave the land as their gift to God concerns two areas; first, was this really in the mind of the people from the beginning, or is this a very recent thinking of the church leaders who use this to counter land claims by the people against the church. And second, I hope the leaders of the United Church in the New Guinea Islands do not hold to this view as an excuse to deny justice to the people with a genuine need for land.

<sup>41</sup> Based on my interview with two Provincial Lands Advisors: Samela Biamak, East New Britain Province (July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004) and Martin Banlovo, New Ireland Province (August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004), and a Lands Court Magistrate in Kavieng, New Ireland Province, who is also a Lands Title Commissioner, Peter Toliken (August 4<sup>th</sup> 2004)

haunted; one such place was where the Methodist (now United Church) established the Rarongo Theological College in East New Britain.

The people gave haunted land away on purpose, to prove the power of the new God the missionaries were telling them about and whose ways they were teaching them to follow. If any of the missionaries fell ill and died then their God was not powerful. It happened that no missionaries died, thus the people became convinced that the missionaries' God was real and powerful. This example of power encounter was responsible for many islanders embracing Christianity.

Based on the historical evidences discussed so far in this chapter the claims of fraud and deceit against missionaries by critics who accuse them of misdemeanor in their land dealings with the islanders lack historical authenticity. Also in view of the discussion so far, the missionaries acquired land from the people properly, that is, there were proper negotiation and with a clear understanding also of the role to protect indigenous lands from the planters.

Missionary Theology. In the overall missionary theologies of the era, there were residues of the Enlightenment paradigm, which had greater influence on mission theologies of this period. Bosch notes the, "Enlightenment philosophy of *progress* is the element more clearly recognizable in modern theology . . . . Far reaching for theology was the Enlightenment's distinction between *fact* and *value*" (2002:271). And the Enlightenment spirit of uniformity with the western social paradigm, purported to a set of controlled pattern of change geared towards making the recipients of change equal to the agents of change – 'let us make them like us' attitude (cf. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999:89-90).

One of the trademarks of the Enlightenment paradigm was its dichotomous worldview, the influence of which was perceived in the early missionaries' theologies, and evident in their perception of the land. Based on the western dichotomous worldview the missionaries' idea of progress and development on the mission fields of Melanesia had a secularizing impact on the religious/spiritual values of land,<sup>42</sup> that is, the economic values of land was more important than its religious, cultural and social values. Sacred grounds and local shrines were destroyed to make way for infra-structural developments such as health centers, schools and mission stations.

Equally true was the attempt to extend the spirit of uniformity to indigenous believers and local churches to make them conform to the Western patterns. Local churches must become replicas of the mother churches in the West, structurally and functionally, the theological basis for which was paternalistic and capitalistic in nature. The implications are, the land acquired from the people by the missionaries must be used and managed in conformity to Western patterns.<sup>43</sup> Financial aid from the mother church is severed the moment national views of progress contradict those of the mother church.

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<sup>42</sup> In 1920 when the Church was first established in Umbukul village on the island of New Hanover, a portion of land was requested from the elder of the *Janga*, 'parrot' clan, named Naumelek. Initially he agreed, but when he discovered that the land was for planting of a coconut plantation for the mission, he changed his mind, because by ancestral laws, the land was only for planting of the taro crop, a religiously and ceremonially important root crop among the Tungag. Planting coconut trees would have only served the desecration of the land (From an interview with my uncles: August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004). This is an example of the progress that ignores the spiritual and social values of the land.

Earlier I mentioned that the missionary emphasis on holistic or integral human development was the key to the missionaries' concept of development and progress (see footnote: p.15). Ironically the emphasis was on the development of the human being and the land was to be exploited for the purpose of making a better and balanced person. This was un-Melanesian or at best irreligious insofar as the spiritual bond and interconnectedness between human being and land had to be severed. By commoditizing land through the development processes, the social and spiritual values of land were ignored and destroyed in the long run.

<sup>43</sup> In spite of the fact that the United Church in Papua New Guinea is an indigenous church, there is one aspect that remains foreign, a legacy of the missionary era: the use and management of church land and other properties. Understandably, the property board meetings of the United Church is always concerned about the church being in a comfortable position financially to be able to compete in the economic



Melanesians approach life holistically (in one big basket), to include religion, economic, social, and politics. The land holds all these together, for it is the foundation for life throughout Melanesia. As Rynkiewich notes, "...that life is one, that the supernatural is as real and important and that the land is foundational to the *gutpela sindaon*, 'the good life'" (2000d:210). There is also a sense in which the islanders perceive themselves as one with the land; they are spiritually interconnected with the land.<sup>44</sup> Their concern for the fertility of the land leads them to seek the assistance of the ancestors and the spirit world through rituals. The missionaries in favor of Western scientific methods and knowledge frowned upon this as superstitious.<sup>45</sup>

Mission Development and Legacy. By the 1950s the Methodist Church in the New Guinea Islands was a thriving local church. And in spite of the yet strong missionary presence, the church was showing some signs of coming of age in several areas, of which three were notable. By 1968, the year of the formation of the then United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands,<sup>46</sup> the following legacies were left behind by the Methodist mission:

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environment that surrounds it. What the Church must not forget is that the land and other properties are not an end in themselves, but means to an end.

<sup>44</sup> For instance, when the people spoke of fear of evil spirits on the land, the relationship they had with their ancestors through the land and their myths of cultural heroes who gave them the land; the missionaries would deny the existence of these spirits and regarded the people's stories as fables. The missionaries claimed that, the only true story about the land was the Genesis story, and scientific knowledge was the only key to understanding and explaining the cosmos.

<sup>45</sup> Melanesians had their traditional theology, prior to and at the advent of colonialism and missionary activities. Contrary to Western theology, Melanesian theology was holistic, relating to all issues of life and Melanesian realities, both in the empirical and non-empirical world. Relationship was foundational to the Melanesian religious experiences.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix 6 for description of the formation of the United Church.

An Indigenous Church. In spite of the fact that theology was still a foreign import, localization of church leadership was very fast. As early as 1885, emphasis was already placed on training national church workers (Threlfall 1975:42-64), a move that paid off, with some islanders becoming evangelists among their own people and pastors of newly established local congregations where there was no missionary presence.<sup>47</sup> The strong emphasis on indigenous leadership laid the foundation for the first generation of national leaders within the Methodist Church in the islands prior to and at the time of the formation of the United Church.<sup>48</sup>

The Church was increasingly assuming a stewardship role, by sharing its human and financial resources and education facilities with the other Methodist Districts, beginning in the late 1940s.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1950s, missionaries from the New Guinea Islands churches went to Mendi in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea.

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<sup>47</sup> In 1888, the first batch of students from the New Guinea District to be trained overseas graduated from the District Training Institute in Navuloa, Fiji – returning as pastor-teachers, to join the ones who were trained locally. It was the beginning of many more to be sent to Fiji and Brisbane, Australia. 1919 saw the ordination of the first ever-indigenous minister (Rev. Peni To Pitmur). From 1916 to 1958 the church had ordained 16 indigenous ministers (Threlfall 1975:65-85).

<sup>48</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1968, the four districts of the Methodist Church (New Guinea, Papua, Bougainville and Solomon Islands, and the mission field of the highlands), the Papua Ekelesia of the London Missionary Society, the Presbyterian and a small fraction of United Church of Darwin in Australia came together in a union that formalized the United Church in Papua New Guinea.

<sup>49</sup> For theological training, men and women from Bougainville, the Papuan Islands, the Solomon Islands and the Southern Highlands came to the Rarongo Theological College and the Malmaluan Christian Education Training Center in Rabaul, East New Britain. Towards the early 1960s, the George Brown High School also in East New Britain, was the only Methodist high school to provide secondary education for Methodist students from the New Guinea Islands, the Papuan Islands, Bougainville and the Southern Highlands. By 1970, the Papuan Islands ceased to send students to the George Brown High School because the Wesley High School in Salamo had been established. The Methodist Church in the New Guinea Islands contributed a substantial amount of money towards the building of the school.

A Self-supporting Church. Of the four Methodist Districts in the early 1900s,<sup>50</sup> the Methodist Church in the New Guinea District was doing well financially, owing to the giving of the people, but the big part of it was from the dividend received from the plantations and a few other income generating ventures. The plantation scheme was proving its worth (as an asset) to the church, showing signs that the church was moving towards being self-supporting.<sup>51</sup> By the early 1960s, the financial asset of the church was in excess of forty-six thousand dollars excluding properties and land. With big plantation holdings (Ulu, Vunakambi and Lolobau plantations) and a printing press, the Trinity Press; which was doing very well, the church was financially secure. But it is the legacy of the plantation scheme that is coming back to haunt the church and the people.

A large volume of Church Land. Undeniably the Methodist mission had accomplished tremendous work in the islands, however, there is one mission legacy that has come back to haunt the United Church today: the land the Methodist mission acquired from the people and claimed ownership of since the late 1800s.<sup>52</sup> While these

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<sup>50</sup> The other Districts were Papua (comprise the Papuan Islands), Bougainville, and Solomon Islands. The Methodist Church in the New Guinea Islands itself was known as the New Guinea District. The Southern Highlands, in the interior of the main island of New Guinea became the mission field for the four Districts. Since the inauguration of mission work in the area by the Methodist mission in 1950, pioneer missionaries from the New Guinea Islands, Papuan Islands and Bougainville were sent to the highlands to serve alongside their Australian and New Zealand counterparts.

<sup>51</sup> I am using the term self-supporting cautiously due to the tendency to misapply the concept. Henry Venn (1872), who championed the three 'self's' (self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating); claiming that these are the indicators of a truly indigenous church (Tippet 1973:148-176; see also Warren 1971:15-34). I want to argue as others have (Smalley 1978:363-372; see also Tippet 1973), that there has not and ever will be any church in the non-Western world that will ever be totally self-supporting. In my own church, the United Church in Papua New Guinea, we still depend very much on our overseas partner churches for supports in our staff development program at graduate level.

<sup>52</sup> Situated on these lands are mission stations, plantations, church buildings, schools (community and high schools), clinics and major health centers belonging to the New Britain and Niu Ailan synods/regions of the

lands no longer belong to a foreign mission, but rather, to a fully indigenized church, the United Church in Papua New Guinea, it does not mean that all the previous landowners are satisfied. Many of the portions of land are still the subject of bitter conflicts; at times putting pressure on and/or straining the relationship between the church and the community.<sup>53</sup> The church acquired land from the people to carry out its mission work. But, the current “social and economic changes have raised [serious] issues of land ownership, use, transfer and compensation. The churches are now facing difficulties in land use, often in the context of mutual misunderstanding” (Rynkiewich 2001f: 347).

## 2. Colonial Ideology of Land

Prior to discussing the colonial land ideologies, I wish to give a brief discussion on the colonial theory that has shaped our perception of colonialism and its influence on the world of politics, economy, education and religion today. Colonialism is a system of power, and ideology and a worldview, and there is no denying of the global impact it has had on the whole world, from north to south and east to west.

Colonial Theory. Colonialism is blamed for some of the world most repressive political and economic systems found in the non-Western world today. The reaction against colonialism brought to the fore the need to counter capitalist thinking that was expanding its influence to the non-Western world through colonization. Critics see

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United Church, and the three major church institutions of the whole United Church in Papua New Guinea – Rarongo Theological College, Gaulim Teachers’ College and Malmaluan Timal Center.

<sup>53</sup> In August 2003 at the Synod meeting of the Niu Ailan Region of the United Church in Papua New Guinea, a group of people from Maiom village, under the leadership of Balane Penias, a former graduate of the United Church Rarongo Theological College converged upon the Regional mission station and demanded Bishop Gerson Kapman and the church to return the land to the people of Maiom, claiming they were the rightful owners of the land (Interview with Bishop Gerson Kapman; August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004)

colonialism as an attempt to control of labor and land for expansion of the markets to the gain of the colonialists.

Colonialism, critics claim, is an instrument in the expansion of Western imperialism and the global capitalist economy that “must be resisted” (Dharmaraj 1993:21). Marx and Engels argue “the need of a constantly expanding market for its [that is capitalist economy] products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe” (1970: 38). Likewise, “the hunger for raw materials in Europe made its impact felt in Melanesia as elsewhere” (Amarshi 1979:5), which was evidence of the reach of the long arms of the global capitalist economy through colonialism.

Capitalism benefits the elite, so colonialism needs a cover to legitimize it. The colonies became the haven of the colonizers who have to shift their domestic problems away from home. The colonial strategy by the end of the nineteenth century was that African colonies be “regarded as a source of wealth which could be used to mitigate the class conflict in the capitalist states” (Nkrumah 1965:xii). This was also true of Melanesia (Amarshi 1979:6). The reason for colonization was clear: “it was the combination of cheap land and readily available cheap local labour that attracted many settlers and companies to Melanesia” (Sillitoe 2000: 77). Thus, taking the land in Melanesia was part of the colonial technique for gaining both land and labor, for the benefit of the rich and powerful minority.

What is said of Africa and Asia is also true of Melanesia. Critics allege that, as an ideology, colonialism sought to colonize the minds of the subjects, that is, “to colonize their consciousness with the axioms and aesthetics of an alien culture” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:4; see also Dharmaraj 1993:27 and Mucherera 2001:36-53). The

conquest of land around the world served to convince the people of the West of their cultural superiority. It was therefore the ‘white man’s burden’ to educate and civilize the people, that is, to bring the benefits of Western civilization to the rest of the world (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999:16; Hiebert 1994:54; Dharmaraj 1993:27). The colonial mentality was bent on changing and developing the non-Western societies into replicas of Western societies.

The Purpose for Land Acquisition. The colonial purposes for acquiring land from the indigenous people in the islands were purely political and economic. The methods of acquiring the land from the people, however, were questionable, which in the long run has left a legacy of anger and distrust among the indigenes, for the colonial administration. To set the stage for the discussion, I will begin with a brief discussion of the Europeans’ economic interests in the southwest Pacific, namely the British, Germans and French, in the later parts of 1700s and the 1800s.

Land Under the Germans in New Guinea. The southwest Pacific region, comprising the islands of Melanesia fell into the hands of European colonizing powers, beginning in the late 1700s to the later part of the 1800s.<sup>54</sup> Germany reluctantly annexed New Guinea in 1884. Even though Germany was only new in the colonizing arena, it already had experiences of conquests. Being only recently centralized as a country under

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<sup>54</sup> The British, Germans, French and Dutch each colonized separate island groups and areas of Melanesia respectively. New Guinea was colonized by three European powers respectively, the British annexed in 1884 the southern part (Papua), the Dutch colonized western part (Irian Jaya), and the Germans annexed in 1884 the northeastern part (German New Guinea).

'Prussian hegemony' (1871), Germany had a leader in Otto von Bismarck who set his eyes on manipulating European politics to his advantage.<sup>55</sup>

With the background of conquest and domination, and of strong allegiances to aristocratic rules and the Protestant faith,<sup>56</sup> the Germans came to New Guinea. They were in New Guinea as conquerors among the conquered. Taking land from the people was therefore "our right is none other than the right of the stronger, the right of conquest" (see Legge, 1918:397).

As time went by, German New Guinea increasingly became a "forgotten colony" (Firth 1986:169), due to the fact that the German African colonies drew more of Germany's attention, financially and time wise. In reality, "Chancellor Bismarck was not interested in colonies, he was interested in a powerful and prosperous Germany" (Rynkiewich 2001e:250; cf. Brandenburg 1926:13-14).<sup>57</sup> Although New Guinea was of little importance to Prince Otto von Bismarck, in a bizarre move, Germany went ahead and annexed New Guinea. Its annexation was important for three reasons, first, for

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<sup>55</sup> Under his reign/leadership small independent states submitted to him as he led them in victories over Austria (1866) and France (1870). The domination and forceful taking of land from neighboring peoples, such as Poland, was justified with the claim that "our right is none other than the right of the stronger, the right of conquest" (Brinton, Christopher and Wolff 1960:179; see also Rynkiewich 2001e: 251).

<sup>56</sup> There were two notable orientations or attitudes in the Germans' relationship to the 'natives' and their relationship to the missionaries of the Missionary Society of the Sacred Hearts (MSC) Order of the Roman Catholic Church. First, it is a notable fact that the under the Neu Guinea Kompagnie (NGK), the relationship between plantation owners/bosses was a replica of the rich land lords and the vassals relationship. Second, there was a residual of Protestant versus Catholicism in matters of land dealings in the New Guinea Islands, although it may have been the case throughout New Guinea. The case of Bishop Coupe (1894) having his attempt in securing title for a portion of land given to him by Parkinson rejected by a German judge would be an evidence of this denominational prejudice of Protestant versus Catholicism.

<sup>57</sup> Apart from the fact that German was only new in the business of colonization, "Germany was a country only recently centralized (1871) under Prussian hegemony" (Rynkiewich 2001e: 251), and so it had to also take care of domestic concerns at home. The task of politically consolidating the many independent groups that have come under its control was critical to its survival as a new political power in Europe.

political convenience, that is, its annexation could only be used in international politics (Denoon 1981:85).

Second, because it was available to be a colony for economic reasons. It was obvious that the Germans were in New Guinea with an economic agenda, “first and foremost to make money and only secondary to impose a system of ordered administration on the inhabitants” (Firth 1983:7). This economic motivation was also true for the British and the French. “Europeans imposed their rules on their new land for purely economic reasons” (Biskup, Jinks and Nelson 1968:42).<sup>58</sup> Its coastal villages were major sources of laborers to perpetuate German prosperity in Samoa (McKillop and Firth 1981:89-90). And third, defense was one reason for New Guinea being reluctantly annexed. Survival meant keeping other nations in check; thus New Guinea offered a strategic position as one of the coaling stations for German naval ships as it sought to consolidate its position in the world (von Bulow 1914:25).

Owing to the fact that the Germans’ economic interest in New Guinea was more important than any efforts to properly administer it, they came without a well-developed plan for colonizing it (Firth 1986:5).<sup>59</sup> The British, unlike the Germans, had a definite plan for colonizing Papua (British New Guinea).<sup>60</sup> This was evident in the fact that they quickly sought to protect the people’s rights to their land from outside interests and to

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<sup>58</sup> The colonies would be markets for manufactured goods from Europe; they would provide raw materials for industries in Europe and provide a tax haven for European investors. In fact, however, the British were not keen on annexing Papua, and did so only to counter German interest in the area (Longgar 2004:65).

<sup>59</sup> German economic interest in New Guinea before the annexation took two forms: “a trading interest in the Bismarck Archipelago and a financial interest, emanating from Berlin, which was concerned with investment in plantations on the New Guinea mainland” (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:154).

<sup>60</sup> The Germans colonized New Guinea for economic reasons, so the indigenous people, their land and their resources became means to achieve their economic agenda. In contrast the British protected both the people and their land, but they were more paternalistic than the Germans were the perfect examples of imperialism.



protect the people from labor recruiting (Waiko 1993:34). The administrative indecisiveness and blunders of the Germans left New Guinea open for people with various reasons/motives to come in and plunder its rich natural and human resources.<sup>61</sup> The German ‘open arm’ attitude led to the exploiting of the human and natural resources of Melanesia to serve the markets and industries in Europe, and left a legacy of mistrust, hate and hostility towards the foreigners, among Melanesians.

The Traders and Planters. Before the 1884 German annexation of New Guinea, traders, planters, and labor recruiters/black birders were in the islands acquiring land from the people and recruiting young men for indentured labor on sugar plantations in Samoa. German enterprise was obviously very strong in New Guinea. By the mid 1870s, big trading firms, such as Eduard Hensheim and Godeffroy und Sohn (Godeffroy and Son) acquired land in the New Guinea Islands (in the Duke of York Islands).<sup>62</sup>

Other big names included T. Kleinschmidt (1879), DHPG,<sup>63</sup> Mouton and Son, and Emma Forsayth who later became known as Queen Emma. Emma Forsayth arrived from Samoa in 1879 with Thomas Farrell, dreaming of making it big in New Britain. Being the largest private land buyer,<sup>64</sup> her interest was in acquiring land for long term

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<sup>61</sup> These included those; (i) with business interests, (ii) with a sense of destiny whereby the Pacific became the land of the ‘second chance’ for “outcasts of the Old World” (Trompf 1987:6) to make amends and improve their social images, (iii) who were motivated by the ‘humanitarian’ side of colonialism – being obsessed by the belief that it was the prerogative of the much more superior and civilized societies to protect, educate and to bring to maturity the more backward races (Rynkiewich 2001e: 252; cf. Mucherera 2001:36-53).

<sup>62</sup> In 1876 Eduard Hensheim acquired land in Makada, while Godeffroy and Son acquired land in Mioko both in the Duke of York Islands. From this base they recruited laborers, hence competing with the Queensland sugar planters (Rynkiewich 2001e: 254; see also Denoon 1981:88).

<sup>63</sup> The initials DHPG stood for *Deutsche Handels- und Pantagen Gesellschaft* (German Trading and Plantation Company).

<sup>64</sup> Of the 500 claims to 700,000 acres of land, Queen Emma and Farrell laid claims to about 400,000 acres of land to their name (Sack 1973:125).

development, which led to her establishing one of the biggest plantation ‘empires’ in the southwest Pacific (Robson 1965:138-140).

Prior to the German annexation of New Guinea, “there were already 500 claims to over 28,000 hectares of land, mainly in the Bismarck Archipelago and Bougainville” (Rynkiewich 2000e:255; see also Sack 1973:125). The news of the imminent annexation of New Guinea sent planters into a land fever, seeking to acquire as much land as possible from the people before the laws changed the rules of land acquisition, thus placing the settlers in a disadvantageous position with the new laws.

Every settler’s dream of a “paradise” in the Pacific was never going to come easy. The settlers made three costly mistakes.

Assumed “natives” had no concept of ownership. European settlers and colonial officials alike held the view that “natives in New Guinea had no concept of ownership of land as such and that all uncultivated land was therefore ownerless” (Sack 1973:124) and so they could easily go in and take their land away from them.<sup>65</sup> They prided themselves in being above the power of “primitive” law in bringing them to justice, for it lacked the legal mechanism/apparatus known only to the Western legal systems, to be able to bring them to justice. Some of the settlers, however, could not escape the fury of the ‘native’ law of retribution, thus paying dearly with their lives.

Misjudged vacant land. The planters assumed that where there was no village or gardens, that the land was vacant. On the contrary as Longgar notes; “There was, of course, practically no unclaimed land in the islands. The land not in immediate

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<sup>65</sup> According to Miklucho Maclay, the Russian anthropologist who made himself spokesperson of the people of the ‘Maclay Coast’, Rai Coast in Madang, at the time of the annexation, “that each piece of ground, each useful tree of the forest, the fish in each stream etc., etc., has a proprietor” (Greenop 1944:164).

use was reserved land for hunting, for gathering of wood and building material, for fallow in between planting . . . for sacred sites, or land held in trust for the future” (2004:67; see also Bodley 1975:84). The planters had often ignored claims to vacant land by the indigenes, and often cheated the owners by buying the land with worthless trade goods.

Ignored the irreconcilable differences in land ideologies. The irreconcilable differences between the Western ideologies of land and Melanesian ideologies of land were the cause of frequent conflicts between traders and customary landowners. The Western concept of ownership meant an outright individual ownership, whereby the land is bought and everything on it (land and fruit trees, etc.,) belongs exclusively to the new owner. On the contrary, Melanesian land tenure makes a clear “distinction between rights to land and rights to trees growing on the land,” a constant cause of irritation among planters (Sack 1973:119).<sup>66</sup>

Neu Guinea Kompagnie (NGK). When the Germans came ashore and planted the German flag on Matupit Island in New Britain, on November 15, 1884, little did the people in New Britain, New Ireland and elsewhere in the Bismarck Archipelago realize that, “They would lose land to foreigners, become plantation labourers . . . accept new religious beliefs, suffer from unfamiliar diseases, resist German punitive expeditions, pay head-tax and discover the drastic consequences of disobeying German orders” (Firth 1983:7). By an act of an Imperial Charter on May 17 1885, issued by Kaiser Wilhelm,

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<sup>66</sup> It was a common practice among planters to follow the Western concept of ownership in making “a deal, mark the boundaries, pay the price and fence the land in to keep everyone else out” (Rynkiewich 2001e: 255). It was not only T. Kleinschmidt who did it which resulted in his being killed by disgruntled landowners on Utuan (Sack 1973:119). In Bagail, an urban village on the outskirts of Kavieng town (1904) and on Beligila plantation along the east coast of the Buluminsky Highway (1902) some land owners were censored for coming onto German owned plantation land to pick *galip* nut and bread fruit. The so-called culprits acted within the required Melanesian customary land tenure, which is the land belongs to another person but fruit trees and betel nut palm/coconut palm belongs to the one who planted it.

the administration of the protectorate was given over to the Neu Guinea Kompagnie (NGK), which administered it until 1899.<sup>67</sup>

The Charter among other things empowered the company, first, to protect German subjects and business (economic interest) in New Guinea, ironically not the people of New Guinea. The Germans were in New Guinea with an economic agenda, “first and foremost to make money and only secondary to impose a system of ordered administration on the inhabitants” (Firth 1983:4; see also Rynkiewich 2000e:257). Protecting Germany’s economic interest in the New Guinea was to be a paramount task of the Neu Guinea Kompagnie.

Second, to acquire large tracts of land for laying out plantations (Epstein 1969:20). The company also had the “exclusive right to occupy or to dispose of ‘vacant’ land, and to conclude deals for purchase of occupied land” (Brookfield 1972:37; see also Sack and Sack 1975:1). Colonization and economic interest were inseparable. And third, “To establish peaceful relations with the natives and their civilization” (Sack and Sack 1975:1). Ironically this particular directive was far from reality considering the ethnocentric attitudes of the company personnel and the planters toward the people and their land.

Two additional ordinances to be included in the Charter were issued on the 20 July 1887, regarding the acquisitions and charging of land in the Protectorate. The law was established on Prussian law for the colony (Sack 1975:12). Although the law applied to Europeans only, it affected the ‘natives’ and customary land tenure also. The Ordinance stipulated two methods of acquiring land, with the third method later added by

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<sup>67</sup> The administrative power of the Company was not autonomous; it was a ‘rubber stamp’ in the hand of the Imperial Government in Germany.

the judiciary under Judge Albert Hahl. The ordinances stated that all land must be acquired, (i) “By means of contract with the natives,” that is the ‘natives’ must be willing to sell the land, (ii) “by occupying ownerless land” (Sack 1975:16), and (iii) by confiscation of land as punishment for breaking German law.

There were loopholes and/or ironies in the German land laws. First, land laws were constantly changing, not for the benefit of the indigenes; it served to further disadvantage them. The changes were mostly to accommodate the economic interests of the German colonizers and the fluctuating economic situation in Europe. Second, the legal irony in the law was, although it was put in place to control land acquisition, the practice of land acquisition did not always follow the legal directives. And third, a foreign legal system could not work well in Melanesian. The Germans expected the New Guinea Islanders to live by their laws, considering the fact that it was totally foreign to the people and so outrages as far as the islanders were concerned, for it treated them as children and disregarded the significance of “native” land laws.

It was the “do not care” attitudes of the Neu Guinea Kompagnie in the acquisition of native land that was a problem to the customary landowners. The company had the practice of acquiring occupied land without prior and proper consultation with the local population. “Purchasing of occupied land meant expansion of plantations, but at the expense of good land needed by the indigenes (Longgar 2004:68). Frustrated and infuriated by such move, the indigenes attacked plantation personnel and properties.<sup>68</sup> It

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<sup>68</sup> The killing of Rudolf Wolff’s wife and child in 1900, by angry landowners near Mt. Vunakokor, in the Gazelle Peninsula is an example of the anger of landowners against such deceptive land dealings on the part of the settlers and the Company (Neumann 1992: 1-6; see also Waiko 1993:48). The people resented and hated the Germans for grabbing their land.

also began acquiring land for its own use and for sale to all German settlers who would move to New Guinea from Germany and Australia (Denoon 1981:91).

Under the Neu Guinea Kompagnie, over 70 per cent of the total land under plantation in the whole Protectorate was in the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago with four-fifths of the plantations on the Gazelle Peninsula and New Ireland (Epstein 1972:25). Approximately 210,000 acres of plantation was in the Bismarck Archipelago, with 180,000 acres in the Gazelle Peninsula and New Ireland. Given the limited land in these small islands, this was certainly a substantial amount of land alienated from customary landowners by the Germans under the Neu Guinea Kompagnie. The dire consequences of the alienation of such magnitude of arable land areas from customary landowners were far reaching.

The Imperial Government, 1899-1914. It was proving to be a formidable task for the Neu Guinea Kompagnie to administer the colony and do business at the same time. As Jinks, Biskup and Nelson note, “The New Guinea Company was plagued with problems right from the start. There was too much control from Berlin, too many rules and regulations, not enough staff, and little expert knowledge of tropical agriculture” (1973:157). The difficulties eventually led to the transfer of sovereignty from the company to the Imperial government.<sup>69</sup> It was not the first time the company had appealed for help; “the fact that it took three years to complete arrangements indicates that Germany was not eager to assume control” (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:165).

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<sup>69</sup> After relinquishing sovereignty of the protectorate to the Imperial government, “the New Guinea Company became a purely business concern. Together with Hershheim and Co., the Mioko [in the Duke of York Islands] branch of the Deutsche Handels-und Plantagen-gesellschaft and Queen Emma’s E.E. Forsayth and Co. it dominated the economic life of German New Guinea” (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:173; see also Mackenzie 1934:112-113).

Sack and Clark note, “An important and decisive change in respect to the executive power has been initiated, in so far as negotiation are in progress with the Reich, having as their object the transfer of the rights and duties of local sovereignty from the Neu Guinea Kompagnie to the Reich” (1979:105). But the negotiation was not so much between two willing parties; obviously one was a reluctant party in the whole deal; it was the Imperial government in Berlin.<sup>70</sup> The transfer of power from the company to the Imperial government signaled the beginning of a third phase of colonialism (Rynkiewich 2001e:264).

The transfer of power was consequential to the land situation in the Protectorate. I will not go into detail on the sequence of events transpired in the transfer of power from the company to the Imperial government. I will instead focus specifically on five areas relating to the land situation following the assumption of power by the Imperial government from the company.

First, German land law and policy, beginning with the company actively pursued a system of land conversion that turned every land acquired from the people to freehold land. The take over simply took the policy to a new level and consolidated its power,<sup>71</sup> giving the Government the power to buy land from the “native owners and transferred it

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<sup>70</sup> The transfer of sovereignty meant the charter that mandated the Neu Guinea Kompagnie control over the colony had to be rendered ineffective. By Imperial Ordinance, this became effective on 27 March 1889, thus removing those “special property and other privileges which the Neu Guinea Kompagnie held” and transferring them to the Treasury of the Protectorate of New Guinea, and all authority transferred to the Imperial Governor (Sack and Clark 1979:11-14).

<sup>71</sup> Mackenzie notes, “The lands acquired by the New Guinea Company during the years of its plenary powers as a chartered company were held by it under freehold tenure. Before the declaration of a protectorate over northeastern New Guinea and the New Britain Archipelago (Bismarck Archipelago), land at Molot and Mioko on the Duke of York Islands, and in New Britain at Matupi [Matupit], on the shores of Blanche Bay and at Kokopo (Herbertshohe) on St. George’s Channel, had been purchased from the natives by pioneer settlers. The German Government subsequently confirmed their purchases as freehold. These facts shaped and determined the land policy of the Protectorate, and, up to the beginning of the year 1914, most land alienated by the Government had been granted in freehold” (1934:273).

to the applicant upon his compliance with prescribed conditions” (Mackenzie 1934:274).<sup>72</sup> Prior to 1902, the interests of “native” landowners had not been closely protected, resulting in them unwittingly parting with land. By 1902, however, there was an increasing emphasis on the protection of village land,<sup>73</sup> by the administration.

Second, under the Imperial government, the company’s ruthless ways of land dealings with the indigenes were exposed and challenged in court and lands were returned to the rightful owners.<sup>74</sup> Things were looking very promising for the islanders and their land, until Albert Hahl returned to New Guinea to assume the role of Governor of the Protectorate. Under the governorship of Hahl, the economic progress of the colony was more important than the land claims of the locals. Hahl felt he was not going to compromise the progress of the colony through legal approaches, because “raising questions as to whether land had been legally acquired from the natives, would lead to endless litigation and would seriously affect the progress of the colony” (PNGLR 1971-72:56-57).

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<sup>72</sup> Those prescribed conditions the applicants had to meet were paying: (i) the price agreed upon with the natives, (ii) a sum (fixed by law) for each hectare of land alienated by the Crown, and (iii) the cost of survey and the fee for the registering the purchase of the land (Mackenzie 1934:274).

<sup>73</sup> The 1902 Land Legislation, “introduced the principle that purchases of land from the natives should thenceforth conditional on, and accompanied by, reservation and covenants designed to safeguard the agricultural, hunting, fishing, and other occupational or customary needs of natives who had exercised any rights of possession or ownership over the particular area intended to be sold, and that such purchases must be subject to the approval of, and be made through, the Government” (Mackenzie 1934:274).

<sup>74</sup> Some members of the new administration “were less business oriented and more humanitarian” in spirit, in particular two judges. Judge Heinrich Schnee, who on 20 May 1900 presided over a land claim against the company by Torabel, a Tolai and ruled in his favor, thus returning the land to him, the company’s title to 5260 hectares, was invalidated (Rynkiewich 2001e: 264; see also Sack 1973: 152). Judge Boether was another; who in 1901 by ruling in favor of the landowners invalidated the company’s title to land on two islands in the Astrolabe Bay area on the mainland of New Guinea (Sack 1973:152). It was the work of these judges that made the Imperial government aware of New Guinean rights and needs (Rynkiewich 2001e: 265). But the work they began in reversing the company titles to land and awarding them back to rightful users was never backed up by Judge- cum-Governor Albert Hahl.



Governor Hahl was convinced that “the legal validity of land was largely irrelevant as long as sufficient land was left for the natives” (Sack 1973:171). As part of his ongoing land policy, Hahl began setting aside “native reserves” into which the “natives” could be “herded” in the event that all their land had been grabbed by the settlers. The Hahl land policy was clearly a formula for further resentment and anger among the indigenes towards the Germans.<sup>75</sup> The “natives” were infuriated by the absence or lack of legal avenue for their grievances to be heard. It was no secret that the people had lost large tracts of land to planters and the Neu Guinea Kompagnie.

Third, the administration under Hahl adapted a paternalistic attitude by declaring itself the protector of “native” land affairs. This was evident in the Hahl’s administration policy, which prohibited all direct land dealings between the ‘natives’ and any potential buyers in favor of the administration being the key player representing the customary landowners to interested land buyers.

Fourth, for fear of further unrest, which would prove detrimental to the progress of the colony and disrupt the settlers’ accessibility to land, he prohibited traditional politics. The engaging of young men on road constructions and the alienation of so much land from the people to the point they were pushed to the periphery, Hahl had envisaged these would help control and diffuse potential unrests.

And fifth, the marked inconsistency and instability in the administrative policies of the Imperial government under Governor Hahl left a lot of questions about the

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<sup>75</sup> The revolt among the Tolai against the planters resulting in the death of a planter’s wife and child (Waiko 1993:48-49; Neumann 1992:1-6), the unrest in Astrolabe (Sack and Clark 1979:251), and the unrest in Graged and Siar which would have resulted in the murder of some settlers had the plan not leaked out (Pech 1991:145-150), just to mention a few. Waiko notes, “The Tolai people of the Gazelle Peninsula resented the loss of their land to the planters and the interference with their sacred places. The resentment sometimes erupted into violent conflicts” (1993:43).

authenticity and integrity of the colonial administration in place. It was almost a case of every person being a law to himself due to the uncertainty brought about by the constant changes in colonial policies. Rynkiewich notes,

The uncertainty of the colonial agenda, the many voices demanding a hearing, the shifting policies of the administration regarding control of land and labour, the constant changes of personnel, and the administration's subservience to the national interests in Germany all contributed to the legacy which haunts us still today. . . . Successive colonial administrations and national government have struggled with many of the same issues, and so as the church. The issue of who controls rights over land and resources is part of the larger question of who is in control period [sic]. (2001e:251; see also Firth 1986:8 and May 1998:68)

The indecisiveness of the Hahl administration, in the face of deliberate defiance of the law by the settlers regarding land acquisition, saw the indigenes loosing large tracks of land. In the New Guinea Islands alone 28,000 hectares of arable land was alienated from customary landowners.

By 1914, neither the Neu Guinea Kompagnie nor the Imperial government had used their resources to develop schools or clinics for the sake of local populations. Both the company and the Imperial government were only living up to what was expected of them, that is protecting the interests of German citizens in the colony and not those of the New Guineans.

Summary of the German Land Law and Policy. Under both the company and the Imperial government, the following observations are true. First, the land law and policy was unstable and not protective of the indigenous land rights and interests. Such attitude was due to the fact that under the company and the Imperial government, the sole policy objective was the development of European type of production, as such, "the land and the people who inhabited it were regarded primarily as resources" (Mackenzie 1934:274).

Second, the 1902 land legislation, like all the other previous legal attempts to monitor land acquisitions in the protectorate, was just another ‘paper work’ that achieved little to protect the indigenes and their land. Third, when land was converted to freehold land under the German administration, it was one example of the Western law working against customary land tenure, which did not allow permanent alienation of clan land. Converting land into freehold land was a structural and deceptive way of grabbing land from the indigenes, thus alienating them from their land. It may have been legal by Western law but by customary law it was a crime against the clans and families whose livelihood depended on the land.

And fourth, German land law and policy was unreliable, unfair and very indifferent to the islanders’ land rights. For instance, although all land grants were in freehold, the leasing of land became increasingly common towards the close of the Imperial periods, as Germans sell the land they acquired by fraud from the people to their cohorts.

By mid 1914, the Imperial government was pursuing an active policy of land-alienation, and giving practical encouragement to the development of tropical agriculture. All this came to an abrupt ending, when the Imperial authority was suspended through the military occupation of September 1914, by the Australian army, who subsequently placed the colony under military rule.

Land Under the Australian Colonial Administration. Australia became a colonial power in September 1914 with minimal experiences of colonial administration, and with unclean track records in relation to land issues. Its own records of land dealings with the aboriginal Australians were not the best. By coming into a new situation in German New

Guinea, it was going to be a real test of Australia's integrity on the international scene. However, to Australia's advantage, its assumption of power over the former German colony did not require any immediate legislating of new land laws. For the first six years or so, the colony came under a military administration through the control of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU). The reaction of the indigenous population to the take over was a mixture of relief and resentment. Waiko notes;

In places where the Germans were kind to individual communities the people may have resented the Australian takeover. In regions where the Germans had grabbed extensive tracts of land, such as around Madang and the Gazelle Peninsula [and New Ireland], the people most likely welcomed the Australians, at least during the early stages before they realised that the Australians had no intention of returning the land, which the Germans had taken. (1993:83)

The discussion on the Australian land policy will be brief, limiting myself to the New Guinea Islands region with occasional references to other areas in New Guinea.

Australian Land Policies. The economic policy of the new regime was obviously different from the former, which also meant land policy was going to be different.<sup>76</sup> There were several differences and new developments under the new administration; apart from the fact that from 1914 – 1921, prior to the 1922 Land Ordinance, Australia followed the policy of land acquisition laid down by the former German administration.

Under the military administration of the Australian, German businesses and plantations in New Guinea were left intact. Like the Germans, "Economic development meant plantations for expatriates labour lines for the 'natives', and the use of personal

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<sup>76</sup> Many of the German plantations owners remained and were in fact encouraged to extend their business and planting. A number of the German Methodist missionaries were allowed to remain in the islands. Their Lutheran counterparts were also allowed to remain on the mainland of New Guinea following a request from the Lutheran Church in Australia (de Groot 2001:282).

head tax to force labour recruitment” (de Groot 2001:282).<sup>77</sup> But as time went on it increasingly became obvious that there was also a large degree of vested interests in Australia from the top right down to the returning servicemen on the new economic opportunities in the former German colony.

Australian military administration had a policy, which favored plantation interests, making it very difficult for the indigenes to participate in the cash economy. By 1921 after the colony was returned to civilian administration, most German properties, including plantations were expropriated and sold to new owners;<sup>78</sup> most of which were offered for sale between 1925 and 1927. Ironically, the sale of the expropriated properties to private owners did not increase the wealth of the colony and did not work in favor of the customary landowners, because none of the properties and lands was returned to them, hence breeding further resentment for the colonizers.<sup>79</sup> Critics of the Australian land policies cite corruption and as having a worse scenario of exploitation than under the Germans (see John Kaputin 1984).

Some hope was in sight for the indigenes when under the Mandate administration; the 1922 Land Ordinance established a new land acquisition policy. The policy gave the

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<sup>77</sup> According to de Groot, “There were differences. Where the German government administration had brought a balance between taxation, recruitment and dealing with native land, the new colonials were basically ignorant of the local situation” (2001:282; see also Griffin, Nelson and Firth 1979:47). The head tax was higher than what the labor line was paid.

<sup>78</sup> Following the Treaty of Versailles; article 297 “granted Australia to power to ‘retain and liquidate the property rights and interests’ of German national and companies” (Jinks, Biskup and Nelson 1973:232). Under the Expropriation Board, comprised Australian military personnel, ex-German plantations were to be managed and eventually disposed of by tender; most of which ended up in the hands of ex-soldiers (Australian). The whole expropriation exercise turned out to be “looting” and an “unjust and hate-breeding” process by the Australians against the Germans (Townsend 1968: 27-28)

<sup>79</sup> De Groot again notes that, “The uncertain future on New Guinea was a major determination of the land policy of the Australian military administration. Wishing to limit the further extension of German landownership, the Australian discontinued the sale of freehold land and only permitted Germans to acquire new land under annual leases” (2001:284).

administration the sole right of purchasing land from the indigenes.<sup>80</sup> All this was done in the name of helping the ‘natives’, to protect “indigenous interests and imposed improvement conditions on alienated titles. However, there is always a big difference between what is legislated and what is actually carried out” (de Groot 2001:283; see also Mugambwa 1987:98).

The policies/rules were never followed, the indigenes continued to lose land even under this administration. This is substantiated by the fact that in 1914, 702,000 hectares of land had been alienated within the colony; however, towards the end of the Mandate period (1939), the total alienated land had increased to 894,000 hectares. The Gazelle Peninsula and New Ireland, just like the Manus and the Madang coasts were the badly affected areas, loosing large areas of their most useful land (Waiko 1993:91). This further aggravated the hatred and resentment for the Australian administration.<sup>81</sup> The Australian administration had failed to resolve dissatisfactions which had begun under the Germans and which were to erupt into a whole series of land claims and counter claims beginning in the late 1960s up till now. The 1922 Land Ordinance was one of many Land Acts with intension to protect indigenous land rights, but proved to be just another mechanism in the hands of the administration to put land into the hands of wrong people.

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<sup>80</sup> The policy required that the purchase could not be actualized until the rightful owners were identified and that the buyers were certain that the people were not going to need the land for a further fifty years, and then the deal had to be certified on the scene by a district officer to legalize and authorize the purchase.

<sup>81</sup> The murder of Jack Emanuel, the East New Britain District Commissioner in 1969, by the people of Kabaira on the north coast of the Gazelle Peninsula was land related. The people were not happy about their land being taken away from them and feared the possibility of loosing more of their land to foreigners. The inception of the Mataungan Association was a move towards protecting the people’s land.

The Colonial Legacy. The land situation in Papua New Guinea today is, three per cent of the land is alienated land and ninety-seven per cent is still in the hands of customary landowners. One would have thought that the increasing mining activities in the nation, would have changed the percentage of alienated land, but it is not the case, the number of people denied access to the traditional use of the land, however, has increased. The land committed to mining cannot be classified as alienated land, because legally the land and everything on the surface of the land remains the people's, it is what lies below the surface of the land that belongs to the government (see Peter Donigi 1994).<sup>82</sup>

But the colonial legacy that has returned to haunt Papua New Guineans, and especially the islanders socially and economically has its roots in the following. First, the insensitivity of the colonial administration to local land tenure customs and the villagers motivation to work (see Crocombe 1964). The forceful and extensive alienation of customary land by the German planters and administrators; "had aroused intense hostility among the local inhabitants" towards the Germans (Amarshi 1979:20). And although alienation of land for plantations in Papua New Guinea has been small proportion of total land area, the extent of 'effective' alienation (that is, as a proportion of arable land) is much higher (Barnett 1976:7, 8). For instance, in the Gazelle Peninsula alone forty-six percent of arable land was alienated from the people.

Second, the expropriation of a substantial proportion of the product, land included, by the administration to outside interests, bypassing the people, thus maximizing the trend of exploiting the economy of the colony (see Amarshi 1979:9-35).

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<sup>82</sup> By national estimates, the percentage of land obtained for mining purposes is 5% of the total 97% land that is still in customary ownership, but by local estimates (clan owned land) it is a lot of land being taken off the people. When one considers the magnitude of damages done to the land through mining, the Rorovana people in the Panguna Valley of the North Solomon Province, in Papua New Guinea, had actually lost 80% of their usable/arable land (Post Courier 10<sup>th</sup> April 1997).

In doing so, there was no opportunity for the people to participate in the cash economy. And third, the failure of the colonial administration to provide an adequate marketing and transport infrastructure all contributed to continuous disappointment with the performance of peasant export production (see Power 1974 and Mair 1948). Today, for instance, the continual failure of the government to provide a timber-processing mill is resulting in the nation losing thousands of cubic feet of lumber to foreign Asian companies, who get them cheaply from the people, process them then sell them back to Papua New Guineans at exuberantly high prices.

Considering these factors, it is not surprising that the people are demanding compensation for their land and/or the return of their land. It is equally not surprising that the economy of Papua New Guinea as an independent nation is still on the periphery. Apparently, succeeding national governments in Papua New Guinea's thirty-five years of independence have adopted a neo-colonial attitude, which subsequently and continually deny nationals the opportunity of equal participation in the economy. It is creating a scenario in which the rich and powerful minority are benefiting, thus grinding poverty on the masses.

A Comparison. German land law and policy was unreliable, unfair and very indifferent to the islanders' land rights. There was no improvement soon after the Australians took control of the colony in 1914. Australian land policies were corrupt and had a worse scenario of exploitation than under the Germans, according to critics (see John Kaputin 1984). As an example of Australians corrupt land dealing, critics cite the expropriation of former German properties and a substantial proportion of the product, land included, by the Australian administration to outside interests, bypassing the people



(see Amarshi 1979:9-35). Under the Australian administration, the islanders continued to lose substantial amount of land; 894,000 hectares in 1939, compared to 702,000 hectares by 1914 immediately after taking over control of the colony (Waiko 1993:91).

In my research, I found that, first, both administrations failed to protect the rights of the people to the land. The 1922 Land Ordinance of the Australian administration, one of the many Land Acts to protect indigenous land rights, ended up serving the interests of those from whom the people were to be protected. Second, both administrations did not respect the traditional land tenure of the islands. And third, with both administrations economic interest took precedence over administering the people properly.

With these said I would like to proceed to the analysis of the case.

### Analysis of the Case

The land issues concerning the United Church and the people in the New Guinea Islands are set within the colonial and missionary historical context of the region. In analyzing the case, one may be able to establish some of the reasons behind the land conflicts that are putting pressure on land. The case demonstrates the following Western understanding of land.

#### 1. A Secular View of Land

The Rev. Cox bought two portions of land, one in Kimadan and the other in Pinikidu on behalf of the Methodist mission. In buying the land, he was acting within the precinct of the culture of which the missionaries were the product. The missionaries and their counterparts, the colonialists were part of the capitalistic worldview, which saw land as disposable, a commodity to be bought and sold. The practice of buying or being

disposed of land contradicted the view of land held by Melanesians. Land was both physical and spiritual, thus the strong bond between the people and the land was physical and spiritual, an interconnectedness that is inseparable. The land is their root, and the foundation of their being. It is their security of all time, however long they reside on that land. The fluidity of boundaries in customary land tenure does not undermine the sense of security that land gives to people. One could not dispose of land that easily without jeopardizing the security and livelihood of the whole clan. When one takes the land away from the people, their sense of self-fulfillment and sense of belonging, their security, identity and history is destroyed, thus they cease to be a people. In Melanesia land cannot be sold, especially when the land is one's "mother."

The history of the missionary and colonial land dealings is in some way not the history of the islanders and their land, because in Melanesian religious and social philosophies of life, land is timeless. The West talk about time when dealing with land, Melanesians, however, speak of the events that took place on the land, not because they did not have a concept of time; on the contrary, for Melanesians every event on the land is part of and contributes to the cycle of life. Land mediates life.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> C.D. Rowley notes, "In pre-industrial economy the world over, the rhythm of life is geared to the seasons, and to the transitions of life through their accompanying ceremonies. There is a time for working hard, and a time for enjoyment; but these are not regulated by the clock, and by the working day, which the industrial man has inflicted upon himself. In most of New Guinea now, economic activities are not something separate and dominant in the scale of village values" (1966:51). The rhythm of life is celebrated on the land through harvest, initiation, puberty, pig kills and marriage; but in the tilling of the land and the planting of new crops, through the blood of an initiate and of a menstruating woman or a sow the cycle of life goes.

Missionaries never really got around to understanding and/or grasping the meaning behind the symbolic act<sup>84</sup> of buying the land from the people. In Melanesia, the practice of gift giving and exchanges involve a certain degree of reciprocal obligation, insofar as a gift being received must be reciprocated. Gift giving and exchanges also signal and symbolize the beginning of new relationships or the consolidation and enhancing of an already existing relationship. In view of this, the money and trade goods given by Rev. Cox to the people was not the price tag for the land but gifts to symbolize a relationship, to which the people reciprocated well and beyond by giving the land to the mission to be used until such a time it reverts to the clan.<sup>85</sup> In reality the value of the land is not determined in trade items but in the embedded networks of relationship that binds clans and communities together.

While the missionaries saw the giving of the trade goods and loincloths to the people as concluding the transaction, the people saw it otherwise. The people saw that as the beginning of a lasting relationship, however long the missionaries are on the land. The truth of the matter is; the missionaries were actually accorded the rights of usufruct, by virtue of the new relationship they had just established; symbolized by the items of exchange they offered to clan elders and the people. Melanesians resented the fact that

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<sup>84</sup> For the missionaries, the trade goods and loincloths given to the people for the land were seen as sealing the act of buying the land. It was a transaction in its finality, the land was now theirs. On the contrary the islanders saw that as symbolic of the beginning of an ongoing relationship

<sup>85</sup> In Melanesia, and especially in the New Guinea Islands, when one wishes to borrow another person's canoe or spear (for fishing or hunting), he brought betel nut or shell-money in exchange. The transaction is done to secure the right to use the canoe for the day, with the understanding that the canoe will be returned to the owner at the end of the day. I believe this is one clear factor in the conflicts faced today by the church.

some missionaries were not interested at all in relationship, accusing them of being selfish and greedy.<sup>86</sup>

A careful analysis of the Kimadan conflict revealed that the young men's action was justified, based on the cultural understanding that the missionaries were not buying the land for exclusive ownership. According to people the missionaries were their guests and they were their hosts, and in Melanesian spirit of hospitality, a guest worthy of their respect must receive a gift or become an exchange partner.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, the young men's action is justified according to Melanesian land and property law which states that the land may belong to the owner, but the fruit and palm tree growing on it belongs to the person who planted them.

## 2. Private Ownership Versus Corporate Rights

The Western perception of property encompassed individual/private ownership. The Church's exclusive claim of ownership to the land is one obstacle to its relationship with the people. Mas' son and nephew could not use a portion of the land, let alone cutting timber on the land to build a new house, because the land 'belongs to the church.'<sup>88</sup> In most Melanesian society, land is never a private property, but one finds that group/public rights and private rights of usufruct co-exist. Every one by virtue of being a

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<sup>86</sup> The Rev. Benjamin Chenoweth based in Ligga, New Ireland Province, from 1935-1945 never accepted an invitation to attend a village feast in all his ten year tenure, earning him the reputation of being a callous and selfish individual (Conversation with Josephat Boski of Metemana village and Jonah To Piana of Kosai village, New Hanover Island. Both men were students of Rev. Chenoweth at the Methodist Christian Training Institute (CTI) at Ligga).

<sup>87</sup> Based on my research work in New Britain: in October of 1999; October and November of 2000; and in July of 2004; and in New Ireland: June 2001 and in August of 2004.

<sup>88</sup> Carried over from the traditional religious beliefs of the people was the belief that any desecration of sacred object and property belonging to the ancestors or any breaching of taboos carried the punishment of sickness and even death. Children are instructed to leave church properties alone, out of fear of similar fate.

member of the landowning clan has the right of usufruct.<sup>89</sup> Although private and group ownership also co-existed, it only applied to other properties other than land. The co-existence of group and private ownership served an ultimate goal; that is, the well being of the whole community.<sup>90</sup>

The Methodist missionaries may have done well when they first acquired the land from the people, but the moment they got the land, the ‘theological fences’<sup>91</sup> were erected to keep people away from it. But of significance to this study is the argument that, if the Church is truly the new community of God in human societies, then it must be a community rooted in the context of the New Guinea Islands societies, embracing their values and ideals of reciprocity and respect,<sup>92</sup> while maintaining its unique identity.

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<sup>89</sup>The Kimadan case is all about the right of use. According to Jordan Watlen one my informants in the case, the individuals involved asked the church for rights to cut timber and to garden on the church land concerned, but they were denied permission, simply because it was ‘church-owned’ land. Out of anger the individuals forcefully moved on to occupy portions of the land.

<sup>90</sup> The reality perceived today is far from the ideals of yesterday as described here. The impact of the global economy/global capitalism is certainly leaving its mark on the whole area of clan ownership of land. But not everything is lost, because of the fact that 97% of the land is still in customary hands, making Papua New Guinea and the New Guinea Islands societies very strong rural based communities.

<sup>91</sup> The people were told that the land now belonged to God and they must never come back on the land, lest God punish them. The idea of being punished by a supernatural power was not a new concept to the people. They knew very well and feared most being punished by angry ancestral spirits or angry spirits.

<sup>92</sup> During my research work among the Tolai, Mandak and Tungak, spanning six months (from 1999 to 2001, and 2004), I detected a general sense of resentment at the exclusive claim of ownership over the land by the church, among the third generation of United Church members. For instance; Balane Penias led a group of people on to the United Church land in Ligga, New Ireland demanding the Bishop Gerson Kapman and the Synod representatives who were present at the meeting, July 2004, to hand over the land to people whom Penias cited as victims of missionary errors (Interviewed: Bishop Kapman, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004). Roy Padana of Malmaluan village (Interviewed: July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004) believes the United Church should share with the people portions of land currently lying idle, instead of holding on to them. I strongly feel the church should pay attention to the spirit of resentment among this generation. Giving a deaf ear to the existing problem may only serve to deepen and widen the already estrange relationship they have with the church.

### 3. The Generation Gap

The case demonstrates the reality of the generation gap between the old and young existing in the church today, which is obviously another factor in the present conflicts. Today's generation does not understand the actions and motives of the past generation in giving away land to the mission. While the United Church is deeply rooted in the New Guinea Islands, not all identify with the church. Rynkiewich notes, "Today's generation has difficulty imagining the context of giving land to the church in the 1870s when what the church had to offer looked like a way out of certain social binds in which the people were caught" (2004a: 36).<sup>93</sup> In the words of one informant, "the church must seek to bridge the social, cultural and religious gap between the old generation and the young generation or it will loose the young, because once the church looses the young generation its future seems bleak."<sup>94</sup>

It is unrealistic and very naïve of the United Church to assume that today's generation accepts the actions taken by their ancestors in giving land to the missionaries. It is evident from the research that, the church owes an explanation to this generation, about the reasons for giving land away to the mission. The church's accountability to the original landowners is crucial for maintaining an open relationship with the community. The church needs to be forthright with the people, telling them how much land it actually needs out of all the parcels of land it has, and put before the people its plans for future

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<sup>93</sup> The ancestors of the New Guinea Islanders are accused of being selfish and inconsiderate; caring little about the future of the next generation, when they gave the land away to the missionaries. It is now the responsibility of this generation to correct the mistakes made by the ancestors, by putting pressure on the church to return the land to original customary owners.

<sup>94</sup> From interviews I had with Roy Padana (July 2004) in Rabaul, East New Britain Province. Oliver Balbal, also of Rabaul holds a similar view (July 2004). One may not agree with the sentiments expressed here, but the defection of many United Church members to the new fundamentalist groups is an indication that something is wrong. The land issues must not become another contributing factor to the defection of church members to other groups.

infrastructure development, to avoid keeping the people in the dark about the state of the land. When the church feels accountable to the people in this matter it may help ease some of the tensions created by the misunderstanding about the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the church owning land.

In my research, I discovered that many people in the islands are frustrated by the fact that they see a lot of church land lying idle for many years, and yet the church is not coming out to tell the people what it intends to do with the land. In some cases whereby the people move in and settle on church land, the reason given is “the church is no longer using the land.”<sup>95</sup> Suffice it to say, our ancestors gave land to the missionaries out of gratitude for the work the missionaries did among them. With this understanding, one wanders: Is the failure of the church to impact society in ways people are willing to identify with it, is one reason for all the land claims against it?

The church today finds itself having to deal with a notable paradigm shift in perception of land among today’s generation, and in its attitudes towards the church. Generally there is ongoing move away from the traditional ideology of land in order to accommodate the impact of the global capitalistic economic that is bearing heavily upon Melanesian societies today. Although the rules of residual and possessory rights may have been affected by the departure from the religious, social and cultural significance of land, one thing has not changed, that is, the significance of land as means for survival. This aspect provides the church with one more theological foundation to emphasize the significance of sharing the land, for the land is a gift from God to benefit all.

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<sup>95</sup> This is the case with the lands at Malmaluan Timal Center and Rarongo Theological College (both cases in Chapter One); and the land among the people of the Kerevara and Utuan Islands, in the Duke of York group of islands, although some of the islanders had already moved in and occupied the portions of land returned to the administration on Ulu island by the Methodist Church in 1920 (see Threlfall 1975:210).

#### 4. Land is Detached from Relationship

In the case, the United Church is demanded to pay compensation for the land.<sup>96</sup> The demand for compensation must be understood within the context of the differences in the perception of land held by both the missionaries and the Melanesians. The West perceived the land as detached from relationship, but see it as a commodity for economic gains. On the contrary, land to Melanesians is symbolic of a whole way of life. It symbolizes harmony, peace and tranquility, unity and identity, deliverance and wholeness, hospitality, relationship and/or reciprocal obligation of one group towards another.

When the people demand compensation, it is not so much the monetary value of the land that they have in mind, but it is their way of asking the church to help them redeem everything the land meant to them before it was taken from them. Relationships between the church and the people have become sour because the people have ill feelings towards the church, because they still blame the missionaries for taking the land away from them. Past experiences leads to the conclusion that compensation will contribute towards the process of rebuilding the broken relationship, thus restoring the confidence of the people in the church, giving them every reason to identify with the church. Social equilibrium in society and community harmony is important and must therefore be restored through the process of compensation.

The church as a catalyst for peace and healing must mediate peace and healing in society, hence practical steps need to be taken by the church towards catalyzing peace and healing. As an act of good will the church may need to compensate the people for some portions of land or take the step of returning some of the land it is not using to those

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<sup>96</sup> I addressed the issue of compensation in chapter four, under the heading of “current issues”.



with customary rights to the land.<sup>97</sup> I know that the danger of setting precedence is very real; hence I would emphasize that only those with genuine claims of customary rights must be compensated. Certainly the problem is further compounded by the difficulties in identifying those genuine claimants. This is where one learns to trust the peoples' stories, for behind every portion of land in Melanesia is a story.

##### 5. Western Concept of Development

The portion of land taken from the United Church by the oil palm company, PACRIM, is unlikely to be returned to the church. The United Church and the original customary owners of the land are not the beneficiaries of the operation and projected economic benefits of the company, other than the opportunity to work, providing cheap labor to the company. The beneficiaries are the capitalist company owners and the state, the Papua New Guinea government through company taxes. The Poliamba Oil Palm Estate, a subsidiary of PACRIM is an example of the ruthlessness of Western concept of development, which has little regards for human life. It is a concept of development that escalates the struggles of the majority (proletariats) against the rich and powerful minority (bourgeoisies), and increases the proliferation of class systems in a society that is mostly egalitarian.

Making profit is the goal and the readily available pool of cheap labor is the means to achieve the profit at whatever cost it comes to human life and/or human society. Friedrich Engels description of the capitalist spirits, which gave rise to the concept of development that is responsible for the creation of class systems and class struggles in society, sheds some light on the situations in islands today.

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<sup>97</sup> The United Church, in 1970, did return some portions of unused land to the people affected by land shortage in New Ireland, Duke of York and the West New Britain. But in view of the changing times it needs to consider doing it again.

Consequently, the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes . . . in which nowadays a stage has been reached where the exploited and the oppressed class – the proletariat cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting ruling class – the bourgeoisie – without at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction and class struggles. (1959:4)

Any form of development in the New Guinea Islands must be communal, and not seek to separate the people from the land, for the land is the sole and heartbeat of their livelihood. Development must also be a sign that the differences about the nature of land between the old and young generations have been resolved. The benefits from the land have always been for the well being of the whole community. Development in Melanesia, following the capitalist agenda, ignores the integration of “economic, political, social and cultural aspects of social change into a dynamic whole” that might benefit the majority (Amarshi, Good and Mortimer 1979:xiv).

Western concept of development sees the exploitation of people and resources by dominant powers leading to the retardation of economic growth among the subordinate groups. This kind of development pattern, “is not the result of an enlightened or progressive population, but rather the result of one group purposely increasing its own wealth and at the expense of others” (Ferraro (2001:362-363).

Writing on the Fijian concept of the *vanua*, ‘land,’ Asesela Ravuvu, a Fijian social scientist notes, “Land is thus an extension of the self. Likewise the people are an extension of the land. Land becomes lifeless and useless without the people, and likewise the people are helpless and insecure without land to thrive on” (1987:76 see also Walker-Jones 2001:84-97). The same is true of the Mandak, Tolai and Tungag peoples of the New Guinea Islands. The land, (i) gives the islanders’ a sense of identity, (ii) is the

foundation of their relationship with the ancestors, the generation to come, and with each other, (iii) gives them a sense of belonging, a sense of security, and of well-being, and (iv) gives the people a sense of dignity. When the land is taken away from them there is a deep sense of helplessness. They cease to be a people, thus becoming foreigners in their land and the livelihood of the coming generation becomes under threat.<sup>98</sup> This is definitely one reason why they wish to repossess some portion of the so-called church land. Western concept of development is disrespectful of traditional values.

#### 6. Pressure on the Land

The current socio- economic changes and the instability in the political situation are putting a lot of pressure on the land. Many islanders want improved lifestyle or living standards. The means to achieve these is not through the introduced Western education system, which is proving dysfunctional in Papua New Guinea. Every year the number of high school and college dropout is at an alarming rate.<sup>99</sup> Many are returning to the land to achieve their dreams, and with the introduction of new cash crops (vanilla, hybrid cocoa and coconut), which promise better production and better financial benefits, the stakes are high.

The problems facing the islanders are acute. First, overpopulation does not guarantee better chances to achieve one's dream. For example, the village of Raluana in

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<sup>98</sup> A poster/flier put out in 1994 by the Melanesian Environment Foundation on behalf of the Pacific Heritage Foundation has the following caption in Melanesian Creole (Pidgin English): "*Sapos yu salim bus bilong yu, yu salim laip bilong pikinini bilong yu long bihain-taim*" – "By selling your forest now, you are selling your children's life and the future". This was put out as an awareness campaign to counter the heavy logging activities going on in many parts of Papua New Guinea, by giant logging firms from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

<sup>99</sup> Recent figures show that only 20% of 60, 000 students who graduate from high schools every year make it to college and a staggering 5% of 10,000 college graduates find employment (2003 Government Report on higher Education and employment in the nation).

the Kokopo area of the Gazelle Peninsula, in the East New Britain Province has a population growth rate of 2.8, which is higher than any other region in the New Guinea Islands and higher than the national growth rate of 2.6. Second, due to over population, clan membership has increased, thus putting pressure on the limited land available leading to land grabbing. Land grabbing is currently one major factor in the inter-clan and people versus the church land conflicts.

Third, the practice of clan members buying land for their children is resulting in land exhaustion in some areas of the Gazelle Peninsula and rapid depletion of customary land in many areas of New Ireland,<sup>100</sup> thus having a negative impact on the processes of clan inheritance. Fourth, the attraction of cash cropping has led to the increase in number of smallholdings or peasantry. The introduction of the hybrid form of cocoa trees and vanilla variety is creating smallholding frenzy among the people, causing the problem of encroachment on other people's land.

This explains why many are encroaching on the only lands available, those given to the missions by our ancestors. Desperate young men go to wrong people for advice about church land, thus creating problem for the church and the people.

Aspiring politicians who promised their voters the return of their land to them, 'stolen' by the missionaries, if they are voted into parliament, further compound the problem. Politicians who are under pressure to fulfill the promises made to their voters therefore create some of the land conflicts between the people and the church. But

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<sup>100</sup> In the Putput area of West coast Tigak on mainland New Ireland, the locals have been selling land to settlers from other parts of the New Guinea Islands and the country for over twenty-years. In 2002, the people of Putput suddenly realized the folly of their action, and put a stop to any further sale of land to outsiders. The realization came too late because most of the prime land had been sold to outsiders. Now the people are faced with a situation whereby in ten years time they will become like the Baining of East New Britain, squatters in what used to be their land.

generally, these problems are sending a clear message to the church, to reconsider its stand before the community. Should the church continue to defend its rights to its land, at the expense of its mandate to bring salvation to the world?

### Summary

In this chapter I interacted with an ideology of land, which was influenced by a capitalistic worldview that saw land as a commodity to be bought and sold, detached from relationship. Missionaries and colonialists were products of this particular worldview. In their land policies and practices, they differed much from the Melanesian understanding and perception of the land. Land conflicts were therefore the results of misunderstandings and differences in land ideologies between the foreigners and the indigenes. The ruthless ways the colonialists acquired land from the people and the disrespect they showed to local authorities, and desecration of peoples' sacred lands were among some of the causes of the conflicts. Previous and current church leaders did not properly deal with some of these problems, and so they are resurfacing, thus becoming thorny issues in the relationship between the church and the community.

Clearly, I see here that the land conflict is part of a much deeper problem. The issue is relationship. When people are disposed of their land relationships are affected or destroyed. It is those relationships that need to be restored. But the United Church has to first of all recognize that the problems are real, and that it is real people that are affected by the conflicts.

## Chapter 4

### Current Issues

This chapter discusses current issues in relation to land in the New Guinea Islands. Issues such as globalization, compensation, land registration, development and many more, are increasingly coming to the attention of the islanders. Some of these issues contribute directly and indirectly to the land conflicts, involving the United Church and the people in the islands. Even though most of the issues do not originate within the church circles, the legacy left by the missionaries and colonialists' land dealing with the people, tend to open up old wounds, thus the church finds itself caught in the crossfire. But in addition, the influences of these issues on people's thinking and life style are indiscriminately inclusive.

Most of the issues are not confined to the New Guinea Islands, they are indicative of a national and regional<sup>1</sup> trend in which the traditional values of land conflict with the Western ideology of land brought about by external forces hostile to the people's values and beliefs. The discussion will take into account the cultural, social, and religious implications of the issues on the people. The attitudes of the church to the issues provide an interesting observation and some in depth discussions. The following case will be used to provide a basis for the discussion.

#### Case Study

In the month of July 2004, the Niu Ailan Region (Synod) of the United Church of Papua New Guinea held a weeklong synod meeting at the Regional headquarters in

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<sup>1</sup> By regional, I make reference here to the Oceania region, but more so, the region of Melanesia.

Ligga, five miles out of the town of Kavieng, in the New Ireland Province. On the third day of the meeting a large group of people who claimed to be landowners, led by Balane Penias came on to the mission station while the day's session was still on and started planting wooden pegs to stake their claim over the land on which the Regional headquarters was situated. By placing the wooden pegs on the land, the group said they were reclaiming the land on behalf of the original landowners from whom the land was stolen.

The session for the day was adjourned so that the presiding bishop of the region, Bishop Gerson Kapman and the synod delegates, could attend to the group who became rowdy and threatening. Among many things the group accused the church of entertaining a could not-care-less attitude towards the demand of the landowners for their land to be returned to them. The church was also accused of being a party to the evil of the missionary days by holding on to the land stolen from the people by the early missionaries. The group claimed it was therefore proper that the church should return the land to the original landowners. If the church is not able to return the land, then the other moral and sensible thing the church could do is compensate the landowners.<sup>2</sup>

The 2004 dispute was the second major dispute over the Ligga land. Three years earlier, two other individuals, Wilson Peni and Mandik Kapin took Bishop Gerson Kapman and the United Church to court over the same parcel of land. The court ruled in favor of the church, hence renewing the church's title to the land. But to fulfill customary obligations, Bishop Kapman paid to the landowners of Maiom village two thousand kina, the local currency (equivalent of \$550.00), two pigs and some bundles of

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<sup>2</sup> Based on an interview I had with Bishop Gerson Kapman on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2004 and with Zacheus Apelis on August 12<sup>th</sup> 2004 at Ligga.

taro. According to Thomas Rambalis of Maiom village, a big man named Leri in the 1920s gave the land to the Methodist mission.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the claim that the ancestors of the islanders were under duress to give the land away to the missionaries, many stories revealed otherwise.

### Analysis of the Case

This case demonstrates four main major issues:

#### 1. The Impact of Global Capitalism

The roots of the land conflicts between the church and the people in the New Guinea Islands region are not confined to the local contexts alone. The conflicts are symptomatic of a much greater consequence that is of global proportion. It is the result of the impact of the global capitalist economy on the lives of the people in the islands. The global nature of the situation therefore necessitates a brief discussion of globalization and its impact on the local economies, the foundation of which is land and customary land tenure in the New Guinea Islands and Melanesia as a whole.

Prior to the discussion of the impact of globalization on the local land tenure, and in order to put issues into perspective, I wish to briefly discuss the nature and history of globalization.

The Nature of Globalization. Two specific items throw some light into the nature of the phenomenon. First, globalization is one of the most important and, it seems, widely discussed processes taking place in the world today (O'Meara, Mehlinger and Krain 2000: xiii-xiv). It is, however, not a process welcomed in many parts of the non-

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<sup>3</sup> I interviewed Thomas Rambalis at his house in Maiom village in June 29<sup>th</sup> 2001, and Bishop Gerson Kapman on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2001



Western world. Rob van Drimmelen notes that globalization is often “blamed for nearly every unwelcome development in the economy or even society as a whole – for example, by government and international institutions seeking to disavow their own responsibility for it” (1998:7).

In the southwest Pacific, globalization means the ever-widening reach of multinational companies to market their products; to others it conjures up the images of trash from industrialized nations (used automobiles, used clothes, etc.) being dumped into the developing parts of the world, to still others it represents the ever-increasing domination of Western culture. There are always two sides to a coin, hence in reality, one cannot deny the fact that globalization brings in progress and opportunities: access to global markets, global communication, transportation and traveling, global education, global justice and more.

Of great concern, however, is whether all people benefit from these. Van Drimmelen thinks otherwise, noting that, “More than one billion people in the South still lack access to basic health and education, safe drinking water and adequate nutrition. Despite growing global wealth, one person in three lives in poverty . . . . Thus globalization is a two-edged sword, bringing benefits to some and misery to others” (1998:10). Given the unpredictable scenarios, globalization means different things to different people or all things to all persons. Howard Snyder notes, “Globalization is both the reality and consciousness that the context of life has stretched from one’s own city or nation to include the whole Earth. Globalization is thus a change in both perspective and reality” (1995:24-25). It is “the shrinking of the world into what is popularly referred to as ‘the global village’” (Chesaina 2004:10), so that whatever happens at one end of the

village affects the rest. It also “refers to the process of growing and intensifying interaction of all levels of society in world trade, foreign investment and capital markets. . . . Globalization focuses on economic processes” (Van Drimmelen 1998:8).

Robert Schrieter says that globalization is about “the increasingly interconnected character of the political, economic, and social life of the peoples on this planet” (2004:10; see also Stiglitz 2003:9), and is “accompanied by the creation of new institutions that have joined existing ones to work across borders” (Stiglitz 2003:9). Victoria Lockwood also notes that the issue of globalization “has become the hallmark of the twenty-first century as it articulates a new form of social organization – an increasingly borderless world where flows of capital and new technologies, are propelling goods, information, people, and ideologies around the globe in volumes, and at speeds, never previously imagined” (2004:1). There is an undeniable factor, “Globalisation is such a process – it will go on whether there is an anti-globalisation movement or not” (Wolters 2004:11). Globalization as a process and its impact on the world scene is here to stay.<sup>4</sup>

Second, globalization operates through many different trends. Snyder discusses eight global trends (1995:11-36), four of which provide the basis for my discussion on

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<sup>4</sup> Put aside all the negative aspects of globalization, Stiglitz asserts that; “Globalization can be reshaped, and when it is properly, fairly run, with all countries having a voice in policies affecting them, there is a possibility that it will help create a new global economy in which growth is not only more sustainable and less volatile but the fruits of this growth are more equitably shared” (2003:22).

I acknowledge that the impact of globalization on a developing nation like Papua New Guinea comes in many forces; economic, political, religious, cultural, etc. These forces are tools in the hands of governments, private and religious institutions who have the power to use them either for the common good or the demise of the people. One arena in which the full impacts of these forces are more visible and felt is the land. Due to the inseparable connection between the people and the land and also due to the holistic nature of the land, whichever way these forces come into play will always have economic, sociological, and religious ramification on societies.

the impact of globalization on customary land tenure in the islands. First, there is “the rise of a global economy” (1995:14), which speaks of the fact that, “Global integration and networking are now the driving force in business and economics. The world is becoming one vast marketplace, not a patchwork of local markets. Economic integration on a world scale is shaping society in a process that will reach well into the twenty-first century” (Snyder 1995:46).

The process of integration and networking is made possible by “the aggressive worldwide expansion of capitalism through free market trade and neoliberal policies” (Lockwood 2004:2); it is a new ideology of unleashed capitalism. This new ideology holds that “free trade without government interference, increasing privatization, and deregulation” is the catalyst to a new era of economic growth (Lockwood 2004:2) or “the golden age of global prosperity” (Snyder 1995:23-24).

Neoliberal economists welcome such policies, proposing that it is the key to the creation of more new jobs, improvements in income earning and standards of living all over the world. Melanesia, like other developing regions of the world is directly affected by the rising global capitalist economy, due to the fact that it involves the land.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Other features of this global capitalist economy are perceived in its policies and processes of development in the developing world. These comprise, (i) the regulation of “trade policies, currencies, and loans to developing countries by international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and by international agreement such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)” (Lockwood 2004:2), (ii) the dramatic rise in direct foreign investment as one of the key processes in the greater economic integration. Much of the foreign investment, which covers “manufacturing, real estate, tourism, banking and natural resource extraction (mining, and so on) is made by powerful transnational corporations” (Lockwood 2004:2; see also Trouillot 2001 and Robbins 2002). The increasing trend now is the relocation of manufacturing and other service-related industries from rich industrialized countries, with high labor cost to developing parts of the world where labor or production are cheap, and (iii) there is a high mobility of labor out of the impoverished regions of the world to the ‘capitalist core’ of the relatively rich nations, in search of improved living standards.

The implications of the economic global trend are far reaching for Melanesians. Ironically, the economic improvement programs to Melanesia are not without the string-attach to the ‘economic aprons’ for example, of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These powerful financial institutions dictate the rules of the game through their policies. In order for the Melanesian nations to keep up with the requirements of these financial institutions they must learn to go by their rules. The lending rates and policies of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund for that matter are exuberantly high and oppressive, and only serve to retard economic growth among Melanesian nations. All this goes to show a deliberate attempt on the part of the financial giants to make Melanesian nations or other developing nations of the world forever indebted to them, thus victimizing them in the process.

Smallholder farmers in the rural areas are feeling the effects of high lending rates of the financial institutions and the high tariff cost on import goods. The high costs of farm equipment, seeds and fertilizers have forced the closure of many of the smallholders. The Papua New Guinea Government’s pre-occupation with investment into non-renewable resources does not help the course of small farmers, let alone the whole agricultural industry in the nation. In the 1970s, agriculture was proving to be a viable economic enterprise and a vital lifeline not only for the economy of the nation but also for the small farmers and families.

In relation to the development packages, the large quantity of foreign investments that are poured into Melanesia do not benefit the indigenes, in the least they exploit the people of their labor and resources and destroy their land. The foreign investments into

Melanesia for example have often benefited the elite of society and their transnational partners.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the plantation schemes of the colonial days in the New Guinea Islands left a legacy of dependency on foreign capital among the indigenes. Apart from the resilience of the Tolai, other parts of the New Guinea Islands were victims of a system that suppressed peasantry, simply for the sake of monopoly over the cheap labor resource among the people. The scheme thrived on cheap labor, to the benefit of the ‘capitalist core’ nations of Europe.<sup>7</sup>

The extensive mining, logging and fishing activities, currently going on in many parts of Papua New Guinea, are also examples of the kind of foreign investments that are in the long run exploitive economically and socially to the indigenes. David Sang, making reference to the Malaysian logging firm carrying out logging on the island of New Hanover, said,

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<sup>6</sup> In 1989, the second largest open-cut mine in the world (the first being in South Africa) on the island of Bougainville in the North Solomon Province of Papua New Guinea, abruptly came to a close. Its forceful closure was a culmination of many years of long standing bitterness by landowners towards the company, the Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia (CRA) and the Papua New Guinea government. The people felt the company and the PNG government were exploiting them, but above all the people were genuinely concerned about the destruction of the environment, thus their livelihood. The large-scale destruction of the land by mining companies in Papua New Guinea, has served to change the lifestyle of rural populations in many parts of the country forever.

<sup>7</sup> Today, there are still large coffee and tea plantations in the Highlands, and coconut, cocoa and vanilla plantations on the coast owned by big firms like W. R. Carpenters and the Steamships group of companies and others. There are wealthy nationals who work in partnership with some of these firms. Ironically none of these benefit the ‘small people’ and the benefit to the economy of the nation from all this is very minimal. This is because wealthy Papua New Guineans who own plantations of some sort save their money off-shore, in foreign banks; e.g. Switzerland, Singapore, the United State of America, the Cayman Islands, etc... This only serves to weaken the national economy, thus victimizing the ordinary people in society. Also, due to the weakness in the legal mechanisms that hold businesses and individual businessmen and women accountable on tax fraud/tax evasion, there are many undue taxes. By 2001, the amount of money owed to the nation of Papua New Guinea due to tax fraud/tax evasion was 250 million Kina (\$US750m). The Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation then (now Bank of South Pacific) was seeking legal advice from the PNG government to freeze the accounts of some national business men and women until they paid their taxes (From my conversation with Ega Renagi the branch manager of the PNGBC in the town of Goroka, in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea: 2001)

They cut our timber, but for every cubit feet we the landowners get 2 Kina (\$0.60), the middlemen get 10 Kina (\$3.00) and the company gets more. They are cheating us, they are hurting us and we want them to be kicked out. We want them to also compensate us for the damages they have done to our forests, rivers and streams.<sup>8</sup>

On the social impact of the global economy Lowery notes,

The emerging global economy offer great potential for human survival, but it also poses enormous threats to social and spiritual well-being. . . . The mobility of capital and the rapidly changing networks of production and distribution increase uncertainty and undermine the stability of families and communities worldwide. On average, parents are working longer hours for less pay. . . . Their absence, exhaustion, and anxiety about finance take a toll on the family. (2000:2)

Lowery is describing a scenario that is no longer confine to the West. It is increasingly becoming a problem in our “modern” Melanesian societies as well.

Second, there is “a basic power shift in global politics” (Snyder 1995:14). There has been a trend toward greater global political integration. There are positive and negative political implications in the global political integration. For instance, since the end of World War II, there has been an increasing participation and intervention in what many nation states consider their internal affairs by international institutions such as the United Nations and the World Court (Lockwood 2004:2). The peacekeeping missions in Lebanon, in the former Yugoslavia, in Sierra Leone and in Bougainville are examples of such interventions. Wolters notes,

The political interdependence of earlier periods has been replaced by new interconnectedness through international organizations like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization . . . The political network uses the language of power. These languages have enabled the networks to become powerful globally. Their common denominator is the language of functional rationality. (2004:10)

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<sup>8</sup> Based on my conversation with the informant (September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004)

The long arms of the United Nation through its many global programs reach out to every region of the globe.<sup>9</sup> Immediately after the process of decolonization in the Pacific, regional groups were either formed or the young Pacific nations became members of existing international organizations in the attempts to foster and enhance global political participation/dialogue, and economic and political integration.<sup>10</sup>

The ambiguity of the process of decolonization is the problem that confronts Melanesian politics today. If decolonization is about being free from the control of foreigners and their foreign systems of power and ideologies, then in reality Melanesians are not yet free. Given the situation in which Melanesians got rid of the foreigners but decided to keep the foreigners' political, economic and legal systems, in reality the spirit of the West is still in Melanesia and still impacting the lives of the people. Global political integration is a philosophical disguise; it is nothing new but the perpetuation of the spirit of imperialism. The demands by the landowners for their land to be returned to them, is politically motivated and contains the language of power.

The implications are far reaching for customary landowners and their land. For instance the following is true;

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<sup>9</sup> Lockwood notes, "There are also growing numbers of international nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) such as the Red Cross and Amnesty International that operate around the world. Some argue that such political institutions undermine the sovereignty, self-determination and political autonomy of nation states" (2004:3; see also Hannerz 1997; Trouillot 2001). The UN for instance cited Papua New Guinea in 1995 for crime against humanity for the role of its military forces in the death of many people on the island of Bougainville. This is a perfect example of the political intervention on a global scope.

<sup>10</sup> The formation of such regional organizations as the South Pacific Forum Nations, the Melanesian Spear Head Group (MSHG), etc., is example of the regional forums for enhancing of global political participation and integration.

- Land ownership can easily be politicized whereby political pressure is placed upon customary owners to give up their land for new mining sites to accommodate outside interest in the mining industries of the Pacific.
- The legal systems are not always fair and correct when they arbitrate over land conflicts. Costly mistakes have often been committed, when rightful owners forfeit their land to the wrong people in whose favor a foreign legal system has ruled.<sup>11</sup>

Third, increasing environmental destruction is contributing to making the world an unsafe place to live. Thompson notes, “Increasing productivity also uses up the earth’s resources and pollutes the atmosphere, the land and rivers, lakes and oceans. The fast and greedy world of globalization seems to be leaving the poor behind, homogenizing culture, and speeding up environmental destruction” (2003:36). Thus, it is not surprising that there has been an increasing opposition “to globalization in the name of the poor, of cultural diversity, and of the earth itself” (Thompson 2003:36, 37). Snyder notes; “New awareness of the global reach of environmental risks is prompting more cooperation in studying and reducing environmental hazards” (1995:25).

And fourth, the global religious proliferation and “the emergence of new ‘hybrid’ religions” demonstrate that “globalization is also a religious phenomenon” (Snyder 1995:24). A spirit of fundamentalism characterizes the religious proliferation, most surprisingly not just among Christians, but also among Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. Some analysts claim that the rise of fundamentalism “is a form of protest or resistance

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<sup>11</sup> During my interviews with the Lands Advisors for both the East New Britain and New Ireland Provincial Governments, I was alerted to this problem. Through their respective offices, they have come to the aid of some landowners who have been hard-done by the courts (Interviews with Mr. Samela Biamak: July 12, 2004; and with Martin Banlovo: August 6, 2004)



against the global expansion of capitalism and the materialist values and lifestyles which accompany it” (Lockwood 2004:3; see also Ernst 1996; Robbins 2002).

Apart from the proliferation of new ‘hybrid’ religious groups, one does not ignore the global impact that the Ecumenical Movement is making in the world today. Through the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Ecumenical Movement has been over the years a powerful voice for the poor, the powerless, the oppressed and the marginalized of society.<sup>12</sup>

Today, one perceives an increasing shift towards economic hegemony in the move towards economic homogeneity. It is a push towards homogenizing the economic systems of the world to a manageable structure. The Melanesians fear economic hegemony, for it means the people and the instruments set in place to protect them would become puppets in the hands of the economically powerful. The people perceive the push for registration of customary land and privatization of land tenures as a further move towards intensifying economic hegemony. At the helm are the powerful financial institutions, which dictate to the smaller nations of the world the rules of the game. In the end it is the small nations that end up being the victims because they cannot keep up with the rules of the game.

Today, the natural resources of the developing nations (gold, bauxite, tin, zinc, copper, gas, oil, timber, fish, etc.) are still being exploited to service the industries of big

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<sup>12</sup> The Ecumenical Movement has influenced political decisions and events in many troubled spots of the world; e.g. in Nicaragua in the early 1970s. My own involvement in the Pacific Conference of Churches (a parent body of all churches’ councils in the Pacific, with a membership in the WCC) for 12 years where decisions have been made at political level to protest super-powers unethical abuse of Pacific islanders right to a clean environment, equal share of their natural resources, etc. In 1996 I was involved in a protest march through the street of Suva, Fiji, to the French Embassy protesting France’s continual nuclear testing on Marurua atoll in Mahuinui (formerly Tahiti). The Pacific Conference of Churches head office is in Suva, Fiji organized the march.

industrialized nations of the world. It is in this context that the land issue in the New Guinea Islands is to be understood.

The Roots of Globalization. Although globalization is a recent phenomenon, the political and economic processes that created it and served its purposes have their roots in history. Globalization has its roots in the western imperialist expansion over the long period of colonization and missionization into Africa, Asia and the Oceania regions.<sup>13</sup> It represents “an historical pattern of increasing global hegemony” (Tomlinson 1997:143-144), politically, economically, and religiously. At the heart of the Western expansion, is the expansion of capitalism.

The expansion of capitalism was not the only phenomena in the whole history of Westernization in the non-Western world. The expansion of Christianity into the ‘heathen’ non-Western world carried with it many of the same dynamics, as did Western capitalism. Stanley notes, “The missionary movement has been portrayed as one of the earliest forces of ‘globalization,’ creating new networks and new media of communication no less powerful than those established by the global market and information technology revolution of the late twentieth century” (2001:1).

Anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff described nineteenth century overseas missions as “nodes in a global order, their stations pegging out a virtual Empire of God no less ethereal than in cyberspace today” (1997:12). While this may be applicable to the African mission situations, it is not a true description of the Methodist missionary work in the New Guinea Islands. However, it is true to say that the expansion of Western

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<sup>13</sup> According to van Drimmelen, “Present-day globalization differs from these earlier processes [the Crusades and European colonization] both in nature (its emphasis on liberalization and deregulation) and in scope and intensity. But like colonialism, globalization benefits the powerful economic interests most” (1998:8).

Christendom was part of the same phenomenal surge of global hegemony, under the auspices of European powers.

The expansion of Western capitalism in history was spurred by the need for raw materials and markets, following the industrial revolution in Europe. During the colonial era, European powers sought to dominate and integrate “distant peoples and cultures into global-scale political economic relations” (Lockwood 2004:3). In doing so, the Europeans;

Created an international division of labor where colonized peoples provided the cheap labor and raw material for European expansion, wealth accumulation and industrialization, while peripheral colonized regions stagnated and were forcibly introduced to Western institutions and Christianity. (Lockwood 2004:3; see also Wallerstein 1974 and Wolf 1982)

Suffice it to say, they left a legacy of a developing world, which includes nations integrated into the capitalist world system through colonialism and neocolonialism, a legacy that is “mired in poverty, debt, and economic malaise” (Gordon 1996) and “often suffers ethnic conflict and political instability” (Lockwood 2004:3). While globalization generally produces economic growth, it also has negative consequences. “Capitalism tends to concentrate wealth and to widen the gap between the rich and the poor” (Thompson 2003:36).

One of the avenues through which the expansion of Western capitalism made an inroad into the region of Melanesia was the plantation scheme. Owing to the fact that such raw materials as coconut, cocoa, sisal, coffee, cotton, rubber, etc., could not be grown in Europe, the responsibility of producing these fell in the hands of the colonies. In many parts of Melanesia, it meant large tracks of land had to be alienated from the indigenes for the establishment of large-scale plantations, to ensure surplus and continual

flow of raw material to industries in Europe. Amarshi notes, "...plantation and mining activities require land, which is an immobile and essential means of production, and continuous and large supplies of labour" (1979:10).<sup>14</sup>

The plantation economic scheme, historically served to consolidate the surge of Western capitalism into Melanesia. Amarshi commenting on the plantation economy in Papua New Guinea notes that,

The peculiar feature of the plantation system, however, is that, for all its importance in capital accumulation on a world scale, it has persistently discouraged domestic capital accumulation of a kind which promotes the economic development of the host economy itself. This is borne out historically by the fact that, with the exception of Brazil, no country that began its career within world capitalism as a plantation economy has managed to emerge from the periphery. (1979:29)

Papua New Guinea's economy today is still in the periphery in spite of the fact that it had a very promising start with the plantation economic scheme. This is due to the fact that the scheme benefited only the rich and powerful colonialists. Colonialism was started for economic purposes. The rich countries wanted to have unlimited access to the resources of colonies in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. Political changes were to support these economic goals. But in Melanesia, the plantation scheme was also responsible for some of the earliest records of human abuse and atrocities, and violation of the rights of the Melanesians to their land. The New Guinea Islands under the Germans is a case that clearly illustrates the atrocities committed against Melanesians (see Sack 1976 and Rynkiewich 2001).

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<sup>14</sup> The introduction of the plantation economic scheme by colonial powers first into the West Indies in the sixteenth century (Amarshi 1979: 29), to Africa, Asia and then much, much later to Melanesia, was evident of the global surge of Western capitalism. The plantation scheme provided Western capitalism the 'earthing' it needed for its impact to be felt also on the periphery. The scheme was a novelty to Melanesians, although in the New Guinea Islands it was the Tolai who caught up quickly with the plantation economic ideology, much faster than their Mandak and Tungag counterparts.

The Impact of Globalization. Globalization's impact around the world is much debated by the sympathizers and critics of the process. It is not my task to discuss the details of the ongoing debates, but I will briefly discuss four specific areas, which relate to the impact made on traditional land tenure in the islands by the process of globalization.

First, one of the hallmarks of globalization is increased and almost ruthless competition (van Drimmelen 1998:10). No one denies the usefulness of being competitive. Every human society has room for both competition and cooperation, and economic practice should allow for both; because both bring out the best of societies. However, competition promotes a one-dimensional view of human nature and human relationships, which neglects cooperation. When this happens van Drimmelen says,

The logic of the winner becomes the norm for success, the weak are excluded and the victims are blamed for their lack of competitiveness. If competition crowds out attention to the common good, it becomes a destructive force, pitting people against each other and against nature, sacrificing what is most vulnerable in creation. (1998:11)

Land is the basis of relationship among the islanders, where all reciprocal obligations are fulfilled. The influence of globalization is not only causing cultural erosion, but also the erosion of some traditional values relating to land. Competition encourages a promotion of the market value of individualism and destroys the spirit of reciprocity. Consumerism and competition are the result of the promotion of the market value of individualism.<sup>15</sup> It is getting difficult today to get one's relative to help out in the gardens without first promising a reward for labor at the end of the day.

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<sup>15</sup> In the past a betel nut was offered when one visited a house. When one went fishing, a neighbor was sure to get his/her share of fish. Today, I have to buy fish or betel nut from the very houses I once used to get these items free as a gesture of good will and friendship.

This has brought about the problem of families and clan members pitting against each other, as the greed for individual gains becomes the norm. Families and clans compete to out do each other in economic venture, thus replacing the old values of trust and communalism. There is a steady increase in land disputes between family members, and members of the same clans, than among members of different clans.<sup>16</sup> The trapping of financial gains on the land, stemming from its potential for royalties from logging and the handsome spin offs from cash cropping has caused disrespect for clan ownership, thus creating conflicts. This is currently the case in several areas on the island of New Hanover, and on the mainland of New Ireland where Malaysian logging firms are operating.

Tourism as an industry has found a sure footing in the islands, which have the reputation of having some of the world's best tourist destinations ever. The increasing number of private-owned tourist resorts is phenomenal. From a reliable source, the church land at Ligga (in case study) is situated in a very ideal location suitable for a tourist resort, with its picturesque view of the ocean, good surfs and idyllic beachfront. The group who wanted the land returned, had plans to build a resort on the land. Not far from the mission station is a local guesthouse owned by Noah Lurang, who seems to be doing well.

Second, globalization encourages exploitation, rather than sustainable management of natural resources. In voicing the pan-pacific concern for sustainability of the environment, Jovili Meo notes,

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<sup>16</sup> The land conflict involving the United Church land in Halis, in the Namatanai district of the New Ireland Province is a perfect example of clan members going behind other members of the clan and selling portions of the church land to settlers from other Provinces in Papua New Guinea (Interview with Rev. Robinson Butut, 20 June, 2001).

Many of our people are lured by promises of large cash bonuses and easily forget the long-term ramifications of such short-term gains. Much of the exploitation of our natural resources is done by trans-national corporations (TNC) whose primary interest is profit. Resource owners derive a miniscule proportion of the return while large profits are made by the large corporations. (2001:122)

Due to the non-renewable nature of some of the natural resources, this generation has contributed to the disparity of the generations to come. In Melanesia for instance, “The forces of globalization appear to be mainly negative – forests are destroyed, minerals are extracted, and fish stocks are depleted – with local people and the system of government not advancing in the way they envisaged” (Macintyre and Foale 2004:150).<sup>17</sup>

In Papua New Guinea as a whole giant mining and logging companies are depriving the people of their land, depleting their forests, silting and polluting their river systems. The “booming demand for timber is leading to further violation of land rights of indigenous people...[and] the price of tropical timber has rapidly risen leading to further invasions of indigenous territories” (van Drimmelen 1998:103). The irreparable damages done to the land in some parts of the islands due to logging and mining leaves no hope for the sustainability of the next generation. Critics of globalization conclude that “globalization and neoliberal economics focus on growth and profits” ignoring the livelihood of workers, the sustainability of the environment, and “economic justice” (Broad 2002:13).

Third, because land is the living link between the indigenes and their ancestors, they are not only physically but also spiritually related to the land. Land is a unifying

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<sup>17</sup> One needs to know that not every thing about globalization is evil. Globalization has brought about multiple good in such areas as communication and the general dissemination of information, travel, health, prevention of human rights abuses, etc... The problem is not with globalization as a process, but it is with the structural forces that utilize the process of globalization to achieve their ends. When globalization as a process becomes institutionalized it becomes a system that serves the intentions of other systems, be they economic, political or religious. When the systems are evil, the process of globalization simply serves to perpetuate the evil all over the world. When this happens, “like colonialism, globalization benefits the powerful economic interests most” (van Drimmelen 1998: 8).

force, essential for all aspects of life; social, political, spiritual, cultural, economic. To separate the indigenous peoples from their land is to deny their peoplehood. The Ligga conflict is also an example of the accentuation of individualism, at the expense of the community ethos. The individuals, calling for the return of the land were not genuine about their intention for the land to be returned to the right owners. These were powerful individuals, using the landowners to wrestle land away from the church, which will eventually go for their personal use.

Globalization, with its economic packages to developing nations of the world has the tendency to ignore these. Ill-conceived notions of development threaten the culture, the land and the very livelihood of the people.<sup>18</sup> Dirlik puts it so eloquently when he said, “The radical slogan of an earlier day, ‘Think globally, act locally,’ has been assimilated by transnational corporations with far greater success than in any radical strategy. The recognition of the local in marketing strategy, however, does not mean any serious recognition of the autonomy of the local. . .” (1992:34).

In fact that notion of ‘think globally, act locally’ became a catchword of the ecumenical movements in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, several of the World Council of Churches co-opt programs, were firm on the notion, calling on all member churches to embrace the global agenda of the ecumenical movement. For ten years I worked very closely with the Youth Ministry of the United Church, which gave me the opportunity to attend WCC sponsored ecumenical youth conferences. I discovered the concept was good but the ideologies were Western, it encouraged not unity in diversity,

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<sup>18</sup> One cannot forget the Bougainville situation, where the irreparable damage done to the environment, the land and the displacement of the people which has contributed to one of the worst case of conflicts in the history of Papua New Guinea. Logging in the New Britain, New Ireland and New Hanover is not only destroying arable land but destabilizes customary land tenure system, and the livelihood of the people who depend heavily of the environment for sustenance.



but the “melting pot” approach whereby unity means uniformity. This leads on to the next point.

Fourth, the current phase of religious globalization has not done much to encourage critical theological thinking among local churches in Melanesia. Dominant religious groups, especially the Pentecostal groups and other independent fundamentalist groups from America, hold to the belief that it is their God given task to theologize for the national Christians. The results of such attitudes are twofold,

- It perpetuates an unhealthy theological dependency on the dominant groups. This means contextualizing the Christian message is a non-issue; people are not encouraged to think through cultural issues theologically, hence the land issues remains a non-theological issue.
- Irrelevant theologies are produced by the dominant groups, which to say the least is devastating to the cultural identity of the people and undermines the relevancy of the church and effectiveness of the gospel in impacting societies. In the islands, for instance, the groups’ theology of holiness, which purports to isolation from ‘worldliness,’ encourages members to separate themselves even from family members who do not adhere to their philosophy of holiness and from pre-occupation with such worldly things.<sup>19</sup>

The groups’ categorization of cultural values as worldly precludes any meaningful dialogue between the culture and the gospel. Ironically, they

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<sup>19</sup> The sad scenario is accentuated by the belief among nationals that whatever or anything that comes out of America/the West is real and true. There is not a United Church congregation on New Hanover Island that does not practice ‘slain in the Spirit’ like Benny Hinn or Creflo Dollar or any of their star televangelists. It is so comical to hear local preachers who want to preach and pray like their American televangelist. In fact the same is true all over Melanesia.

categorized any concerns with the land as worldly, but their theology of prosperity is ‘the proper’ teaching.

It is alarming that the whole issue of globalization has not been raised at congregation levels. Our people are ignorant (not by choice) about the nature and impact of globalization on our societies. It is ironical that globalization has been addressed at ecumenical gatherings of member churches at both the regional and global level, in which United Church leaders participate, but none of that information is disseminated to or trickles down the so-called grassroots.

My research revealed the grassroots are not informed of two further problems relating to the nature and impact of globalization on our societies; (i) it is not being addressed at the theological and Bible college levels. The church’s theological institutions have not taken up the task of including globalization in their curriculum and teaching, and (ii) When the church takes seriously its prophetic ministry, the issue can be addressed through its homiletic and teachings, and in its other awareness programs.

## 2. Landowners’ Compensation Claims

Over the years since independence, landowners’ compensation claims have increased dramatically in Papua New Guinea. Landowners are demanding to be compensated for the land on which churches and mission stations are built, major towns are situated,<sup>20</sup> schools and other educational institutions are established and hospitals, major airports and airstrips, roads and other infrastructures are built. Business

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<sup>20</sup> In 1980 some landowners from Panapai village, some 30 kilometers away from the township of Kavieng, under the leadership of Diosin Korong and Kapin demanded compensation from the Papua New Guinea Government for the land on which the Kavieng town is situated and on which the airport occupies. The courts, one example of what Maxtone-Graham alludes to (p. 192), squashed the compensation claims.

establishments and mining companies are demanded by landowner groups to pay compensation before any major projects can be carried out on the land.

Land claims against the church are currently a major issue. Those claiming to be descendants of original owners often make demands for high compensation. Land claims against the church will likely to continue as long as increasing population growth puts pressure on the limited land available to the people on the islands, especially among the Tolai. People in small islands groups in the New Guinea Islands region are facing the threat from natural elements, which are reducing land sizes, thus creating a land shortage, for instance the people in the Duke of Islands and many of the Tigak islands in the New Hanover island groups.<sup>21</sup>

Given the scenario, many critics see landowners' compensation claims as hindrances to meaningful development in Papua New Guinea (Power 2000; Narangeng 2004:161-195). Many of the compensation claims are so exuberantly high in capital values, often times putting pressure on developers to operate within their capital means to stay in business. Many of the developers are committed to "work with the customary owners as partners in project development" (Power 2000:3), but are threatened by "a breakdown in dealing with the project area landowners" (Power 2000:3) which can spell disaster for the developers. Exasperated by the high compensation claims, developers are asking, "Is there a better way to do business?" (Power 2000:4).

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<sup>21</sup> The Tasman, Mortlock, Pitt, Carteret and Nuguria atolls are part of the North Solomon Province in Papua New Guinea. The people on these atolls are of Polynesian stock/descent. The atolls are sinking at a very fast rate. Since the middle of 2005, the Papua New Guinea government has been putting pressure on the people of Tasman and Carteret atolls to relocate on to the mainland of Bougainville Island in the North Solomon Province, but the people are refusing to relocate, they are so attached to their familiar environment. In January 2006, waves caused by rising tides destroyed food gardens in the Tasman and Carteret atolls (Post Courier, PNG's Daily Newspaper, 6 March 2006).

The mining sectors in Papua New Guinea, since the collapse of the second biggest open cut mine in the world, on the island of Bougainville are weary of the high price of carrying out mining in the country in terms of the high compensation claims by so-called customary landowners. As a result they have established special public relations group to work closely with landowners ‘pressure groups’ comprised of young educated men and women who become spokespersons on behalf of their clans, communities and families. Compensation is part of the package.

The Papua New Guinea government was forced by the circumstances on Bougainville to enact two Acts, the Mining Act of 1977 and re-enacted in 1992 (Banks 1999:157), and the Land Act of 1996. Under both Acts, the issue of compensation is being addressed or legislated. Without going into detail on the Acts, among many things the Acts serve the purposes of controlling excessive compensation claims by so-called land owners, confining the claims only to the articles stipulated in the Acts.<sup>22</sup> And it also served the purpose of ensuring developers compensated landowners appropriately.

It is true that the phenomenal increase in landowners’ compensation claims and other forms of compensation claims is symptomatic of a strong society versus a weak state. But the issue at stake here is not whether development must go ahead without interferences from the numerous landowners’ compensation claims; rather it is justice for customary landowners/users. Jamie Maxtone-Graham notes,

Compensation is temporary, one-off; it does not offer ‘ongoing’ solutions – or lasting harmony. It has also been a failure because the compensation ‘cause’ has been hijacked by lawyers, by politicians, by minority interests, who together put

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<sup>22</sup> For instance in the Mining Act, “the amount of compensation to be paid for various types of damages, the Act notes firstly, that ‘where applicable, compensation shall be determined with reference to the values of economic trees published by the Valuer General’ (Section 154 (3)), and secondly, ‘that the amount of compensation payable... to landowners... may be determined by agreement’ (Section 156 (1))” (Banks 1999:157)

the true welfare of the landowners at the bottom of the pile. As a result, the expectations the landowners have with regard to compensation are almost never met – and problems not only continue, they worsen. (2002:13)

My research revealed that the practice of compensation is not the problem. The problem is in the shift from its socio-cultural purposes, contexts and emphases to purely economic purposes and agenda. The impact of the global capitalist economy is a telling factor in the current compensation practices. When compensation claims are taken against the church by landowners, both the church and the people become victims of this shifting scenario brought about by the increasing economic push.<sup>23</sup>

The following discussion will focus on the strengths and weaknesses, and the advantageous and disadvantageous of compensation, but prior to that I wish to provide a brief discussion of the socio-cultural context of compensation in traditional societies in the New Guinea Islands or Melanesia as a whole.

The Socio-cultural Context of Compensation. Compensation must be understood within the socio-cultural framework of traditional Melanesian societies. Melanesian reciprocity comprises reciprocal obligations or reciprocal actions, known in Papua New Guinea as “payback.” There are two aspects to the practice of “payback,” (i) the reciprocation of acts of kindness and goodwill that contributes to the well being of individual, community or a clan, and (ii) and the reciprocation of evil actions or anti-social behaviors causing harms to individuals, community or clan. The retributive law of

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<sup>23</sup> The current economic push is opening up new opportunities for people to make it big in the cash crop industry and other viable economic ventures brought to bear upon the land. The problem is, in some parts of the Islands the church wants to also benefit from these new economic opportunities, therefore it cannot let go of its lands. When this happens, the people accuse the church of being insensitive to their needs, and in turn the church also accuses the people of not honoring the commitment of their ancestors when they first gave the land to the early Methodist missionaries.

“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” feature prominently in this case (see Trompf 1991:19-24).

The practice of compensation embraces both elements of reciprocity. One gives a negative implication on compensation and the other a positive implication. The negative aspect of compensation, which is retributive in nature, serves to perpetuate acts of evil and atrocity. Although retribution was carried out strictly under societal laws, human nature being as it is, there was room for abuse, which triggered a chain of counter atrocities or acts of evil.

Basically, the practice of compensation, in its positive aspect, is a social norm in most New Guinea Islands’ societies; it is demanded, coached and supervised by elders of the communities or clans.<sup>24</sup> The socio-cultural significance of the practice of compensation is perceived in its functions, first, to restore broken relationship between people estranged by wrongs committed against one another. Elders of rival clans, families and groups entered into peace negotiations, which were solemnized by the exchanging of such items of value as shell money, taro, pig, the giving of a young maiden in marriage to a rival clan, and the giving of a portion of land to secure peace.

Second, in creating balances out of imbalance situations brought about by anti-social behaviors such as rapes, killing of a clan member, robbery, the forceful occupation of another clan’s land, etc. Social equilibrium in society and community harmony is important and must be maintained through the process of compensation.

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<sup>24</sup> The Tungag have two synonymous words, *seupok* and *polpol* both of which speak of and allude to compensation. The word *seupok* means to buy back or to redeem; when used in the context of compensation it is appropriate because it speaks of redeeming broken relationship, restoring social equilibrium in the community. The word *seupok* is used in relation to the death of Christ on the cross as not only the means but also the process by which the redemption of humankind is actualized. The word *polpol* on the other hand, when used in the context of compensation, carries with it both a positive and negative notions of reciprocating both the good and the anti-social behaviors.

Third, compensation as a social mechanism ensures justice is done for those who have been unjustly treated. Dinnen notes:

The payment of compensation or exchange of gifts provided and important vehicle of restorative justice. Such an orientation contrast with the narrow and impersonal focus on the punishment of offenders characteristic of the Western criminal justice system implanted in colonial Papua New Guinea. (2001:15)

The elders of the clan and the community always insisted and ensured that those who have been wronged must be duly compensated by those who wronged them. Among the Tolai when a *tubuan* comes to a person's house to claim compensation, it symbolizes the seriousness of the offense. My uncle who is married to a Tolai woman from Matalau village in the Gazelle Peninsula, one day found himself approached by a *tumbuan* at his house, after a severe disciplinary measure on his daughter, which left her bruised and unable to walk. The *tumbuan* symbolizes authority and justice, balance and peace in Tolai society, and the presence of the ancestors on whose behalf the compensation is being demanded by the *tumbuan*.

Fourth, traditionally, compensation consolidated group identity and group superiority over other groups. When a whole clan rallies behind a member who had been wronged by a member of another clan, it sends a strong message of group solidarity. The purpose behind this though, is not necessarily the intimidation of the other group, but it is for making sure that relationships are maintained.

Compensation, as a practice in Melanesia, according to Michael Taylor, is a form of social control measure typical of "stateless societies" (1982: 80-90). The negative impact of compensation on society today, results from a major paradigm shift, away from its cultural, religious and social significance in maintaining social equilibrium in society. Today, as one writer to the editor of the Post Courier newspaper claimed, "compensation

is a growing and viable industry” (July 12, 2000); it is being abused to meet the greed of opportunists and those who parasite on society to make a living.

Claims against the Church. How does the traditional understanding of compensation carry into the land claims against the church? When the people asked for the Church to compensate them for the land, there is a sense in which the people feel they have been unjustly treated.<sup>25</sup> There are three issues involved in the call for the land to be returned to the original owners. First, the call for the Ligga land to be returned to the original owners is legitimate, for it is based on the cultural understanding of the traditional and customary land systems whereby the land reverts to the clan when no longer in use. No individual owns the land; all land is under the custody of the clan, with the rights of usufruct accorded to all members of the clan. Traditional societies typically had rules (taboos) that ensured equal use rights were accorded to every member. The clan head was charged with the responsibility of enforcing these rules, and encroachment of these *tabus* entailed severe punishment.

The group was correct in claiming that their clans own the land, but their clans have not been the sole owner of the land for generations. There were other owners before their clans, until the land passed on into the hands of the Methodist mission. Typically, all lands in Melanesia have had many owners over generations, even up till the beginning of permanent settlements around gardening sites and/or at the advent of colonization and

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<sup>25</sup> I discovered in my research that in the past (before the advent of Christianity), among the three groups, compensation for wrongs committed against the land were seen as acts of ‘atonements’ because it restored human relationship to one another, to the environment and with the non-empirical world; at the same time it was an act of appeasing the ancestors whose anger was aroused by such social misdemeanor. It was a very solemn occasion because among the Tolai, the presence of the *Tumbuan* or among the Mandak the presence of the *malanggan*, and/or among the Tungag the presence of the *vosap* solemnized the occasion. Today the religious significance of such occasion continues, but with an added Christian flavor to it. Based on interviews with Rev. Beniona Lentrut, Rev. Robinson Butut, Uncles Jonathan Vulaumat and Ekonia Pasingantapak, the right Rev. Bishop Albert To Burua.



missionization. Occupation of clan lands by other warring clans was ongoing, meaning that land went through successive ownership.

Second, verifying the genuineness of the claim is certainly a problem. The problem can be further compounded by the lack of understanding of the church's position in relations to the land it claims ownership of, by those who put pressure on the church to return their land. But, to rectify the situation, the stories of the elders and the church's records are extremely important, to counter the claims. In Melanesia, every portion of land has a story. Both the people and the church have their stories to tell relating to the land they are in conflict over. The church has to retell its story, and the claimants have to hear the story,<sup>26</sup> and vice versa. Samela Biamak, the land advisor in the East New Britain Provincial government, told me, his department is seriously taking into account studying the genealogy of the Tolai people in order to resolve some of the land conflicts among the people. It is a step that is reaping some amazing results.

The United Church on its part has to redefine its own position in relation to the land it claims ownership of. For instance, is the United Church the outright owner of the lands under its name? Is it the leaser of the land or a recipient of land as a gift from the people? The church, in my opinion should see itself as having the right of usufruct and not the rights of ownership. When the United Church sees itself as having the rights of usufruct like the people within the communities it serves, it may not only lead to improve relationship with the people, but it also shows that the church is committed to justice for the sake of those who struggle for land.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The children of those who gave the land away to the Methodist missionaries (most of whom are still alive and active members of the church) need to retell the story on behalf of the church in the midst of land claims and counter claims against the church.

It is important that the church<sup>28</sup> does not take for granted the goodwill of the ancestors of the New Guinea Islanders who gave the land to the missionaries. Padana holds that “the United Church needs to show a deep sense of gratitude for the kind gestures of our ancestors [of the Tolai people] in giving the land to the missionaries by doing more for the people in terms of both physical and spiritual developments.”<sup>29</sup> There is a sense in which the people feel the church owes them so much for the land their ancestor gave to the early Methodist missionaries. Added to this is the general feeling that the church has failed to fulfill the original purposes for which the land was given to the missionaries.

Third, the court systems that arbitrate over land conflicts in Melanesia are foreign. When the first conflict over the Ligga land was taken to the courts, the courts ruled in favor of the United Church in New Ireland. The Western system of law is all about who wins and who loses, whereby one party (the guilty) is victimized for the good of the other. This is not to say that the Western system is unjust, rather, it operates on a different set of assumptions that is totally foreign to the Melanesians’ assumptions. I am also not saying that the United Church is wrong in occupying the Ligga land, because the

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<sup>27</sup>Between 1970 and 1974 there was growing tension over the land in the Gazelle Peninsula, the Duke of York Islands, and New Ireland. In 1970 the meeting of the then New Guinea Islands Synod of the United Church in Papua New Guinea, “resolved that land which was not essential for the Church’s work should be transferred to people who needed it” (Threlfall 1975:235). Two of the Church’s large plantations (Ulu and Yunakabi) were affected by the resolution. By 1974, 200 hectares of the Bulup lease on the Duke of York Islands, with Government approval was given back to the nearby villages.

<sup>28</sup> I am deeply aware here of both the ambiguity and the irony of the phrase ‘the church.’ After all, what is the church or who is the church? The church is the people, the islanders themselves. However, when I use the term church, I have in mind two things: first, it is a reference to how those who claim to be the outsiders perceive the United Church in light of the current land issues; and second, the church insofar as it is still in its missionary mould or cocoon – its philosophies and theologies are still based on missionary traditions.

<sup>29</sup> From an interview with Roy Padana: July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004. Whether one agrees with Roy Padana’s view or not, he certainly makes a valid point, the church has been seen as being incarnated into the social, religious, cultural fabric of the societies without losing its own uniqueness.

land was a gift to the church. I am saying that justice must be done to prevent the church losing its impact in the island communities.

The most puzzling scenario a Melanesian is expected to be accustomed to is the forfeiture of land by rightful owners to wrong people as a result of court decision. Sack notes the following;

The idea of social balance is central for primitive law as the idea of justice is for Western law. Whereas the state thrives on enforcing the law within its domain and on winning victories over other states, the group can frequently not afford either. In primitive societies victory cannot be the basis of peace. Instead social balance has to be restored.... Primitive law is not a battle between right and wrong where one side has to win and the other to lose; primitive law is not an attempt to establish the higher order of justice, its aim is to maintain and restore social balance. (1973:18)

A notable inclusion in the Papua New Guinea land laws is customary laws. But in spite of that, there are often notable omissions in the final decisions.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps going to court is not the way for the United Church to resolve its land disputes. The church could learn from the mining companies in establishing public relations personnel for the purpose of dialoguing with the people on land matters, not a property board that simply makes policies and guidelines. Failing to resolve land conflicts, the church takes the customary way of compensating the people. The church has nothing to lose in the transaction, but it has much to lose through alienating communities because of its dabbling in land disputes.

### 3. Land Registration

Land mobilization and registration is another current issue, which is not going down well with customary landowners. The politicians, economists, lawmakers and the

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<sup>30</sup> The case of the Bougainville Coppers Limited (BCL) a subsidiary of the Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia (CRA) is a clear example of the biggest omission made by the legal system ruled in favor of the company and state interests than the customary landowners' interest.

International Monetary Fund think this the best way to go to protect indigenous rights to their land. My research revealed four different views. First, Christian fundamentalist groups in the islands are giving a theological flavor to it, arguing that it should be resisted at all cost, because it is one indication of the reign of the anti-Christ forces which are pushing for one world religion, one world government and one world economic system. The government's push to register all customary land is one indication of the anti-Christ forces at work to deceit the people.

Second, the customary landowners see this as the *giaman bilong ol politisen*, "the lies" or "deceitfulness of the politicians" whose intentions are to side with the International Monetary Fund in structurally robbing them of their land. Since Papua New Guinea's independence, successive governments have made ill-fated attempts to formalize landownership. It was in July 1995 when the Chan government<sup>31</sup> attempted to assess the feasibility of a land registration policy, following structural adjustment recommendation from IMF. The proposed step triggered a major demonstration by university students and military personals, forcing the government to abandon the issue. The students feared, that land registration would eventually become a device to push customary landowners off their land.

In July 2001, the government under Sir Mekere Morauta as the Prime Minister, the issue was resurrected. A much bigger demonstration than 1995 took place, involving

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<sup>31</sup> From 1992 to 1996, Sir Julius Chan, a bi-racial person, of Chinese and Papua New Guinean parentage, became the Prime Minister for the second time. Under his government the nation went through some positive economic reforms, but it was his handling of the customary land issues that saw the premature ending of his second term. It was under his government that the idea of registering customary land first surfaced.

university students and sympathizers. The demonstration turned violent, resulting in the shooting dead of four university students by the police.

Third, many leaders of the mainline churches voiced strongly their opposition to and displeasure at the move the government was taking in registering customary land. They argue that the people should be “educated” about the economic implications of the whole process.<sup>32</sup> Obviously, it was clear that there was not a lot of public awareness about the implications of land registration, and the effect it would have on customary land and landowners. Incidentally, many people also questioned the motives of the mainline churches’ in voicing their opposition to the government’s proposed land registration policy.

Fourth, relates to the view the government holds to. When questioned about the 2001 demonstration by university students against the government’s move to register all customary land, the lands officer<sup>33</sup> from the East New Britain Province told me that the students were not well informed. They were ignorant of what the whole land mobilization program was all about. It was in fact not a new idea, because by the early 1960s to 1970s, before the IMF came into the scene, there was already under the Land Titles Commission the practice of land demarcation and land mobilization going on in several areas in the East New Britain Province. One such area was Raluana, whereby the Lands Title Commission went in and registered land, and with the aid of simple compasses and chains demarcated the land.

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<sup>32</sup> I interviewed Bishop Gerson Kapman of the United Church Niu Ailan Region (August 2004) and Bishop Ezekiel Tioty of the United Church New Britain Region (July 2004) for their views of the land registration push by the government.

<sup>33</sup> I interviewed Samela Biamak, the lands advisor for the East New Britain Provincial Government in his office at Kokopo: July 12<sup>th</sup> 2004.

The Tolai people were already registering their land, for they knew that to avoid or minimize the problem of land disputes (which is now being experienced), this was the way to go. Putting development in the land in the hands of landowners, thus maximizing their benefit from the land was the purpose for land demarcation and registration in the 1960s and 1970s.

Among many things, the government justifies its move to register land as protective measures against two groups of economic predators: (1) greedy developers who only seek to exploit the people off their land, and (2) lending agencies like banks and other financial institution who charge high lending rates for loans customary landowners took out for projects on the land. With regards to the lending agencies, in the event that a landowner does not meet the deadline for paying up the loan, the bank has the right to take the individual to court or to dispossess the owner off his/her land.

Under the proposed land registration scheme, however, this would not happen. Instead of dispossessing the owners off their land or taking them to court, the new by-laws of the proposed scheme authorizes the bank and/or any other lending agencies to move in and re-possess the property. With the property in its control, the bank will contract interested developers to work the land and recoup all the money lost in the loan, at the end of which the land reverts to the real owners. This, however, would not happen if the land were not registered under the particular individual's name.

The scheme is a stalemate, because the people no longer trust their elected members in parliament. The government's own track record, as a middleman in negotiating development with major developers on the land is not the best. So often

benefits from such land dealings that are supposed to be in the landowners' hand do not reach them; even if the benefits do reach landowners' hand, it is never the full amount.

The high profile relationships between some politicians and foreign companies who have substantial land dealings in the country, and between politicians and very rich and powerful Papua New Guineans is one of the 'scare crows' in the whole proposed land registration deal. Until customary landowners are guaranteed the safety and security of their land, they will always be unwilling partners in any government schemes that directly involve the land.

To put the anxiety of landowners about the security and safety of their land once the land registration policy is pushed through, the current Secretary for the Department of Lands in the national government outlines once more what the government stand is on land registration (Post Courier March 10, 2006). He reiterates three issues,

- The Department of Land would not administer or manage the land, but would only maintain registration and the records of the land once they were registered by the registrar of titles,
- It is important that landowners register their lands in order to acquire a base title. Landowners should go back to their history to ascertain they are the rightful owners, and then have the land surveyed and registered. Ascertaining the rightful ownership of the land before registration is important because once the land is registered, it would be recorded and legally recognized forever.
- With the base title in place, the landowners would have absolute title, that is, the land will always be theirs and they can do anything on it and with it. The

proposed land registration policy is not an attempt by the government and the IMF to steal the land from the people.

But as is the case with every legal treatise, there are loopholes. One such loophole is the precluding of any future attempt to return the land to rightful owners, once it is established that the land was registered under wrong owners. Unless the system has means to annul the previous legal transaction, then it has a serious problem. This is exactly one of the courses of the land conflicts between the churches and the people. There are cases before the United Church today whereby it has to give back land to the right landowning group, after discovering that a mistake was made in history, whereby wrong people gave land away to the Methodist missionaries; e.g. among the Kerawara people of the Duke of York islands.

In my research, I discovered that the church is out to protect its land from any outside interferences.<sup>34</sup> In fact, in the Ligga conflict, it would be difficult for those who are demanding the return of the land to original landowners, to have their demands legally ruled in their favor, because of the fact that the United Church in New Ireland has registered its land. The difficult parts for anyone to accept or understand relating to the Ligga land are: (1) the individuals in conflict against the church are products of the church's education system, taught on mission stations such as Ligga, and lacking gratitude towards the church, and (2) the inability of the individuals to perceive and understand that it is the people that the church is seeking to serve. The land is simply there to enable the church to do it work well to meet the holistic needs of the people.

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<sup>34</sup> The New Britain Enterprise, a business arm of the United Church in East New Britain has gone ahead to establish proper demarcation and registration of all church land and property to safeguard the rights of the church (From an interview with Sir Ronald To Vue and Sam Piniua in Rabaul October 1999).



With that said, the church is not exonerated from its failure to help heal the wounds left by the legacies of the past.

The opposition to the land registration moves by the Papua New Guinea government shows the need for:

- The landowning groups, comprising the customary landowners, the churches, the government and the private/business sectors to enter into serious dialogue about the whole process, considering the cultural, social, religious and economic ramifications of such. It would be beneficial to all groups if the dialogue includes representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- The people to trust those who represent them in public offices to do the right thing by them in protecting their land. One hopes that the dialogues will produce such outcome.

#### 4. Development Issues

In this section, I will confine the discussion to the issue of economic developments, which directly involve the land. There are two main concerns in relation to development on the land, which I will keep in mind while discussing development issues: (1) it is the concern on proper uses of land, so that it is sustainable development taking place, and the benefits go to all, while at the same time it conserves the land, and (2) concerns the other ninety-seven per cent of the land that is still in the hands of customary owners. As long as this large volume of land is still in the hands of the customary owners, development is slow or stunted. The major concern is being able to gain the confidence of the people into allowing some of the land to be use for the purpose of development.

In the first decade of independence, from 1975 to 1985, economic development and progress was the goal to be achieved by the newly independent state of Papua New Guinea.<sup>35</sup> Self-reliance and equal participation of all Papua New Guineans in the process of development was the way to achieve economic development. The determination on the part of the government to achieve this goal led to the adoption of the famous and now defunct ‘Eight Point Plan’ as a strategy for economic development. The adoption of the ‘Eight Point Plan,’ came together with “the governments approach to a new land policy” (Hegarty 1979:196).

Agriculture was going to be the backbone of economic development in the nation, but by the mid 1980s, the focus shifted in favor of heavy investment into the non-renewable resources.<sup>36</sup> Rhetoric about ‘self-reliance’ had become increasingly empty, as the government increasingly became so dependent on handouts from the Asian Bank, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The first decade saw the government going on a borrowing spree from these financial institutions. The more money it borrowed, the deeper it sank into debt, and this meant the government was continually repaying its debts. The implications were not favorable for the nation; the money needed for development within the nation, was continually spent on paying off

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<sup>35</sup> The belief then was, there were social advantages in such progress and development, defined in terms of increased income, better education, higher standards of living, greater security and better health. All these social advantages at a great cost to the people, for progress had to be imposed on them. And although there is currently a shift from nationals being passive recipients of foreign changes and foreign philosophies of progress to being active participants in development, it is not significant enough to say it is equal participation in the process of development. For those who are active participants in the process of development, they find themselves entrenched in a trend of progress that is uniquely Melanesian, defined by loyalty to one’s clan and region, and mostly neo-colonialist in nature.

<sup>36</sup> It was the churches that continued sustainable development on the land on behalf of the people through special Vocational and Technical school programs; many of which naturally ceased operation for lack of funding

debts. In order to bail itself out of the enormous debts it had, the government shifted its focus from agriculture to mining, for it believed that the benefits from the mining was far superior and faster than agriculture.

After a decade of independence it became apparent that development and progress benefited only a few. The proliferation of class systems became apparent very early, as the elite of Papua New Guinea quickly adopted a neo-colonial attitude towards their own people, thus making progress and development costly, subversive and oppressive to the people. Ordinary Papua New Guineans sacrificed a lot in terms of their cultural values and land simply to accommodate the changes imposed upon them. Land and other natural resources are exploited for the benefit of the state and the rich sectors of society.<sup>37</sup>

John Bodley did a study, thirty years ago on the impact of development and progress on the lives of tribal peoples. He notes,

Autonomous peoples have not actually chosen progress in order to enjoy its advantages, but that the governments have pushed progress upon them in order to obtain tribal resources and not merely to share with them the benefits of progress. It has also been shown that the price of forcing progress on unwilling recipients has involved the death of literally millions of tribal people, as well as their loss of land, political sovereignty, and the right to follow their own life-style. (1975: 150)

The legacy has lived on, making the whole notion of economic development much more expensive and destructive, socially, culturally and religiously, not to mention the psychological effect it has had on individuals.

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<sup>37</sup> There is a contrast in the colonial emphasis on development and the current government policies of development. In the colonial days, development ideology was about making societies in the non-western world replicas of western societies, although it was repressive as well. Today, however, emphases on development are about our own leaders, who as puppets in the hands of foreign global entities are exploit the very people they are called to protect. The leaders ignore the ethic of 'I am my brother's keeper'

Why is development an issue? In view of the topic of land, development as a notion is not the problem, rather it is the spirit and praxis of development that is the problem. Jan Czuba notes,

Land is the lifeblood of the Papua New Guinea people. The inflow of western culture, along with the western view of land, has been a source of conflict between traditional beliefs and modern development. A solution needs to be found that takes into consideration the importance of the Melanesian philosophy of land in the PNG culture, while also allowing for an inescapable development which is very much based on western culture and the western view of resources. Until this issue is resolved clashes between the two cultures will continue to disrupt all possible developments taking place in PNG. (2002:1)

There are four factors I wish to discuss in relation to development as an issue. First, when development on the land, ignores and violates the customary values and ethics that govern the use of the land and make land important to Melanesians, then it is an issue. For instance, land is not just physical; there is also a spiritual dimension to it, which must be taken seriously. The authority of the ancestors who are the benefactors must be respected. The argument, that the superstitious beliefs of the people about the land are one major hindrance to development in the nation of Papua New Guinea, is not altogether true. On the contrary, people are willing to allow development to go ahead when major developers respect their sacred grounds, or when the authority of shaman or a religious person is called upon to perform special ritual on a portion of land before work begins.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> I witnessed two separate incidences at two different locations in Papua New Guinea. First was in 1978, in the Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, where a major roadwork was being carried out on a twenty-kilometer portion of the road linking the township of Banz and the Christian Leaders Training College, where I was studying. Before all work began, the local people living nearby had to call for a Roman Catholic priest from Fatima Catholic mission to bless the portion of land by sprinkling 'holy water' in the direction the road work was advancing. If it were not done, they would not have allowed the roadwork to continue, even if they were going to be compensated in cash for it. The second was in Rabaul in the East New Britain Province. The same thing happen, although this time it was a shaman from the village of Kabaira, who was called on to appease the spirit of a particular creek before construction work continued on the last leg of the North coast road linking the United Church Theological College with the townships of Rabaul and Kerevat.

Second, any development on the land that benefits or makes very few people rich is unethical. As long as our leaders and elite in society sustain a neo-colonial attitude towards their people, the danger of legislating in their favor will only see a further unethical systemic alienation of more land from the people. Traditionally, a corporate residual right to land was the norm and the whole community benefited from the land. Some forms of development have pushed people off their land, thus destroying their roots and livelihood, and obliterating their sense of religious authenticity and socio-cultural identity as a people, making them foreigners in their own land. The Rorovana people of Bougainville (in chapter two) and the Min peoples of the Ok Tedi areas are examples of what structural and systemic alienation of land from the people can do to their livelihood.

Third, when development is destructive to the environment it leaves people susceptible to other forms of natural disaster, destroys the sustainability of the land and the whole environment, and threatens the future of the generations yet to be born, on whose behalf the land is held in trust. Mining and logging are economic ventures that come at the expense of our land, environment and livelihood. A paragraph in a recent letter to the editor of the nation's leading newspaper, the *Post Courier*, by Anthony Kajir reads,

Today, 30 years after independence, Papua New Guinea is just beginning to formulate rules about what happens when a bio prospector wishes to explore in PNG. Legislation cover mining and petroleum exploration but there are no laws or rules for engagement with those who want to exploit the biological resources of our country . . . aspects of Melanesian [culture] need to be carefully considered before we simply follow the lead of developed countries and buy into an intellectual property rights regime that does not address these issues that are important to us. We should be mindful that the agendas of the developed countries who provide us with technical assistance through so-called rural development projects for economic recovery are not necessarily aligned with our own priorities [sic]. (*Post Courier*, 12 March 2006)

One does not agree with everything Kajir says, but he emphasizes two significant aspects worth paying attention to: (1) development of the nation's natural resources must not be carried out to the tempo of foreign drum beats. Development of the resources must be done at nation's pace and on its own terms. So much is being dictated from outside, and because much of the rules in the economic games are still new and foreign to most Melanesians, the partners in the games take advantage of Melanesians, and (2) development must be sustainable.

Fourth, when development destroys the environment and the land, it is an affront to God, for two reasons: (1) the earth and everything in it belongs to him, (2) he mandated human beings to be stewards of the earth. As stewards, human beings do not own the earth but they manage and conserve it. Too often, human beings assumed it is their right to use natural resources indiscriminately, thus endangering other species that like humans also depend on the environment for their survival.

According to the Wheaton 83 Statement, "The earth is God's gift to all generations . . . . When either individuals or state claim an absolute right of ownership, that is rebellion against God. The meaning of stewardship is that the poor have equal rights to God's resources" (2003:258). A development that exploits the weak and powerless in society or that systemically denies the rights of every person to benefit from the resources is immoral and oppressive.

In God's economy, development is transformation. Wayne Bragg notes: "The idea of transformation is not posed as an alternate development strategy, but as a Christian framework for looking at human and social change. As such, it contains a set of principles against which any theory of development may be measured" (2003:40).

Development as transformation is concerned with, life sustenance, equity, justice, dignity and self-worth, freedom, participation, reciprocity, cultural fit, ecological soundness, hope and spiritual transformation (see Bragg 2003: 40-46)

My own view of development perceives the working of God in the hearts of individuals, which in turn instills a fear and respect for him that translate into the attitude one has towards the earth and environment. Roy Padana said it so well when he lamented the fact that the church has been among his people for a century and a half, but very few people have experience the transforming power of God.<sup>39</sup>

##### 5. Environmental Issues

In July 1996 the students and professors of the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Suva, Fiji, joined members of the mainline denominations in Fiji on a march to the French embassy in the city of Suva, to present a petition to the French ambassador, calling on France to cease all nuclear testing on Marurua atoll in French Polynesia. The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC)<sup>40</sup> office in Suva organized the march, purposely to show solidarity with the Tahitians in their stand against France nuclear testing in their islands. The march to the French embassy was a culmination of some years of discussion at the ecumenical assemblies of the Pacific Conference of Churches on many environmental issues threatening the survival and livelihood of the Pacific people. The nuclear testing on Marurua atoll by the French was one of them.

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<sup>39</sup> From my interview with Roy in his house at Malmaluan village, July 2004.

<sup>40</sup> The Pacific Conference of Churches is a regional ecumenical body that serves and unites all the church councils in the South Pacific. Every church council in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia are financial members of the body, which meets every four years, before the World Council of Churches Assembly convenes.

The seriousness of the environmental threat to the Pacific communities can be perceived in light of the following.

The Threat of Rising Sea Level. The twenty-two Island countries and territories of the Pacific occupy a vast area of thirty-eight million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean. Only two percent is land, scattered over thousands of large and small islands. Due to the increase global warming and the green house effect, the rising sea level (14-80 cm) is contributing to the literal sinking of some of the small island nations. Some of the islands are merely 3 meters above sea level. Four years ago I was in the Solomon Islands, and I flew over the Wagina Island, which the Solomon Islands government has set aside for the relocation of the Kiribati people from the island nation of the Kiribati, most of who came from islands that are sinking fast. There is a projection by the Pacific Forum Secretariat,<sup>41</sup> that in five years time there will be a massive relocation exercise to relocate people from the island nation of Tuvalu who are facing the imminent threat of their islands sinking.

In the New Guinea Islands the Papua New Guinea government is putting pressure on people from the smaller islands in the Duke of York group of islands, to relocate to higher grounds. The people of the Tigak islands in the New Hanover group of islands are under the same threat posed by the rising sea level.

The Depletion of Forest and Marine Resources. For many years, New Guinea had one of the largest virgin forests on earth, but the biggest still being in the Amazon. Today, however, the massive logging of the forest by Malaysian firms is reducing not

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<sup>41</sup> Six countries in the Pacific are faced with the threat of seeing whose islands disappear as a result of rising sea levels as a direct consequence of global warming. Already, among the Kiribati people, livelihoods are being affected: the intrusion of sea water is destroying the roots of breadfruit trees causing many of them to die, thereby taking away an essential component of the people's diet (Pacific Regional Consultation 2001:122).



only the size of the forest, but also the capacity of the earth to reduce the level of CO<sub>2</sub>. The New Guinea Islands is one of the most heavily logged areas in Papua New Guinea. The heavy logging shows a lack of sustainable management of the resources. Many New Guinea Islanders are lured by promises of large cash bonuses and easily forget the long-term ramifications of short-term gains. The irony is “Resource owners derive a minuscule proportion of the returns while large profits are made by the corporations” (Pacific Regional Consultation Report 2001:122).

Over fishing and the use of inappropriate methods of fishing contributes to the fast depletion of certain species of fish (especially the skipjack and yellow fin tuna), species of crustacean and the giant clams, by Japanese, Taiwanese and Indonesian fishermen, most of whom operate illegally in Papua New Guinea waters.

The Damages Done to Landscape. The irreparable damages to the landscape in the New Guinea Island due to heavy logging are sad sites to see. Heavy logging has led to extensive soil erosion in many places, resulting in the silting and/or polluting of the river systems, and the drying up of sources of drinking water, such as the creeks and streams. The river systems for many villages on the island of New Hanover, is their lifeline, the rivers connect them to the shores and other coastal village, sustains their livelihood through fishing and gardening.

Lowery succinctly describe what I have been trying to say so far, in the following.

Global economic integration poses serious ecological question already discussed in popular culture. . . . Increasing numbers of people of all political persuasions are concerned about how human lifestyles are affecting the ecological balance that makes life possible. . . . economical inequality also threatens the ability of the ecosystem to sustain human life. Unrestrained consumption at the top of the economy turns vast quantities of natural resources into unusable and irretrievable thermal energy, while producing more garbage and other pollution than the natural environment can process in the foreseeable future. (2000:2)

The concerns raised by the damages done to the environment covers the psychological, spiritual, social and physical well-being of the people, not forgetting the future of the next generation.<sup>42</sup>

### Summary of the Issues

Why are the issues of globalization, land registration, compensation, development and environment all of grave concern? How are they related to the land issue? How do they impact the livelihood of the people? These are important questions because the issues concerned are critical issues. Whatever is happening in Melanesia exposes also the depth of the crises faced by those who are affected by these phenomena. All the issues have one goal in common, the expansion of the global economy.

The crisis that stem out of the expansion of the global capitalist economy is twofold: First, the current model of economic globalization is a threat to “the Earth’s life systems, cultural integrity and diversity, and the lives of many who are poor in order that some may consume exorbitantly and a few accumulate vast wealth” (Moe-Lobeda 2002:1). Second, the Melanesians leaders have gullibly succumbed to the prevailing form of globalization, complying with its demands and acceding to its truths, as if there is no other alternative. They fail to consider seriously the long-term moral, “social and ecological implications of economic globalization, resist it, and forge alternatives” (Moe-Lobeda 2002:1). Melanesians are victims of the choice their leaders and educated elite made on their behalf.

These issues have affected directly and indirectly land issues in the New Guinea Islands in the following ways:

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<sup>42</sup> The concern expressed by villagers from Metemulai, Kosai, Katangan, Baungung, Meteselen, Metekavil, Metemana and Meteran villages on New Hanover Island, was the future of their children and grandchildren, in view of the heavy logging being carried out in many parts of the island.

- The impact of the global capitalist economy on the land has a negative social, cultural and religious ramification on society. Capitalism is ruthless and cares little about human dignity and the well-being of the community. The capitalists focus on making and accumulating money. In the New Guinea Islands the cases of land grabbing and falsifying claims had increased dramatically in the last fifteen years. There is also an increase in cases of family and/or clan members who have been pushed off the land by their own relatives because they stand in the way of them realizing their dreams of making money.<sup>43</sup>
- Current trend of development in the islands lacks sustainability and leaves no hope for the next generation on the land. Development on the land must be holistic and seek to empower the islanders to participate in whatever form of development in their communities, so that the maximum benefit of development goes to them. “The economic welfare of a community is determined by how well the poorest people in the community fare, not by how well the richest people live” (Bradshaw 2002:168).

### Summary

These issues are real and pose real threat to the livelihood of the people. Where the government has failed to educate the people about the issues, I see the significant role the churches can play in creating awareness among Melanesians about the threat of the issues to their livelihood, if they do not know how they operate. Many elite in Melanesia

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<sup>43</sup> According to Samela Biamak, the land advisor for the East New Britain Provincial government, the numbers of land cases that are brought to be tried at the land’s court have increased dramatically over the years. On record, there are 3 to 4 land cases brought to the courts everyday, 15 cases a week, 60 cases a month. It is family members, clan members and church members taking each other to court ( In an interview with Biamak: July 12 2004)

would rather capitalize on the ignorance of the majority of the people in society for their advantages. For the church to take the lead, it must be informed itself about the issues.

## Chapter 5

### **Biblical Theology of Land**

Different groups in history and today, to justify conquest, alienation, colonization and revolution, have appropriated the Bible. The same approach to Scripture has justified the conquest and dispossession of indigenous people from their land by powerful regimes in the colonized parts of the world. Such a reading of Scripture is one way, but not the best. A holistic reading of Scripture, according to Brueggemann (2002) and Habel (1995), shows several incipient theologies of land from conquest, to ecology and to land as host with the messengers of God as guests on the land.

In this chapter I will be discussing the biblical teaching on land, paying special attention to the major biblical themes. It is essential that a chapter be committed specifically to the biblical ideology of land. It is not an understatement that any task of theologizing has to be informed by Scripture, to avoid the danger of syncretism or split-level Christianity. Biblical theology begins with God and ends with him. It is in the broad sense, an “attempt to reach below the surface of life and gain a deeper understanding of God. Theology seeks to understand God’s being, God’s nature and God’s relationship to the world” (Grenz and Olson 1996:38).

Likewise a theology of land has to begin with God and ends with him. It seeks to understand God’s original purpose for the land, how he relates to it and his ongoing activities in creation, of which the land is a part. A theology of land seeks to understand the history of God’s dealing with Israel to establish how they reflect God activities and purposes for the land. The history is basically salvation history, the basis of which is Yahweh’s relationship to the land and his people, Israel. Unlike the West, the history of

Israel and the land is not secular; it is religious history in the sense that it is a narrative of God's activities in the world through Israel.

To facilitate further discussion into God's purpose for the land, a key question need to be raised. What does God expect of human beings on the land? This a theologically loaded question, for the reason that the contexts for theologizing are the Melanesian communities in the New Guinea Islands, but the normative for judging and informing all process of theologizing is the Scripture. The significance therefore of a chapter on the biblical ideology of land, is that it will inform the process of formulating a local theology of land for the New Guinea Islands.

Prior to the discussion of the major biblical themes, one wishes to acknowledge that there are individual theologians and Christian groups globally, who in the midst of a serious environmental catastrophe facing planet earth, are calling for return to biblical teaching on creation or of the earth. Norman Habel notes; "The Earth crisis challenges us to read the Bible afresh and ask whether, the biblical text itself, its interpreters – or both – have contributed to this crisis" (2000:25). He goes on to acknowledge, on the other hand, the emerging earth consciousness in the global community, whereby indigenous peoples of the world are returning to re-embrace that "sense of kinship with the land as a spiritual source of their being" (2000:26). Habel notes; "This new Earth consciousness invites us, as members of the earth community, to return to the Bible, and in dialogue with the text, ascertain whether a similar kinship with the Earth is reflected there" (2000:26).

My research into the land issues between the United Church and the people in the New Guinea Islands, revealed a real need for more biblical teaching on the land; to provide instruction for the local church, the membership of which includes some of the

individuals and groups who are demanding the United Church to return their land to them,<sup>1</sup> and others who are using Western forms of land ownership to try to hold on to the land for the church. Both need an indigenous theology of land. The lack of biblical teaching is one factor in the absence of a firm and clear theological framework for a dialogue between the scriptures, customary land tenure system and modern development.

### Land in the Old Testament

Land is especially important in the Old Testament. Gerhard von Rad notes, “In the whole of the Hexateuch there is probably no more important idea than that expressed in terms of the land promised and later granted by Yahweh, an idea found in all the sources, and indeed in every part of them” (1966:79).

The Old Testament has a holistic view of the land, as physical and spiritual, thus it is both a physical and a spiritual inheritance for Israel. Both views are held in balance so that one is not sacrificed for the sake of the other. Significantly, the Old Testament perceives land as earth and its resources, and not just a “spiritual” home. It presents land as soil rich in minerals, water, forest resources, and even the air. Deuteronomy states,

A good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. (8:7-9)

The material reality of land is evident in two Hebrew words being used. The most commonly used word, *erets*, is used in the Old Testament to mean both earth or nation or geographical territory, and can also mean cultivable soil and inhabitable place. The other

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<sup>1</sup> My experiences as a Tungag and a member of one of the land owning clans on the island of New Hanover, *kiukiu/siavun*, ‘land kingfisher’ clan, and six years of serving as pastor/educator among the Tolai, and based on seven months of research work carried out in the islands, substantiate my observation.

word *adamah* specifically signifies “soil for cultivation, especially rich humus, as top soil. It is the patrimony of families and communities, and is the place where one establishes a home” (May 1991: 51-52). The significance of such a land is in its capacity to sustain life; this was the land Yahweh gave to Israel.

Weinfeld notes, “The fate of the land is the focal point of Biblical historiography. Beginning with the patriarchal stories in Genesis and ending with the destruction of Jerusalem in book of Kings, the historiography of Israel hinges on the land” (1993:xv). A careful reading of the patriarchal narratives, reveals that the story of the settlement of the Israelite tribes in the land of promise unfolds in two stages: (1) the first ancestor who leaves his homeland with his family to reach the new destined land, and (2) depicts the settlement of the land of promise, hundreds of years later, by the descendents of the first ancestor.

With this said, I wish to proceed with the discussion on the major biblical themes on land. I acknowledge the presence of a wide range of themes in the Scripture relating to land, but they deal with the more philosophical and technical aspects of land that is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I chose to discuss eight themes, which I hope will be relevant to the task of formulating a theology of land.

### 1. The Story of Abraham Acquiring the Land

Our understanding of the other major themes on land in the Old Testament hinges on an understanding of the beginning of the story, which is about the first ancestor who left his homeland, to receive from God a new land. Abram called out of the “pagan” world of which he belonged for the first seven decades of his life to become the ancestor of a new people, a new faith and on a new land; is where the story begins. Between the



call and the fulfillment of the covenant associated with the call, there were series of events leading up to the new land, new people and new faith.

The words of God's initial call to Abraham were, "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). And in Genesis 12:4-5 it reads, "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there." The question rises as to what sort of land this was from which God called Abraham. Why would God ask him to leave? Genesis portrays Abraham not as one who possesses an adventuresome spirit, easily given to moving. Wood notes,

He was a staid person, thoughtful, a man of judgment and foresight, who calculated before he acted. We may be sure he would have much preferred to remain in surroundings he knew and where he could continue to enjoy old friends and comfortable living conditions. But he responded to God's call, and his response is an indication of remarkable faith on his part. (1979:42)

The socio-cultural context out of which Abraham came may find significant correlation in the Melanesian socio-cultural and religious contexts, on the basis of which land is important. Among many things, the society of Abraham's day was very religious. The remains of fine religious structures, such as ziggurats, which date back to that period, testifies to the rich religious tradition of the day. The people, in the region of Ur in the upper Mesopotamia were worshippers of the moon-god Nanna, and certainly, Abraham's father Terah worshipped the moon-god (Wood 1979:41-46). Although the question remains: Was Abraham a worshipper of the moon-god as well? Some scholars think

otherwise. Wood believes that “somehow, he [Abraham] had been instructed regarding the true God” early in his youth (1979:45).

Abraham obeyed God and went out to Canaan, the land promised to become the inheritance of his descendents, who would become God’s chosen people through whom the whole world will be blessed. In analyzing the story, I am indebted to Matthias Zahniser’s patriarchal paradigm approach to the story of Abraham, which is helpful to the discussion on the Old Testament theology of land in this study. He sees the patriarchal paradigm as “a model of patient, peaceful and co-existence” (1987:21); hence he comes up with four insightful models that are helpful to the process of theologizing in this study.

Zahniser’s four models bring up ideas that correlate to one of Habel’s six ideologies/theologies of land, the “immigrant theology” of land (1995:125). In Zahniser’s models, he speaks of:

- Abraham’s Generosity to Lot. In Genesis 13:8-13, Abraham shows generosity to Lot, by letting him choose the best land; displaying an amazing freedom to let others choose. As a paradigm for cross-cultural mission, Zahniser sees a possible model for “ecumenical corporation” (1987:21). Based on Zahniser’s model of “ecumenical corporation” and Habel’s “immigrant theology” (1995:125), the following can be said, Abraham comes to the land not as a conqueror dispossessing previous occupants of the land and possesses what God has promised. Habel argues that, “the nation of Abraham’s seed is supposed to empower, not to disempower other nations of the host country” (1995:122).

The method of empowerment is that “Abraham is portrayed as the exemplar of how to share the land, overcome conflict, and mediate blessings to

the inhabitants of the land” (Habel 1995:125, see also Rynkiewicz 2000d:224). Abraham accommodates Lot rather than being acquisitive himself (Rynkiewicz 2000d:224; see also Habel 1995:126). Abraham understands that God’s promise is not built on an ideology of dominating and excluding others nor on building himself up, but rather, in his faith that the God of the host land will invest him (Abraham) with a great name (Habel 1995:120). Abraham saw the potential of the land as benefiting all.

The first Methodist missionaries in the islands may have done the right thing by negotiating with the clan elders for land and/or accepting land from the people as gifts to the mission; however, contrary to the patriarchal paradigm, the missionaries set up “theological fences” to keep people away from “church land.”

The spirit of “ecumenical corporation” therefore calls for the church and the people to work together to develop a common understanding that, (1) all human beings are guests on the host land, which belongs to God, (2) land is for the benefit all, and no particular group has the right to dominate and exclude others from the land, (3) the rights of the indigenous of the land must be respected and preserved, and (4) God’s ultimate purpose for the land is the corporate responsibility of both the church and the community to work towards, so that he is given the glory and honor on the land, that is the community of God.

- Attributing to Yahweh Names of Canaanites Deities. Abraham realized he came among a people who already had a system of religious beliefs and he identified with them. Identification is the key to understanding the contexts of the people which opens the door to a proper process of theological contextualization. For

instance, Abraham attributes to Yahweh, names of Canaanites deities, shows his ingenuity in understanding the religious culture and beliefs of the land, thus enabling the process of contextualization to take place. Zahniser sees this as a theological contextualization model (1987:21).

- Acceptance of Indigenous Practices. In Genesis 23, Abraham negotiates with the Hittites for a place to bury his wife. He shows a peace-loving acceptance of the cultural forms of the people of the land. He identifies with them and respects their tradition. When he needed the land to bury his wife, “he does not haul out his mandate from God, but instead buys the land at an exorbitant price (Genesis 23). Clearly there are levels of rights here, God, Canaanites, and Abraham, and the fulfillment of the promise can take place in other ways than through violence and deception” (Rynkiewicz 2001d:224).

Abraham did what the Methodist missionaries did among the islanders; he “walked softly” among the people of the land (see Threlfall 1975). He too was a guest among a host of other guests, of the “land as the host country” (Habel 1995:128). Abraham behaved properly and acted justly on the land, and was well received by the Canaanites. He played the roles he was expected play as a guest on the land very well, “as mediator who promotes unity, justices, peace and goodwill among the peoples of the land” (Rynkiewicz 2001d:224; see also Habel 1995:128-129).

The ‘land as host country’ theology in Habel’s immigrant ideology of land, gives us a better perspective of and helps us to discover what Abraham discovered that wherever missionary work calls us to, the God of the land is one

with the God of the immigrant (Habel 1995:131-133). In reality, God's requirement for the use of the land, does not change to accommodate human mobility, it remains the same. It requires (1) acts of justice towards the poor and powerless of society, (2) honesty and integrity by those who hold positions of power in communities, however large or small the societies may be, and (3) a fear for God who has ultimate control over all. In view of these, most Methodist missionaries to the islands sought to serve the people well; respecting the total humanity in them.

- Peaceful and Patient response to Resistance and Rejection. Isaac's response to the injustice and rejection of Abimelech, earns him the respect of his detractors (Gen. 26:12-33). In a continuation of the "land as a host country" theology, Isaac accommodated himself to the Canaanites situation by moving on when there was trouble and obtaining land by being a blessing to the Canaanites rather than a curse. Isaac's actions are not only fitting to an heir of the promise, but are also attributed to two of the many important Semitic traditions: (1) the significant roles religion played in the early spiritual and character formations in every male child, (2) the significance placed on the fathers as role models to the male child, thus the fathers were expected to model social, cultural and religious realities before the household.

In summary, the story of Abraham's acquisition of the land is about, (1) reciprocity and reciprocal obligation to other members of the family or society. Land was never for private ownership, (2) those in position of authority over the land are simply trustees of a property that belongs to all, (3) missionaries to other land, are entering into "sacred land"

because God is already working in that land, like Abraham they must seek to discover evidences of God's working among the people, and (4) missionaries are not conquerors or colonizers; they are called to be sensitive and to respect the ways of the land, hence enabling the people to embrace not an adulterated or truncated gospel, but the "real gospel" (see Gal. 1:2-10). A theology of land for the islands is not about conquest and dispossession of others, but emphasizes the essence of respect for others and the virtue of sharing and reciprocity.

## 2. Land is Gift in Trust From Yahweh

Yahweh's gift of the land to his people is an expression of his covenantal commitment to them. The covenantal commitment is the dominant feature of land theology in the Old Testament. Israel is repeatedly reminded that Yahweh gave the land to them because of his commitment to their good and well being (Deut. 1:20-21, 25, 35; 3:18, 20 ;). But the land is not a free gift per-se; it entails ethical obligations (Deut. 12-25) on the part of the Israelites. In Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Millar notes; "the divine ownership of the land and the response demanded of Israel (i.e. to live on the land as faithful stewards) are explicitly connected" (2000:624).

The land is given to Israel in trust by Yahweh, and can be easily forfeited, if the ethical obligations, demanding obedience to the will of Yahweh are not honored. "Enjoyment of life with Yahweh in the land requires obedience. This is the conditional element in what God says about the land" (Millar 2000:624); the entrance and occupation of which requires obedience and a willingness to take Yahweh at his word.

There are several notions to the understanding that the land is a gift from Yahweh. These notions are connected to the fact that land was an important focal point for the

outworking of the divine promises made to Abraham. Williamson notes, “As an integral part of the divine blessing announced in the pragmatic agenda of Genesis 12:1-3, land becomes an important focal point for the outworking of the divine promises made to Abraham” (2000:17). It is important in our understanding of the relationship of Yahweh to Israel, and “by extension to all other people” (Prior 1999:17). The notions include: dependency on Yahweh, ethical obligation, a promise, and an inheritance.

The giving of the land to Israel was to foster an attitude of total indebtedness and dependency on Yahweh as the universal ruler and land giver. In the land economy of Israel, land usage was to be kept in the hands of the peasant families and not in the hands of large landholdings and land controls by urban landowners.

The land entails moral obligation on Israel’s part. Habel in his “agrarian ideology of land” (1995:97-113) presents Yahweh as one who protects the land rights of the powerless. In this theology God is depicted “as the sole landowner and the people are more like tenants on the land. In this sense, the land is God’s holy ground and so the tenants must act with justice and righteousness” (Rynkiewich 2001d:222). Dependency on Yahweh was an ethical obligation as spelt out in the treaty format, which regulate life in the land (Deuteronomy 12-25). If Israel is to continue to enjoy the blessing of covenant on the land, it has to fulfill ethical obligations, which required obedience to Yahweh, remembering his good deeds for them through worship and thanksgiving, and by living a sanctified life before him (see Deut. 6:10-15, 18-19). Israel was a special instrument in Yahweh’s programmatic agenda to be mediated through her on the land.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The role of the land in Yahweh’s programmatic agenda is essentially twofold. It involves, first, a blessing on the national scale, the prospect of nationhood (encompassing the promised blessings of ‘seed’ and ‘land’) is solemnly guaranteed by a covenant between God and Abraham. Second, in Genesis 17, “the prospect of international blessing comes to the fore, with the announcement that Abraham will become

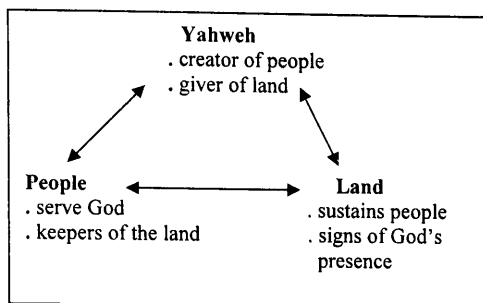


Figure 5. An illustration of the relationship between God, people and the land. God relates to both land and people.

Land is given as a promise. The content of the promise made to Abram by Yahweh comprised ‘descendants as many as the stars’ and ‘land’ to be inherited by Abram’s descendants. Snyder notes: “In the Old Testament, the land is closely tied to shalom. God promises his people a land where they will dwell in peace... a secure peaceful environment where they will live forever. The land will be their inheritance” (2000:28, 29). Israel’s life as a people will revolve around the land. Yahweh promises Israel “I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid” (Leviticus 26:6).

Beginning in Genesis 12:1-3, Yahweh calls Abram and sends him to “the land I will show you” and promised him “all peoples on earth will be blessed.” Yahweh says to Abram, “To your descendants I will give you this land...” (Genesis 15:18), the whole land of Canaan as “an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8).

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‘father of many nations’ (i.e. in the sense of becoming their spiritual benefactor)” (Williamson 2000:17). Through the ‘royal seed’ of Abraham, all nations of the world will be blessed.



The promise is subsequently made to Isaac also (Gen. 26:3-4), and, to guarantee the inheritance, Isaac prayed that the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled in Jacob (Genesis 28:4). As a covenant keeping God, Yahweh would recall and renew the covenant with Jacob, promising him “I will make you a community of peoples and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendents after you” (Genesis 48:4).

A notable factor in Genesis 15:18 is that, it seems to indicate, the land, which will belong to Abram’s descendent, has already been given. When Abram moved to Egypt to sojourn because of the famine, the land was already the inheritance of his descendents. This makes sense because, although the conquest of the whole of Canaan may have appeared as an act of injustice, insofar as the dispossessing of the previous occupants of the land was concerned, there was no act of injustice at all.<sup>3</sup> In spite of their servitude, under the bondage of slavery in Egypt, they were not a landless people at all. They were in reality already heirs to the land of promise, but Berry notes, “though they see the Promised land as a gift to them from God [they] are also obliged to take it by force from its establish inheritance” (1981:269). In reality it was the repossession of the land by “the true landlord” through his people (Berry 1981:271).

When Yahweh heard their groans under their bondage, he remembered his covenant and rescued them (Exodus 2:24). In the events that transpired through the exodus from Egypt, Yahweh gives them a leader, an identity and a promise of a future resting place. The exodus “symbolizes the community of Yahweh, rescued by him from servitude in an alien land and led to the land of promise” (Prior 1977:19).

Theologically, the Old Testament emphasizes the significance of the land as Yahweh’s inheritance, which has to be understood in the context of the special

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<sup>3</sup> There are writers such as Michael Prior (1999), who attribute the conquest as arbitrary act of colonialism.

relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The land is given as a corporate inheritance to Israel, to the ancestral households, with power in the hands of the heads of the households (Habel 1995:54-73). It is an expression of their filial relation to Yahweh. The relationship between Israel and her God is intricately linked to the land he gave them (Brueggemann 1972:52).

By entering into the land of promise, Israel has also become Yahweh's inheritance, not as a mere possession, but a 'son,' implying a father-son relationship that was so intimate. Israel's 'sonship,' however, is maintained as long as it continued to relate to Yahweh as the Father.<sup>4</sup> As a 'son' Israel is poised to share in the inheritance of the land, both as privilege and rights accorded to them by Yahweh. The land as an inheritance given to Israel by Yahweh was not for individual ownership; rather it was an inheritance of the whole people of God (Deut. 26:1). The inheritance was not to be transferred at will, but it was to be passed on to succeeding generation; (e.g. the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1Kings 21), and as to be guarded at all cost.

How worthy was Israel to be the recipient of such a good gift? Worthiness was not the prerequisite to Israel's receiving of the land, because this is not all about Israel. Theologically, the land embodies God's programmatic agenda for the salvation of the

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<sup>4</sup> There are also other biblical imageries portraying Israel's role in this covenant relationship: (i) she was the bride of Yahweh (the book of Hosea). Israel has to stay married to Yahweh if she is to enjoy the blessing of the land on which her married vow was sworn, (ii) Israel is not just a son, but also the first-born son of Yahweh, who must inherit the land. The inheritance of the land by the Israelites correlates to the practices in some Melanesian societies whereby the elder son inherits properties, some times in the form of land, from the father, (iii) the horticultural image depicting Israel as the vineyard and Yahweh as the owner, etc, The land is a testimony to the covenant relationship Yahweh and Israel the bride, the son, the vineyard, etc.

world. But once Israel is on the land, God expects her to prove herself worthy to him, so that his salvific purpose for the world will progress unhindered.

God expects from Israel three things: (1) To be “faithful, grateful and humble” and to “remember that the land is a gift” (Berry 1981: 272), (2) To be “neighborly, just, kind to one another, generous to strangers, honest in trading” (Berry 1981:272). And even though these are social virtues, a strict adherence to these has far reaching ecological, agricultural and theological implications. Israel as Yahweh’s community does not only exist in space, but also in time; it is a community made up of the dead who “bequeathed the land to the living, and of the unborn to whom the living will in turn bequeath it” (Berry 1981:272). The land must therefore be cared for, not as a possession, but an inheritance to the living, as it will be to the unborn. And, (3) to practice good husbandry which will have far reaching effect on the preservation of animal life and other seed bearing plants. Ecological and agricultural discipline is required in land use so that the fertility of the land is preserved.

To summarize the notion of the land as a gift to Israel from God, the following can be said:

- The land was a gift, “not a free or a deserved gift, but a gift given upon certain rigorous conditions” (Berry 1981:270).
- The land given does not spell “ownership, but a sort of tenancy, the right of habitation” (Berry 1981: 271). In fact, Yahweh himself said, “The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me” (Leviticus 25:23).

- The land is given as a family and/or community trust, to be used corporately, with clan or household elders as the representatives of Yahweh over all households, insofar as authority over the land went. Outside of this jurisdiction, no one has the power to decide on land matters (Habel 1995:54-73).
- And land was not disposable by the clan or any one, except when it is to be given on a philanthropy basis. Land is the inheritance of the living and the generation of the yet-to-be-born.

These strike a similar chord with the Melanesian traditional land tenure systems.

Land as a gift finds a significant correlation in the New Guinea islanders' practices of gifts and gift giving. The test of the level of commitment to any form of relationship between individual parties and/or different clans in the islands is determined by the magnitude of the gifts given and reciprocated by the receiving clans, to formalize or consolidate relationship. In the islands, when a clan gives an individual or another clan a portion of land as a *kiraus ivag* (Tungag), 'a mortuary feast gift,'<sup>5</sup> it is like sharing their life's vein with the others. Owing to the perpetual nature of land to sustain life for generations (past, present, and to come) and the fact that it is the soul of the people, giving to another clan implies the depth of the relationship.

### 3. The Intrinsic Value and Goodness of the Earth

The land Yahweh gave as a gift to Israel was "a gift of good land" (Berry 1981: 267-281). The state of the gift is determined by the character of the giver, thus the land is a good gift, because it comes from God who is merciful and just. Looking back at the

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<sup>5</sup> It was a practice among the Mandak, Tolai and Tungag peoples for members of a clan to give a parcel of land away as a thank you gift to an individual (male or female) or to another clan for their contribution over the years towards the clan's strings of mortuary feasts. The land was always given at the event of a mortuary feast. Among the Tungag of New Hanover Island, the gift of land was known as the *kiraus ivag*.

creation narratives in Genesis 1:1-31, seven times Yahweh declares everything in creation to be good and self fulfilling. Yahweh stamps his own stamp of approval on creation, by declaring it good.

Osborn notes, “the Old Testament paints a stark picture of creation as process ordering by separation. Creation is thus presented as a differentiated totality; its very diversity is part of the process that God declares to be good” (2000:430; see also Blocher 1984:71). The declaration of the goodness of creation by Yahweh is all encompassing. In declaring that the earth is good, Yahweh was affirming the intrinsic value and goodness of the whole creation. Four specific areas relating to the intrinsic value and goodness of creation, I need to discuss.

First, the earth is good because God by the word of his mouth has sanctified and consecrated creation so that everything in it is good, and there is nothing one can call as bad or evil.<sup>6</sup> Basing his land discussion on I Timothy 4:1-5 Trebilco notes:

It is not only humanity, which is sanctified by God, but creation also participates in the sanctifying action of God. The text denies a dualism that sees heaven as holy, and earth as inferior or corrupt.<sup>7</sup> In this text the earth is not only honoured and celebrated as good; it is also holy, set apart for God through the action of God’s word in creation. (2000:217)

In reality, the intrinsic value and goodness of creation and/or land is an extension of God’s own personality and nature. William Dyrness, in his assessment of Genesis 1:2, among many things notes that;

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<sup>6</sup> I often read with certain degree of fascination the account of Peter’s vision in Acts 10:9-23; wherein Peter is rebuked and told; “Do not call anything impure [unclean] that God has made clean” (v.15 NIV). Obviously it was not about food, the vision was very much about the intrinsic value and sanctity of humankind and human life. In spite of the human nature we now have brought about by the fall, it is not give any individual or group to be disrespectful of their fellow man.

<sup>7</sup> In Genesis 1:2 we come across a contrasting picture whereby the earth is described as being “formless and empty, darkness over the surface of the deep...” to the picture of the earth we get immediately after creation; “it was good.” Even in verse 2, there is no reference to a dualism between heaven and earth; instead it is dualism between the light and darkness.

The movement from chaos is progressive, day by day, toward a concrete realization of God's own character and likeness, leading to the creation of the divine "image and likeness," the man and woman. God also exults in all this at the conclusion saying: "It is very good," that is it reflects my divine character and purpose. (1997:31)

Theologians since the Reformation were insistent that there were two ways one learn about God; first, "by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, which is before our eyes as a most elegant book" (Noll 1994:53); and second, more "clearly and fully" from God's written word (Noll 1994:54), neither was understandable without the other. God was present both in creation and in his word.

The dichotomous view of Western Christendom has not helped to develop a holistic theology of creation, the earth and the whole environment. Instead it brought an unbiblical dualistic theology portraying heaven as holy versus the earth which is evil. The dualism stands in antithesis to the Melanesian holistic view of the cosmos.

Second, the divine euphoria following the accomplishment of each creative day is a fitting celebration of the diversity, which added to the tapestry of "art work" that only Yahweh could mastermind. Everything he created is a masterpiece, duplications of none; thus the land is good and valuable. Equilibrium and beauty in creation is the initial purpose of Yahweh, the Creator. Imbalance is created by the extinction of any one species of animals and/or of plant life through destruction of the environment. Such extinction of plant and animal species offsets the composition and networking (or the normal functioning) of the whole ecosystem.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> My people live off fishing and gardening. Growing up I enjoyed fishing for one particular fish, *tingang*, 'the black bass,' a prize catch for anyone who goes fishing at the mouth of the river. It's been twenty years since any one has ever caught a black bass, let alone seeing one. Twenty-five years ago most of the mangrove habitats along the entrance of the river and along the fringes of the reef were cut down by the laborers of a big coconut plantation for firewood for the copra driers. It never dawned on the laborers that the mangroves provided a safe breeding place for fish and much other marine life. We are grateful that

Third, the intrinsic goodness of the earth relates also to the abundance in its resources to sustain the needs of every living creature. In later years Yahweh would remind Israel, that the land is good (Deuteronomy 4:21-22; 8:7-10), a land of abundance, and possessing all necessities for life “an ample water supply, a rich variety of food and sufficient iron and copper to make implements” (Habel 1995:42). Israel will lack virtually nothing.<sup>9</sup>

A different and contradictory global scenario is being witnessed today. The New Guinea Islanders, like other indigenous peoples of the world are seeing the depletion and destruction of their environments. The once vital ‘life-support’ of the people’s livelihood (i.e. the forest, rivers and so on), is fast disappearing. The greed, and exploitive attitudes of the powerful regimes and multi-million dollar corporations of the world, contributes to the fast depletion of the earth’s resources. It is the rich and powerful minority who are benefiting, thus grinding poverty on the powerless majority in society.

Countering the current global scenario is the hope in the “link between land and God’s messianic promises” (Snyder 2001:29) that will see the redemption of creation. Snyder continues, “God cares for the environment in which we live and on which we depend. He intends to redeem man and women with their environment, not out of it. God loves all his creation, not just the human part of it. Psalm 65:9 says God cares for the land; he waters it, and enriches it abundantly” (2001:29).

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mangroves have started growing again, because when the big ones were cut, the seeds fell and started sprouting. On my recent research trip, I encouraged my people to protect our mangroves.

<sup>9</sup> The emphasis is on the ethical character of Yahweh as the covenant keeping God, someone who is true to his words. The quality of the land signified also the goodness of the One Israel has come to put its trust in. He is Yahweh the faithful King. The goodness of Yahweh the King is a stark contrast to the cruelty of Pharaoh under whom they served as slaves in Egypt.

The complete redemption of creation lies in the future, but the mission of Christ as the redeemer of the world, has left the church with a redemptive mission to carry on. The redemption of creation is an ongoing redemptive act to be carried on by redeemed people, the church. Caring for and respecting creation and/or the environment is in itself a redemptive act. The church is the instrument of God's ongoing redemptive mission in creation.

Fourth, accentuating the intrinsic goodness of creation was the profound state of peace, harmony and tranquility among human beings, animals, and everything in creation. Isaiah many years later would give a glimpse of what creation was like in its original state, before the fall in the following.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9 NIV)

The mission of Christ, who is alluded to as the 'shoot' from the 'stump of Jesse' (Isaiah 6:1, 2) is to restore creation to its original state. The New Testament, in the Pauline writings picks up this idea of Christ mission as that of reconciling everything in creation to God (see Col. 1:19-20, and Romans 8:18-27).

As I read the Old Testament and ponder upon the creation narratives, I am convinced that the land brings or binds together all that are created. Biblical theology of creation is basically ecological. One cannot speak of the dignity of humanity at the expense of the rest of creation, for such a theology is lopsided. In spite of the fact that humankind is created in the *imago Dei*, the whole creation is equally important to God,



the reason for which he mandated human beings to care for creation. Snyder sums up this idea well in the following:

The central place of land in God's economy is striking ecologically. In both Scripture and ecology, the ideal is men and women living at home on the land in an environment of balance, harmony and mutual dependence. It is neither biblically nor ecologically sound to view humankind as living independently from the land. And it is fundamentally unecological, both spiritually and physically, to attempt autonomous life divorced or alienated from the land. (2000:29)

In 1974, I was a member of a student outreach team from the University of Papua New Guinea Christian Fellowship group going on a mission trip to the northern part of the country, to the Admiralty Islands, one of the island groups that make up the Bismarck Archipelago. After two weeks of sailing and holding rallies at the different villages on the island, the second last village we went to was the home of the Paliu Maloat movement, a christo-paganistic religious group. Our group was warmly welcomed into the village and allowed to run an evangelistic rally in the night.

Prior to the commencement of the rally program, the elder of the village, who was also the spiritual leader of the group, gave a word of welcome to our group. In his rousing welcome he said: "Tonight we the people of Loi village and all of creation welcome you. On behalf of the women, men, children, trees, animals, birds of the air and fish of the sea, I welcome you. Be our worthy guests and please us in everything you do."<sup>10</sup> We giggled about it then, but now it is all making sense to me. Anthropocentrism elevates humanity and human activities at the expense of the existence of the other living things within the ecosystem and/or creation. The destructive way human beings log the

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<sup>10</sup> The group's doctrine of the trinity comprises Wing (God the Father), Wang (God the Son/Jesus Christ) and Wong (God the Holy Spirit). Their doctrine teaches that Wing breathed the breath of life into every living thing including human beings. The group therefore condemns the killing of any animal, insect, bird and fish, unless it is for food, and only when it is necessitated by a real need.

forest, mine the earth and indiscriminately fish the sea, testifies to the anthropo-centric attitudes of human being over other living things.

Tuwere addresses the bond and unity human beings share with the other aspects of creations in the following.

People [human beings] have solidarity of being with other creatures; they are created from the dust of the ground. They share the same sixth day of creation; people [human beings] did not have separate day to themselves.... Humans' bodies connect them to other creatures. Humans' physical elements are no different from those that constitute the physical world. Removing animals, (sic) plants from the notion of God's image is inconsistent with faith in the Creator and creation. What distinguishes humans from animals is their likeness to God's image. (2002:130-131).

New Guinea Islanders express their oneness with creation through their myths and legends, rituals, chants, art forms, in the lyrics of their songs, gardening, mortuary feasts, in their traditional dances, both traditional and Christian theologies, worship and prayers.

#### 4. The Land Belongs to Yahweh.

The ownership of Yahweh over the creation is one of the recurring themes in the Old Testament. Of the many references alluding to Yahweh's ownership of the land the following make the point much clearer. First, the psalmist declares; "The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Psalm 24:1-2; 89:11; 1Corinth. 10:26 NIV). Yahweh's ownership is inclusive, hence leaving nothing outside of his jurisdiction.

Second, Moses reminded Pharaoh in Egypt that contrary to his claim of divinity and control over the world, Yahweh's ownership of and control over the earth remains unchallenged (Exodus 9:29). The ownership and authority over the earth cannot be wrestled from Yahweh. The symbolism of the earth as the footstool of Yahweh (Isaiah

66:1) implies authority and submission, and connotes the notion that the earth shall submit to the authority of the Creator.<sup>11</sup>

As owner of the land, Yahweh has authority over the land. God's ownership of and authority over the land comes by virtue of him being the Creator, he owns and controls the land. It also goes to show that Yahweh is ethically bound to his nature/reputation as the one who acts justly and seeks justice on the land. Deriving from his nature as the just God, Yahweh the Creator and landowner, by his exclusive right gives the land to or shares the land with his people.

There are other contexts in which the earth as a footstool connotes rest, whereby Yahweh the King victorious in battle enters the royal chamber, sits on his throne and rests his feet on the earth, his footstool. Both contexts still connote authority, submission and in addition ownership.

Third, Yahweh himself stakes his claim of ownership, saying, "Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me" (Job 41:11, see also Exodus 19:5). Yahweh is the real owner of the land and therefore claims "a recognition of his claim of ownership from human beings (Von Rad 1966:87). Fourth, very specifically, Yahweh forbids the selling of the land in "perpetuity [permanently], for the land is mine" (Lev. 25:23). As owner of the land, Yahweh's "sovereign rights of disposal over creation as a whole is exercised particularly and specially on behalf of Israel, his own redeemed people" (Wright 1990:116). This is the thrust of Deuteronomy 10:14-15.

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<sup>11</sup> A common practice in most Melanesian societies prior to and at the advent of colonialism was for the big man of a defeated village or community to throw himself full length in the dirt at the feet of the victorious big man begging him to put his right foot on his head as a sign of surrender and submission. It was also done for the sake of sparing women, children and the aged from the clubs of the invading warriors. Often when the victorious big man felt that if the sparing of the defeated big man's life would create a problem for his leadership he would club the latter to death.

In view of God's absolute claim of ownership and authority over the earth, a long shadow is cast over any human claims of outright ownership of land. One thing is clear though in light of God's ownership of the earth, human beings' role as the caretakers and as only having the rights of usufruct is put into perspective. The land is not any individual's possession, but it is every one's heritage and blessings from the real landowner.

It is important to understand the claim of ownership by Yahweh in the contexts of two distinct situations. First, his relationship with the whole earth as the Creator, underscores the significance of human beings' primary task of caring for the land and their accountability to Yahweh himself, the landowner. Yahweh originally intended for the first human beings to relate to him by serving and worshipping him on the land. As a shrine, the land was to be the avenue through which the collective worship of every thing created by Yahweh was to be offered.

The cosmic/global perspective of creation is one other factor that must be taken into account. Yahweh is the creator, owner and sustainer of the whole earth. By virtue of the whole earth belonging to him, God's salvific plan was cosmic in proportion, that is, the whole earth was the focal point in his plan of salvation. The soteriological work of Christ was both spiritual and physical, to redeem the totality of the human person and the totality of creation/earth (Roman 8:19; Col. 1:20), and the cosmos, meaning the non-empirical world as well.

Theologically, the fall of humankind which had a cosmic and/or ecological consequences on the entire creation causing it to groan in pain and awaiting its deliverance (see Hosea 4:3), provides a backdrop to understanding Yahweh's unfolding

plans, from generation to generation to redeem creation. In light of this, Williamson, concerning Genesis 17 notes that “The prospect of international blessing comes to the fore, with the announcement that Abraham will become ‘father of many of nations’ (i.e. in the sense of becoming their spiritual benefactor) and the anticipation of a further covenant that will solemnly guarantee this dimension of the divine agenda” (2000:17).

In view of the above, the ownership of the earth and everything in it belongs to Yahweh, who still regulates and participates in its affairs. Unlike the notion in some Melanesian societies of a “retired deity,” Yahweh is still active in the world, sustaining, recreating and ruling over it.

Second, it concerns specifically the land as a basis of Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel his people, Yahweh’s earthly community. One aspect of the covenant blessing was the territorial promise of land, which relates;

Primarily to a comparatively small geographical area whose borders are explicitly delimited; the principal inheritors of this territorial promise are the Israelites, Abraham’s descendents through Jacob. . . . As an integral part of the divine blessing announced in the programmatic agenda of Genesis 12:1-3, land becomes an important focal point for the outworking of the divine promises made to Abraham. (Williams 2000:16)

The implications are far reaching for the church today as Yahweh’s new community in the world. Although some may argue that the distinction is not a major issue, for the reasons that in Hebrew the same word *eres*, denotes both ‘land’ and ‘the world’ (Millar 2000:623), or that it is more a historical event that has no significance to the church today. On contrary one believes, that the distinction is theologically significant, nevertheless it will not affect the discussion on ownership.

Yahweh’s ownership of land entails also two other very important theological treatises. For instance; first it underscores Yahweh’s role as the Creator of the earth

and/or the land, and everything else in it.<sup>12</sup> In the creation narrative, the first human being is brought into being immediately after the creation of the land, and the Garden of Eden but, it is on the same day as the creation of the animals, which was also the concluding day in Yahweh's creation activities (Gen. 1:24-30; 2:1-24). This not only highlights the orderly way creation was executed, but also shows that behind it all is a divine purpose or agenda. The nature of the purpose of creation is a subject of much theological debates and speculations.<sup>13</sup>

However, the crucial question that remains to be answered is: Was it exclusively for the sake of human kind and/or other creatures in the ecosystem that the earth was created? My research into biblical literature revealed that, while some biblical scholars describe the human being as 'the crown of creation' (Dumbrell 2002:15-18) and the key player in the ecosystem, it is clear that the earth and the land were created for a greater purpose, which is the worship of Yahweh. The idea of creation and/or the earth worshipping Yahweh is one of the major themes in the Old Testament. The Psalms for instance echo this idea so profoundly; "All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name" (Psalm 66:4). And again, "Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them" (Psalm 69:34).

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<sup>12</sup> The similarity between the Hebrew and Melanesian way of story telling is quite evident in this creation account of Genesis. In the Western mind, the creation story is perceived as progressive. Melanesian or Hebrew myths are often characterized by the finality of the event being told in the story, and the different ways the same story is told (synoptically). For Melanesians truth is not relative, the stories may be relative, as they change with time, but the ethics behind the stories remain unchanged.

<sup>13</sup> In the early Methodist Church *Kuanua* (Tolai) version of the West Minister Shorter Catecheticism (1945), the following question is asked: *Ava ra vuna a Kalou iga vaki ra pia?* 'For what purpose (s) did God create the earth?' The answer given is: *A Kalou iga vaki ra pia ure ra tarai.* 'God created the earth for the sake of humankind.' (From the hymn book of the Methodist Church in the New Guinea District – East and West New Britain, and New Ireland: 1945 edition).

Human being, apart from being the key player in the whole ecosystem (Psalm 8:8-6), is also in the center of Yahweh's purpose for communion or *koinonia*, "fellowship." The earth therefore, is created for his (Yahweh's) "own good pleasure" (cf. Mal. 1:10). Human communities are meant to be worshipping communities, to offer worship to Yahweh on the land he created and gave in to the custody of human kind.

Second, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel and the maintaining of that relationship was significant to the land theology in the Old Testament, as a key factor in Israel's continuation on the land. Throughout the history of Israel, it is very clear that the relationship between Yahweh, the landowner, and his people is intricately linked to the land, which he has given to them. Brueggemann notes: "Israel's involvement is always with the land and with Yahweh, never only with Yahweh as though to live only in intense obedience, never only with land as though simply to possess and manage" (1978:52).

In summarizing the section on Yahweh's ownership of the land, one believes the crucial factors are, (i) God created the earth and everything in it, including land, for his own, to declare his glory – human beings' position in the creation plan is to worship and honor the creator and landowner on the land he has given in custody to them. Everything human beings do on the land culminates in worship of God, the rightful landowner. And (ii) Yahweh is the benefactor and human beings are the beneficiaries, but ownership is still in the hands of the benefactor, Yahweh. Human beings are not the landowners they are the custodians and with rights of usufruct accorded to them by the landowner. In more ways the land is a gift from Yahweh to humankind, but it is also strictly on loan to humankind.

## 5. The Land as a Place of Rest

One prominent Old Testament theme is that of the land as a place of rest.

Alexander notes;

Rest is an important aspect of the promise of land. Land and rest are often mentioned together, both being described as gift from God (e.g. Deut. 3:20; 12:9-10; 25:19; Joshua 1:13-15; 21:43-44). Deuteronomy, for example speaks of the land as being 'the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you' (12:9)" (2000:36-37)

There were four features to the rest symbolized by the land. First, it is a distinctive divine gift from God (Exodus 33:14), not just a by-product of being given the land. The divine gift of rest to the Israelites by Yahweh stands in stark contrast to the life of bondage and slavery they experienced in Egypt, and the forty years of living as nomads in the wilderness. It was a rest from oppression by enemies, hard labor and wandering (Genesis 15:13-14). The "immigrant ideology of land" according to Habel carries the idea that the "land is the host country where immigrants find God at sacred sites...and establish peaceful relations with the indigenous people of the land" (1995:135).

Second, the rest from oppression by enemies is only part of a larger picture. Leviticus 26 provides a description of the land that Yahweh gave to Israel; it was very fertile and abundant in harvest. The fertility and fruitfulness of the land was vividly expressed as "a land flowing with milk and honey." The issue here is not whether the land was literally flowing with milk and honey, rather this figure of speech reinforces the idea that it will be a place of true rest. It is about human beings within this bountiful domain, enjoying the presence, blessing and favor of God.

The presence of God on the land is significant to the notion of rest and peace. I read this as a Melanesian who believed in the past that the presence of a guardian



ancestral spirit gave one the sense of security, peace and assurance that no harm will come as long as the guardian spirit is present on the land.

Third, the concept of rest associates with the Sabbath. Alexander notes, “This suggests that the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and their subsequent settlement in the promised land were viewed as in some manner paralleling God’s rest following the completion of his creative activity” 2000:38). Fourth, the irony surrounding this peace on the land, according to Joshua is that it was temporary. The narrative of Genesis to Kings reveals also the rest never became a permanent feature of their time; on the contrary they enjoyed it only for a relatively short periods. In spite of this, Israel’s hope for a permanent rest continues to be an important component in its future expectation.

In reality the continuing conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians over portions of the land in the Gaza strip and the Sinai Peninsula, and the continuing threats to Israel’s security by the neighboring Arab countries of Iraq, Iran and Lebanon, one wanders about the legitimacy of the rest. The conclusion that emerges from my research into the of biblical theology of land, that Israel’s own deep sense of its unique history is the very reason for it continuing to lay claim to the land and surviving under great pressures from its enemies. As long as they know that the land, physically and spiritually belongs to them (their precious gift from their God), they are resting, even though they have to defend it everyday.

#### 6. Land as a Sacred Space

A careful reading of the creation account reveals that human being was created outside the Garden of Eden then later brought into it and given the mandate to care for it.

One also notices that the Garden of Eden seem to exist as a separate enclosure within the rest of the created world, and that Yahweh walked in the garden among all the rest of creation. While at first site, it may appear to indicate the observance of the sacred space, a demarcation between the holy and mundane things; it has a much deeper implication. First, biblical scholars have noted various parallels between the Garden of Eden and the tabernacle (Alexander 2000:35-500, which is not my intention to enumerate on, except to say the Garden as a 'sanctuary' connotes communion between Yahweh and humankind, by his presence among/in human societies. The Garden of Eden just like the tabernacle symbolized the presence of Yahweh among his people and although Israel had an opportunity of fellowshiping with Yahweh at the tabernacle, "direct access into God's immediate presence is restricted to the high priest" (Alexander 2000:41), once a year on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16).

In spite of being created outside the Garden, the act of being drawn into relationship with Yahweh enabled human being access to the Garden, where the presence of God is, a stark contrast to when they were later driven from the presence of God, because the relationship was broken through disobedience. The same can be said about Israel's relationship with Yahweh, on the basis of which that Israel had access to the land.

There is an important implication, with regards to the land, in Yahweh's decision to establish his dwelling among his people; that is, in order to sustain Yahweh's presence the land must remain undefiled. The Israelites are being continually called upon to purge the evil from among them to ensure Yahweh's continual presence on the land (Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21-22, 24; 24:27). The land is sacred because it the thoroughfare of God's movements and activities among humankind, it is where he is

constantly active in blessing and saving humankind; it bears the fingerprint of the creator. As far as Israel is concerned, the land is God's holy habitation (see Maoz 2000:190, 191).

### 7. Land: Place, Memory, and Identity

In his dream Jacob meets Yahweh who reiterates the covenant promises to him: "I will give you and your descendents the land on which you are lying... All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your descendents" (Genesis 28:13, 14). He takes the stone he used as a pillow over night and turns it into a pillar, erects it and anoints it with oil and names the place Bethel. The stone pillar, erected at Bethel the place is in memory of his encounter with Yahweh (Genesis 28).

On the verge of the Israelites entering the land of promise, Yahweh instructs Joshua to make stone flints and circumcise the generation born during the forty years of sojourning in the wilderness. The place is then named Gilgal in memory of Yahweh rolling "back the reproach of Egypt from you" (Joshua 5:1-12). Sel Drake notes that any concern about land highlights "The vital connection between three things: place, memory and human identity. The concept of place refers not simply to geographical location but to dialectical relationship between environment and human narrative. Place is space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is more precious" (2001:1).

The human sense of place is a critical theological and spiritual issue. For New Guinea Islanders, the tension between having a place to identify with and being placeless is crucial for survival and emotional support.<sup>14</sup> Lyndon and More note: "We need to

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<sup>14</sup> My niece named her daughter *Pukamailik*, a compound of two Tungak words, *puka*, 'to suffer' and *mailik*, 'alone' or 'all alone.' She named her daughter after witnessing her brother being bashed up by seven other young men from the village. He was all alone, not because he had no support, but two other brothers and three cousins decided to allow the other young men to bash him up in order to teach him a lesson, never to misbehave again. The idea of belonging to a place provides one with an identity and guarantees moral support in times of clan rivalries, times of death, bride wealth exchange and in staging a mortuary feast.

think about where we are and what is unique and special about our surroundings so that we can better understand ourselves and how we relate to others” (1994:xii).<sup>15</sup>

In the Old Testament theology of land, a place is a historical space with a story and holds specific meaning to those associated with it. It is where particular events happened and is now remembered, providing “continuity and identity over generation” (Brueggemann 2002:4). The destruction of a place, which has historical significance to a group of people leads to an actual obliteration of the continuity and identity of the particular group of people. Brueggemann also notes that

The land for which Israel yearns and which it remembers is never unclaimed space but is always a place with Yahweh, a place well filled with memories of life with him and promise from him. It is land that provides the central assurance to Israel of its historicity, that it will be and always must be concerned with actual rootage in a place that is a repository for community and therefore identity. (2002:5)

Land plays an important role in giving identity to Israel as a people of God, a holy nation. It was the activities of God on the land on behalf of Israel, which gave Israel that unique identity, which terrified other nations. Rahab said to the spies: “I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you” (Joshua 2:9 NIV).

In relation to land as place, meaning in life is found in knowing where one is, in having a home or a place. In the west time is more important than space, but for the Israelites, which is true also for Melanesians, land and space are more important than time. Israelites and Melanesians may not be able to travel back in time to relive the great

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<sup>15</sup> I learned the history of my sub-clan through my mother who brought me to a *rina kavang*, ‘an old settlement’ now covered by a forest. She pointed to a big tree planted by my great, grand mother and began to relate the story to me of how my sub-clan came into existence. For a long time this particular settlement became the focal point of my identity, for it was the birthplace of my sub-clan and where the story of my life began.

things done by their heroes, but they can go to a ‘place’ where the great events took place and find a tree or a pillar of stone planted in memory of the events. The land of promise (place) is an everlasting testimony to the great works of Yahweh through their ancestors. As long as they are on the land, they will always remember what Yahweh did for them through their heroes. There will always be a connection between human stories and the land. In the Scriptures, one finds that the land (place) and every living thing has a story to tell, bringing back memories of the work of Yahweh.

#### 8. Healing the Land.

Healing is holistic; it is not an event, but a journey. This is because, “Essentially Christian healing is not just the wonder of physical or mental recovery, however startling the occasion; it is ultimately the repairing and developing of relationships with God, with others, with ourselves and with the world and society in which we live” (Parker 2001:1). When it comes to talking about healing the land, it is also a journey or a process. Prior to returning to the Scriptures to establish the theological moods from which the call to heal the land comes, a clarification is needed on what one means when talking about healing the land. I will specifically be relating the healing of the land as land, and not land as people and nation.

It seems that the Bible emphasizes more the spiritual aspect of healing out of which there is a natural outflow of physical healing on the land. In Melanesian spirituality, what happens in the spiritual realms affects the physical realms as well. There is a clear biblical emphasis on the healing of the land as a natural outcome of internal transformation in the human hearts, which in turn radicalize behavior toward the

land and the environment. When human beings turn to God in repentance for their sins, then he responds appropriately and heal the land. For instance, Yahweh says:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2Chronicles 7:13-14).

Thomas Aquinas puts it succinctly this way: “Any error about creation also leads to an error about God.” (quoted by Bouma-Prediger 2003:14). A lack of proper understanding of the earth, leads to a lack of proper understanding of the nature and character of the God we worship and claim to serve. The message is simple, “Authentic Christian faith requires ecological obedience. To care for the earth is integral to Christian faith” (Bouma-Prediger 2003:14).

The Scriptures vividly portrays creation as afflicted and groaning in pain, in need of deliverance. Paul says,

The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present times. (Romans 8:20-22)

How long will the land lie perched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished. Moreover, the people are saying, ‘He will not see what happens to us.’ (Isaiah 12:4)

There are a couple of things in these references that emphasize the need for creation to be healed: (1) creation has been subjected to the suffering not by choice, (2) there is a fast depletion of certain bird and animal species, and other resources, (3) the land lies perched and grass withered, and (4) people are suffering. The Isaiah passage cites human wickedness as the result of the desolate state of the land. Human greed, bloodshed,

disrespect for other creatures and the environment, disrespect for other human beings, and the lack of fear for the Creator are attributed to the damage done to the earth. There is a need for a change of heart and attitude on the part of every human being.

#### 9. Land Sabbath and Jubilee

A study of the Old Testament theology of land would be incomplete without a discussion of the land sabbath and jubilee legislations relating to land and property rights, land distribution and the general usage of land. In Leviticus 25, Yahweh gives to Israel specific instructions relating to the sabbath year and the year of jubilee, saying,

For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your field or prune your vineyard. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. . . . Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan (Lev. 25:3-5, 25:10).

The discussion of the legislations will exclude the many theological debates surrounding them; instead it will focus on the purposes for which the legislations were instituted, paying special attention to the implications these may have to the task of developing a local theology of land for the islands.

Fager notes, “The legislation associated with the year of jubilee presents the most radical program for continuous social reform to be found in the Old Testament. This is particularly the case in land reform. . . . The biblical jubilee presents a very rich source of understanding the ancient Israel moral worldview” (Fager 1993:12). In relation to the nature of jubilee most scholars believed that, (1) its was a kind of land reform law, its institution was to address particular problems in relation to accessibility to land and property to which the “small people” in society were denied access (Ziskind 1978:243-

245; see also Gnuse 1985), a set of principles to control the economic, political and religious relationship of community on the land, (2) the jubilee laws and practices were simply incorporated into the religious and theological experiences of Israel, by Moses from the existing economic, politic and property laws of the previous occupants of the land (see Gnuse 1985 and Ziskind 1978). Porter claims that the original jubilee law was based on ancient land tenure systems in which the family held property and no individual member of the family had the right to sell it (1976:201). These views, however, do not invalidate the purposes for which the land sabbath and jubilee legislations were instituted nor do they overshadow the scriptural injunctions for Israel to be obedient to the land sabbath and jubilee legislation.

To better understand the significance of the land sabbath and jubilee, one must seek to understand the ethical, economic and theological dimensions in which both legislations functioned. No doubt they served the livelihood of Israel, but at the same time the violation of the same legislations was punishable by expulsion from the land and/or captivity by invading foreign powers. The jubilee law served the following purposes.

1. Theological Purpose. Central to the jubilee was the divine ownership of the land.

Leviticus depicts Yahweh as the sole owner of the land, and the people were sojourners in it (Lev. 25:23) or tenants whose dependency upon the bounty of God hinged on their obedience to his laws. Habel notes,

As tenants, they apparently have no right to permanent tenure or ownership of the land itself. They hold their traditional land in trust by virtue of the generosity of the divine patron [who] controls the use of the land, ownership of the land, tenancy on the land, condition of land usage, and the seven-year cycle of production. In short, YHWH is the owner and custodian of the land. (1995:98)



During the Feast of Tabernacles, the people not only celebrate new beginning in life, but they also celebrate that which brought them together, the land given to them by their God. Jubilee reminded them of the goodness of God in giving them the land and so they too must deal fairly with each other, the vulnerable and the sojourners for they too are sojourners on Yahweh's land.

Theologically, as long as they live on God's land they are his people, and where they live as his people, the land belongs to him and his presence is with them. The jubilee law also stipulated that the entire seventh year, the land must rest from all human activities, in which the people sacrificed their right to the usufruct of the land to reaffirm "the true and sole ownership of Yahweh" (Alt 1967:164-165). In the seventh year, the land revert to the landowner, God who used it for his purposes.

2. Ethical Purpose. Yahweh as a just God expects Israel to act justly on the land. There is inseparable connection between God's holiness and the land, hence the land is God's holy ground and so the tenants must act with justice and righteousness. The jubilee and land sabbath laws were tied in with the justice of God. Both legislations, (1) were concerned with accessibility to the benefits from the land, that is, who receives the productivity of certain parcels of land, (2) served to prevent "inequalities of land distribution, thereby facilitating stability and morality by keeping the people 'industriously occupied in tilling their field' and away from the decadence of the city" (Fager 1993:13; see also Ziskind 1978). The rights of the poor and powerless in society had to be protected. Every one by virtue of membership in the community of God had the accessory rights to the

land. Private property and ownership was detrimental to community solidarity and only served to further marginalize the vulnerable members of the community, that is the widows, orphans and sojourners, and perpetuate the spirit of self-aggrandizement of the rich and powerful minority.

Every fifty years a land sabbath is observed, “in which land that has been alienated is returned to original tenants. Those with rights in land never lose those rights permanently, because ways are provided for them to redeem the land, or failing that, families to get their land back every fifty years” (Rynkiewicz 2001d:222). In this way justice was accorded to all. In the year of the jubilee each peasant returns “to his property” (Lev. 25:13) rather than to his entitlement, as in the tribal context of the book of Judges (Judges 21:23-24; see also Josh. 24:28).

3. Economic Purpose. The jubilee legislation is promoting a radical social order designed to preserve the economic integrity of the landed peasant farmer (see Habel 1995:97; see also Fager 1993:88-89) and ensure the right usage of the land so that sustainability is perpetuated. Israel’s economy was mostly rural and the basic economic unit was the household, a compound family including perhaps three generations. The vast majority of the people farmed small plots of land handed down through generations as ancestral property. Socially, life was organized self-sufficient villages devoted to agriculture, small-scale cattle herding and craftwork, hence becoming the backbone of the agrarian mode of production.

Although small-scale agriculture was the backbone of the people’s livelihood, they provided “sufficient ‘surplus’ and labor to support the extensive royal bureaucracy and its large-scale ‘public work’s – state buildings, military

garrisons, military campaigns, roads, water projects, and so on” (Lowery 2000:8). The call for justice embraces the need for fair and humane treatment of laborers and for recognition of the rights of usufruct accorded to each household in the wake of economic development.

One other aspect that needs mentioning is that, the sabbath rest for the land after the seventh year was not just a theological issue but an ecological and an economical issue also. For the land to continue maintaining its usefulness to sustain the livelihood of the people for many more years, the fallow period was necessary.

In summary, the biblical traditions of land sabbath and jubilee address conditions of scarcity, overworked and economic inequality that prevailed under Israel’s kings and foreign emperors. “By celebrating a divinely ordained cosmic order built on natural abundance, self-restraint, and social solidarity, sabbath critiques the oppressive consequences of royal imperial system built on tribute, forced state labor, and debt slavery” (Lowery 2000:3). In our modern globalize economy, the land sabbath and jubilee traditions provide us with a lens to theologically reflect on the spiritual, ecological, and economic challenges that face us in this era, in relation to the land.

### Land in the New Testament

It is also important to investigate and understand what the New Testament teaches about land, so that the theology of land for the islanders embraces both the Old Testament and the New Testament views. The first impression one has is that the New Testament is silent about land. But, the near silence by the New Testament about the land does not

mean that it was not an important issue to Christ and the New Testament writers. When one carefully studies Christ's kingdom of God discourses, there embedded in them are theological emphases alluding to the land as a place of rest, well being, healing, relationship and community living. His parables on the sower (Matt. 13:1-23), the wheat and the tare (Matt. 13:24-30), and his allusion to the mission of the Christian Church as going out into the field that is wide unto harvest (Matt. 9:35-38; cf. Luke 10:1-24), are some of the land symbolism Christ used in the Kingdom of God discourses.

Chris Wright has suggested that the basic discontinuity in the New Testament on the teaching on land is actually anticipated within the Old Testament (e.g. Isa. 56:3-7; Ezek. 47:22), where it is envisaged that outsiders (viz. Gentiles) will share in the inheritance of Israel by right. The implication here is the replacement of the old covenant blessing symbolized by the "land of promise," with another covenant blessing, "a membership of God's new community" (1990:110-111; see also Millar 2000:623-627).

It is true that the New Testament devotes little space to the theology of land, but "the formative influence in the biblical theology of the relational ideas associated with land must not be underestimated" (Millar 2000:627). The theology of land in the Old Testament enshrines relationship with Yahweh at the very heart of the Israelites' national experience. Millar notes, "Israel yielded to the temptation to become preoccupied with the gift (the land) rather than the giver (Yahweh), but the dislocation that followed led to God's initiation of a new covenant in Christ" (2000:627)

In order to understand the theological significance of the land in the New Testament teaching, there is a need to interact with the rich allegories and analogies in the New Testament, which relate to land. I limit my interaction to three areas.

## 1. The Teachings and Ministry of Jesus

Senior notes, “The central motif of Jesus’ ministry was the ‘coming of the Kingdom of God’ (cf. Mk. 1:14-15)” (2000:144). Jesus himself was the embodiment of the kingdom of God. In relation to the incarnation, the kingdom of God in Christ is among human beings; it is in human flesh rubbing shoulders with men and women in their communities. It is a fulfillment of the Old Testament teaching on Yahweh’s presence on the land among his people, Israel. Now in the new dispensation God is presence among his people, on the land through the Son.

In his teaching on the nature of the kingdom of God, Jesus alludes to the land theology in the Old Testament. For instance, among many things (1) in the beatitudes, Jesus draws explicitly on a promise of land from Psalm 37 (Matt. 5:5), (2) in Matthew 25:34 he speaks of the kingdom as an inheritance, an idea closely associated with the land, (3) the imagery in John 15, and Jesus’ injunctions to “abide in me,” point to the fulfillment of the land motif in the Old Testament in the person of Jesus Christ himself, and (4) the relational aspect in the land motif of the Old Testament is fulfilled in the incarnation of Christ, whereby God is among his people as their God and Father, as one who heals and who is compassionate towards the lowly and outcasts in society, who forgives and reconciles men and women to himself, who acts justly towards all men and women, and who expects all to live justly on the land.

## 2. Paul’s Teaching

There are several themes in the Pauline teachings that relate closely to land, of which three are important to this study: (1) Paul’s understanding of the church as a community of both Jews and Gentiles is based on his reading of the Old Testament

teaching on land. The land of promise constituted the community of God's people, (2) he draws on the inheritance theme, in Colossians 1:13-14, to explain the nature of salvation in Christ. Thus the theology of land provides a basis for the New Testament doctrine of adoption. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel, as God's sons received their inheritance, the land, and (3) in Romans 8:14-25, the theology of land in the Old Testament finds its ultimate fulfillment in the new creation brought together under Christ.

### 3. The Books of Hebrews and Revelation

The writer of the book of Hebrews compares the Christian life to the experience of Israel during their initial occupation of the land, when they finally "rested" in the land of promise, from the years of sojourning in the wilderness. The perpetuation of the "rest", however, depended on Israel's obedient response to the grace of God (Heb. 4:1-12). While the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the availability of the free gift of rest in Christ, the ethical obligations, on the basis of which the Israel of old continued to receive and enjoy God's favor and blessing, applies also to the "new Israel".

In the book of Revelations, the rest is portrayed in terms, which recall the description of the Garden of Eden. It will be a new experience in which the people of God will once again take up residence in the God's presence, a residence described in terms of both a "new city" and a "new heaven and earth" (Rev. 21). At the center of this new cosmic order is Christ, through whom all believers inherit the true "rest". This inheritance is anticipated by the theology of land in the Old Testament. Millar notes, "The inheritance in Christ is no doubt different from the land received and lost by Israel, but it is greater, not less, than that land" (2000:627).

In summarizing the New Testament teaching on land, I wish to underscore the relational ideas associated with the land as the key theological factor here. In traditional Melanesian beliefs, the land symbolizes (1) the presence of the ancestors and local deities who gave the land to them, (2) the special relationship with the ancestors, which required obedience to the ways of the land, out of which flow blessings.

Based on my research into both the Old and New Testament teachings on land, the conclusion emerged that, in the theology of the land for the islands, a new perception and understanding of land, must be emphasized, not necessarily to counter the Melanesian religious beliefs about the land, but as a fulfillment of their beliefs. Christ is the fulfillment of their beliefs, and his incarnation gives a new meaning to the Melanesian understanding of the land as a symbol of God presence among them. He is here to relate to them, to give them rest, well-being, healing, restore broken relationship and justice.

### Summary

It is important for the people in the New Guinea islands to know that God is the sole owner of the land, for the earth and everything in it belongs to him. God's dealing with Israel on the land brings out several important factors that the islanders need to take note of: (1) we do not own the land; the land is God's gift to us, (2) the land is the host; we are the guests on it, (3) the land is given by God for the whole community, and not for the benefit of a rich and powerful minority – it must be shared by every member of the community, (4) God purposes that we honor him on the land, in the way the land is used, just as Israel was expected to worship God on the land, the same is expected of the people

of islands, and (5) a transformed mind and attitude is the key to caring for the land and the whole environment.



## Chapter 6

### **Towards A Biblical and Local Theology of Land**

I endeavor in this chapter to develop a theology that relates to the topic of land in the New Guinea Islands. In developing the theology, I will bring together some of the main thoughts from the previous chapters to serve the purpose. For instance, the major Melanesian cultural and religious themes on land (chapter 2) will provide a vital link to the biblical theology of land.<sup>1</sup> The interaction between the two, that is, the Melanesian and biblical themes on the land will form the basis for the task of developing a theology of land. In the midst of the land conflicts in the islands, both the church and the people are asking some major cultural and theological questions. The significance of these questions underscores the need for a local theology of land for the islands.

My concern is both immediate and long-term in perspective. Theology is never a final product; the process of theologizing is ongoing. Therefore it is important that this study provides a theological basis that will be able to address land issues now but will also provide a continuum into the future.

The theological views on land from the writings of several Western biblical scholars (Brueggemann 2002; Habel 1995; Johnson and Walker 2000 and Wright 1986), and the writings of several Melanesian biblical scholars (Boseto 1988; Tuwere 1992 and 2002), will provide insights helpful for the theologizing process. I will also take into account the theological views of the people I interviewed, which include church leaders,

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<sup>1</sup> The biblical teachings on land, particularly the major themes developed in the Old Testament (chapter 5), provides an insight into Israel's theology of land, which "fits in with the broader and fundamental Old Testament theology of Israel's unique covenant relationship with Yahweh, their God" (Wright 1986:4), provides a vital foundation for understanding God's ongoing purpose for the world.

both ordained and non-ordained, and several additional church members with whom I was able to converse.

The theological model I employ follows the lead of Ilaitia Tuwera (1992 and 2002), a Melanesian from Fiji, whose exegetical approach uses Scripture and culture to develop a theology of land.<sup>2</sup>

Developing a theology of land that will be able to address key issues in the islands in a relevant way poses a considerable challenge. Three factors constitute the enormity of the task. First, one is concerned that Melanesian cultural and religious themes on the land are adequately and relevantly addressed in the theologizing process, while at the same time remaining faithful to the Scripture. Authentic local theology emanates from an ongoing meaningful interactions and/or dialogue between biblical truth and cultural realities.<sup>3</sup>

Second, one is very concerned about a repetition of the mistakes that the missionaries made, that is, doing the theologizing for the people, thus imposing upon the people a theology that is foreign and lacking in authenticity. When this happens it provides the people no basis to independently think through the land issues theologically. The process of theologizing should never be an exclusive task of a theologically dominant group such as the missionaries or seminary-educated Melanesians. The religious/hermeneutical nature of every Melanesian community is such that theologizing

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 1, pp42-43 for full introduction to Tuwera.

<sup>3</sup> Classical theology and/or Western Christendom theology was brought to Melanesia as a final product to be imposed on the indigenes. This theology was supposedly to be the only right way to understand God and the Bible. Little did the missionaries realize that their theology was failing and creating a general spiritual and theological stalemate situation in the local churches in Melanesia. This goes to show that missionary theology of land, if there was such a theology, was the product of Western interpretation of the creation narratives. As such it left no room for a more dynamic theologizing process that addresses the cultural and religious realities of the Melanesians, of which the land was a major part.

was a factor in existence prior to the advent of Christianity. The integrated and deeply religious worldviews of Melanesian societies necessitated religious explanation for everyday events.

Third, one acknowledges the difficulty facing anyone who undertakes any theological discussion of land. The difficulty lies in the assumption by the many new dispensationalist and fundamentalist religious groups that the land is an exclusively Old Testament theological issue that concerned only the land of promise and Israel as Yahweh's covenant partner, and does not directly concern the church today.<sup>4</sup> Such assumptions negate the significance and authority of the Old Testament theology of land as a foundation for a Christian understanding of land ownership and of the significance of conserving the land and/or the environment in an age of greed and wastefulness.

The inability of the fundamentalists to articulate the significance of the Old Testament theology of land as basis for our Christian understanding of the land today appears to stem from the general ignorance of the compatibility of the Old Testament worldviews to the Melanesian worldviews. But the groups have also adopted a theology of escapism. Basing their theology on the Petrine teachings on the "day of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:1-18), they argue, "The earth and everything in it will be destroyed anyway, just as the Bible says and the saints of God will be glory bound."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The many new Fundamentalists and Pentecostal groups coming into Melanesia today advocate a theology of separation from the world that sees preoccupation with the land as interfering with the believers' preparation for the coming of Christ. The whole issue of land, if it is to be a significant issue for them, it has to be addressed by the New Testament, upon which many of the groups based their theological arguments (cf. Manfred Ernst 1991).

<sup>5</sup> My experiences of direct dealings with some of the fundamentalist groups in most parts of Melanesia and as an assistant pastor for two years (1995-1996) of a growing Christian Missionary Fellowship congregation in the city of Suva, Fiji affirm what I am saying.

### A Case Study

During the month of September 2004, I was on my home island of New Hanover in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea. After a week in my village, I learned of an invitation that came from a woman from the village of Tioputuk who had married a man from my village of Metemana; to go and bless a portion of land she had acquired from her clan for her children. The invitation was extended to the singing ministry group members and to any other interested persons from my village who wished to attend the dedication of the land.

The superintendent minister of the Circuit,<sup>6</sup> the Rev. Jeffrey Wilson was to be the main celebrant; but due to a circuit leaders' meeting he was to preside over on the same day, he asked me to do the dedication of the land on his behalf. I obliged because the woman's husband is a second cousin to me, and therefore, the fulfillment of social role towards the family as *angtuaina*, "brother in-law" of the woman and a *tamarialik*, "small father" of the children was crucial. Also, since I was a participant observer in the midst of research and this was relevant for the dissertation, apart from fulfilling my social obligation to the family.

On September 10, 35 others joined me, and after two hours walking we finally got to Tioputuk village where the land dedication was to take place. Upon arrival, and after a short rest, the dedication service began. Standing in a circle, we began with the singing of two hymns, and then the reading of selected Scripture passages, followed by the actual

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<sup>6</sup> The structure of the United Church in Papua New Guinea comprises four levels: the Assembly is the highest office of the whole Church with the Moderator as the overall head of the Church, and then comes the Region/Synod headed by a bishop. There are nine Regions in the United Church, therefore there are nine bishops heading each Region. Within a Region there are Circuits each headed by a superintendent minister. In a region/synod the number of circuits ranges from five to twenty, with each circuit comprising more than ten congregations. A congregation is looked after by either an ordain minister or by a lay pastor; although most of the lay pastors are relegated to the rural congregations.

ritual of dedication. I asked for a cup of cold water and a machete to be handed to me. With the machete I dug a handful of dirt from where we stood and held it up heavenwards and prayed, dedicating the portion of land to God, invoking his *atautauia*, “blessing” and “enrichment” upon the soil and the land for the purpose of abundance in harvest and the well-being of the family. After that I got the cup of water and sprinkled some over the new family houses invoking the Trinitarian blessing upon the houses, the land and the family. A final prayer was offered before closing the day with a meal.

### Analysis of The Case

The case illustrates several significant theological, social and cultural elements, which correlates with the biblical teaching on land. My experiences and research have shown that a theology of land for the New Guinea Islands must be: (1) creational, based on creation account, (2) covenantal, based on the mutual emphases on relationship between human beings and their gods on the land found in both the Old Testament and Melanesian traditional religious beliefs, and (3) communal, based on both the Old Testament and Melanesian emphases on community. All three notions are loaded with meanings and implications appropriate for theologizing, at the same time, they give recognition to the cultural and religious significance of land in Melanesia.

This theological work thus assumes that: First, the Scriptures remain normative for the process of theologizing. Second, the similarities in theological emphases between the Old Testament teaching on land and the Melanesian traditional religious understanding of land must be emphasized. The similarities are unavoidable, due to the compatibility in the religious worldviews of the Old Testament period and Melanesian

culture. The Melanesian cultural and religious understanding of the land occupy a grand position, as being the seed plot or point of contact for articulating the Biblical teaching on land.

### 1. Creation and Land

At the land dedication, I chose to read from Genesis 1:1-31, 2: 4-25 and Psalm 24: 1-2, emphasizing the following: (1) God is the creator and owner of the land, (2) the significance of land as a gift from God to every community on earth, (3) the need for human beings to be productive on the land and be accountable to God for the use of the land, and (4) the importance of blessing other members in the community or other communities with the produce from the land. At the end, I reiterated to the family and those present that the land like the tentacles of an octopus draws everyone to it, to inhabit it, to harness and cultivate it, to harvest its produce and to celebrate its goodness.<sup>7</sup>

In the woman's note of thanks for the success of the occasion, she expressed her gratitude to God from whom she received the land, through the clan. This experience was more confirming that Melanesians share a similar view of land as the Israelites in the Old Testament.

On the basis of my research, there is a need for a theology of land for the New Guinea Islands that is creational, based on the significance of creation. This theology should recognize (1) the supremacy of God over the earth as the creator, owner and giver of the land on which the islanders have lived and held in trust by the clans for many

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<sup>7</sup> The dedication marked a rite of passage for the family and the portion of land itself. For the land, it was a conversion from clan land to family land, where for the time being it remains the family land until it reverts to the normal process of inheritance when it comes under the custody of the daughter who when married her children will inherit the land. Her brothers, who will be fathering children for other clans, cannot have their children inherit the land, but they can use the land by permission.

generations, and (2) the ongoing participation of God the Creator in the world today, for the world still belongs to him and he continues to sustain it.<sup>8</sup>

A theology of land for the New Guinea Islands based on creation acknowledges the following.

The Sacredness of the Land. Both the Scriptures and Melanesian religious belief acknowledge the sacredness of the land.<sup>9</sup> While it is still necessary for the New Guinea Islanders to embrace their cultural and traditional religious understanding of the land, the Scriptures must inform their cultural perception of land. The Scriptures portray the self-existing God (Genesis 1:1) as the Creator of the earth (land) and humankind (Genesis 1:2-31) and as the owner and giver of the land (Psalm 24:1-2). Land has its destiny in creation and thus in the purpose of God for creating it. All things the earth contains belong to God: its fullness and all its resources, including land (Psalm 24:1-2). Everything is the product of his hands, hence bearing his fingerprints and the trademark of his personality. The Genesis account of creation is the seed plot for an understanding of the creative work of God as the Creator of the whole earth, emphasized right through the Scriptures. To say that the earth is created by God means that “There is a universal

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<sup>8</sup> A theology that shows God as still in relationship with the earth he created counters two other theologies: (1) the Melanesian traditional theology that purported to the notion of a “retired deity,” whereby the creator being retired to the background and became a high god, after creating the earth and not relating to the earth any more, and (2) the missionary theology which emphasized the transcendency of God at the expense of him being a relational God.

<sup>9</sup> Melanesians religious beliefs, teaches also the sacredness of the land. In some Melanesian societies, there existed creation narratives telling of how the earth came into being, attributing it to their ancestral creator beings/deities. There was already an understanding that everything in their world, including land comes from the ancestors or the local deities, the reason for the land being a sacred gift to the people. But there were clear differences in Melanesian creation narratives: it was mostly territorial and the creator beings retired to the background after creating world, no longer interested in it affairs. In spite of the point of departures between the Biblical creation narratives and the Melanesian creation stories, there are very clear and strong theological similarities on the basis of which the church could develop its teaching on the sanctity of land.

coherence and that everything depends on the totality, and influences the totality . . . that there is no owner of the world except the living God. . . . When we say Creation, we confess the living God and we have to mean control of interest” (Sarkar 2000:9).

After creation God continues to be present and involved on the earth which he established the earth for his purposes; thus the earth is central to his purpose, a stark contrast to the Melanesian notion of a retired creator. He established the earth in justice (Isaiah 54:13; Ps. 89:15), which is also the foundation of God’s own throne and reign, so justice must reign in the world.

The Scriptures emphasize the scope of God’s creative work as inclusive of the whole “heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1; Isaiah 42:5), the sea, the land and the sky and everything in them (Gen. 1:27, 2: 3-4; Deut. 4:32). God owns the whole earth, by virtue of being its creator. His authority, which is equal to none, is over the whole earth. He is “not a local deity – who might be viewed as the divine ruler of Canaan- with which Israel must deal” (Habel 1995:37). In Deuteronomy (4: 39; 10:14, 17), Yahweh the landowner is said to be a cosmic and universal monarch who controls a vast domain, of which Canaan appears to be one.

The New Testament presents the inclusiveness and the cosmic perspective of creation much more clearer in its portrayal of Christ as the fulfillment of creation: “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). In the Pauline account, Jesus is “the first born over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1: 16-17).



God is the Landowner. God says, “The land is mine” (Lev. 25:23). It is an exclusive claim of ownership, but as the Tungag say, *parik kapa ngaulugum ia*, “he does not close the palm of his hand over it,” implying God owns the land with open hands, ready to share it. But as long as the land is in the palm of his hand, he is the owner. This implies the following; first, because the land belongs to God, the people do not own the land, they receive it from him as a gift. The notion of Yahweh giving the land to Israel, and especially when the land is his own, which connotes the genuineness of Yahweh’s plan to enter into relationship with Israel, finds a correlation within the Melanesian understanding of the land as a gift from the ancestors. In the Old Testament, the land as a gift signifies a relationship between the giver and the receiver. The relationship is supposed to be based on mutual love, respect and understanding, culminating in the worship of Yahweh.

In Melanesia, land is embedded in a whole network of relationship that includes the ancestors, the living, and the generation of the yet-to-be born and other living things that share their world. This relationship must now include God, the true landowner who distributes the land to all clan members, giving them the divine right of usufruct, not ownership.<sup>10</sup>

Theologically, when the islanders come to understand the land as a gift from God to them through their ancestors for the purpose of fostering relationship with God himself, the ancestors, clan folks and the environment, it may be able to change the

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<sup>10</sup> What about the notion of clan corporate ownership of the land? The clans held residual rights to all land, playing the role of custodians of land, giving every clan member the rights of usufruct on the land. In the past clan elders knew that the clans were trustees of the land on behalf of the ancestors, the living and the yet-to-be-born generation. Today the notion of trustee has eroded, replaced by individual ownership claim resulting from the shift to accommodate global capitalism.

current perception that they own the land. The truth of the matter is that New Guinea Islanders or Melanesians as a whole, do not own the land, the land belongs to God with the indigenous being guests on the land, and the land as the host. While the land plays host to islanders, they are expected to reciprocate that by caring for and/or using the land wisely.<sup>11</sup>

I would like to emphasize also another powerful imagery, that is, the land is on loan to Melanesians. The story of the five talents illustrates this very clearly (Matt. 25:14-30). One of the factors behind the ongoing land conflicts between the church and the people is due to the lack of understanding by both the church and the people that they are guests and caretakers of the land, not owners. Islanders ought to see themselves in the position of “naked I came from my mothers womb, and naked I will depart” (Job 1:21), to be able to understand that the expectation for them to be faithful and thankful for the land they have.

Second, because the earth is the Lord’s, it is sacred. The land is sacred, the trees are sacred, water is sacred, humankind is sacred, and everything the earth contains is sacred. The sacredness of the earth and everything in it makes the earth a “sacrament, of God’s fidelity and total dependability. The earth is a symbol of God’s great action of sharing his love” (Sarkar 2000:8). Hebrew cultural and religious attitudes towards sacred objects, which demanded homage, find similarities in the Melanesian religious belief and practices. The land is sacred not only because it is a gift of God to the Melanesians but it is also a powerful symbol of his continual presence among humankind and/or in human societies and communities all over the world, for “the whole earth is full of his glory”

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<sup>11</sup> The notion of Melanesians being guests on the land brings up an interesting argument. If Melanesians are guests on the land, was it possible for them to play hosts to missionaries on the land? Yes, it was possible.

(Isaiah 6:3). The Spirit of God is the power of God in all places, assuring one of God's presence on the land. God, the landowner ancestor deserves recognition and honor.

Theologically, any form of land use today or major development that takes place on the land should take seriously the sacredness of the land, and in addition, give recognition to God the true landowner. God cares about the sustainability of the land, just as much as he cares for the well being of the islanders. The well being of the people hinges on the health of the land. Development in God's economy embraces sustainability and integral human development.

The secular capitalistic view of development has no regard for the sacredness of the land. Already, the impact of the secular capitalistic worldviews on the New Guinea Islanders is a telling factor; it is causing the people to depart from the religious importance of land. This is apparently one contributing factor to the shifting perception of the land, hence the land, now, is a commodity for profit making, creating an attitude of competition, which is setting clan and family members against each other.<sup>12</sup> The secularizing impact of global capitalism has to be addressed theologically, through emphasizing the supremacy of God over the earth, of which the land is a part. The desecration of the land for selfish gains demeans the spiritual value of the land and the well being of the people, and it is an affront to God.

The church now faces the hermeneutical challenge of developing a theology of development that should recapture both the Melanesian and Old Testament teaching on the religious or spiritual or theological significance of the land and, while at the same

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<sup>12</sup> The general understanding I got from the villagers of five villages on New Hanover Island, whom I used as reflection groups, was that the sacredness of their forests, land, rivers and the whole environment has been desacralized or desecrated, by the logging activities that is going on in some parts of the islands.

time emphasize the centrality of God as the true landowner and giver of the land to the people.

Third, in the Old Testament, land as a gift from God “was an important marker of personal and social identity” (Rynkiewich 2001b:219). One’s true self is found nowhere else other than in the land of one’s kindred (Gen. 24:7) or one’s father (Gen. 31:13). Sons must marry among the daughters of the land (Gen. 34:1). To be dispossessed of one’s land, amounts to a loss of identity (Gen. 15:13; Ex. 2:22; 18:3), hence becoming a sojourner in a strange land, feeling vulnerable and finding no comfort (Ex. 14:3). The exile symbolized a loss of identity, which wrought heart-renting cry, “How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land” (Psalm 137:4). Land is identity.

Melanesians see themselves as one with the land. They derive their names, and therefore their basic constituencies from the land, which means both turf and people. But for Melanesians, their sense of identity links them to the memory of the ancestors; because identity also means a sense of belonging not only to the land, but also to the ancestors who gave them the land.

My experiences and research revealed that theologically, there is a redemptive analogy, in the Melanesian traditional practices of land use, that is compatible with the emphasis on “remembrance” found in both Old and New Testaments. As such, land use among Melanesian was and is sacramental (very ritualistic), insofar as the memory of the ancestors and their goodness in giving them the land is celebrated in the yam harvest, the pig killing ceremonies, in the initiation ceremonies and other fertility rites (Chapters 1 and 2). Similarly in the land of promise, Israel is exhorted to remember the goodness of Yahweh in bringing the people to the land which they now occupy. A theology of land

must also be a theology of celebration, celebrating the goodness of God,<sup>13</sup> not only in giving the land to the people, but also in blessing their gardens, their herds of pigs, their rivers and forests, and the sea and reefs with abundance of fish. This theology must incorporate the existing island's traditional celebrations, thus redeeming them for the purpose of worship in the church.

Elenas Batari and Sion Vekas hold the view that the measure of our relationship with God makes a difference in our attitude to land, and that our customary perception of land must submit to the supremacy of God.<sup>14</sup> God is ultimately the landowner, who chose to work through all cultural systems and cultural frameworks in societies to manifest his purposes for the land.<sup>15</sup> If the complexity of the traditional Melanesian land tenure system is anything, it is indicative of the fact that knowledge is a gift from God to all human beings in all societies and not just to a particular dominant group, to utilize the land for survival purposes.

Corporate rights. God gives the land not for private ownership, but given to Israel as a family and /or community trust, to be used corporately. It is to the ancestral households that the land is given, with powers in the hands of the heads of the households. Israel is given the right of tenancy and right of habitation to the land. The

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<sup>13</sup> In the United Church there is a practice of annual thanksgiving, known in the New Guinea Islands as *vartabar*, in the Tolai language meaning 'gift,' whereby once a year every circuit of the nine synods of the United Church get together in a central place to celebrate and present their money to the work of the church. In the days of Methodist mission, people were encouraged to bring money and the produce of the gardens. Today, one is sadly witnessing the shift in emphasis; the focus is now money taking away the focus of the people from the land.

<sup>14</sup> Judge Batari is one of several Christian judges of the supreme courts in Papua New Guinea. Sion Vekas is my brother-in-law and a retired village pastor. The view of both men signifies the need for more biblical teachings on land. Both men are among the interviewees I interviewed.

<sup>15</sup> I know that this idea is open to misunderstanding, and may be taken to mean that God approved of and worked through such practices as cannibalism, wife strangling, witchcraft, infanticide and other such practices.

provision of the land comes with a clearly defined delimitation: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants” (Lev. 25:23). The gift of the land to Israel entails ethical obligations as spelt out in the treaty format, which regulated life on the land (Deut. 12-25). In Deuteronomy 26:1-11, the divine ownership of the land and the obedience demanded of Israel (i.e., to live on the land as faithful stewards) are explicitly connected.

The Old Testament teaching on corporate rights to the land and land as a trust are not difficult concepts for the New Guinea Islanders to grasp. In fact it finds rapport or correlation in the Melanesian ideologies of land. Melanesians believe that the land is a gift from the ancestors, not for individual ownership, but that every member of the landowning clan would be accorded the rights of usufruct. No member of a clan has the authority to transfer or alienate land without the consent of the whole clan. That prerogative is reserved for the elders of the clans, in consultation with the rest of the clan.

The land given is to be held in trust by the clans, for every generation. Theologically, while the Old Testament teaching about God’s dealing with Israel on the land points to a particular historical genre (i.e. salvation history), it does not rule out the fact that God was already working in other cultures.<sup>16</sup> God was at work within the framework of the Melanesian cultures, including the clan systems, to work out his purposes for the land.<sup>17</sup> Although Melanesians in their quest for holistic experiences on

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<sup>16</sup> The history of the Jews, as a people is a very young one, approximately 4,000 years old, although the civilization out of which they were forged is very, very old. Human beings were already in the island of New Guinea for well over 50,000 years and for 38,000 years in other parts of Melanesia, and I am sure God was already at work among the people of Melanesia and other form of civilizations before Melanesia.

<sup>17</sup> I identify with individuals like Simon Pencil and Oliver Balbal (Tolai), and a group of men from Metemulai, Kosai and Meteselen villages on New Hanover Island who acknowledged that the land belonged to God who gave it to “our ancestors” to own, care for and use it for their good. They believed the individual clans, whether among the Mandak, Tolai or Tungag, were instruments through which God used conserve and look after land.

the land may not have encountered God, the true landowner directly, they, however, did so indirectly (just a glimpse of him) through their religious systems and beliefs and in their relationship with the ancestors, until the fuller revelation of God, through the Scriptures was brought by the missionaries.<sup>18</sup>

In my research, the conclusion emerged that the theological challenge facing the church in the islands, in its ministry praxis, is to recapture the biblical ethos of land as a sacred gift to families and households (clans). There is a need to counter the escalation of private ownership, because it is being practiced at the expenses of relationship and other social obligations previously known to be associated with the land. Private ownership creates exploitation and oppression, leading to dispossession of the weak from the land, hence grinding poverty on them. Privatization at the trans-corporation level is increasingly becoming a major force of economic evil the people have to deal with.

It is God's purpose that Melanesians live in harmony on the land, and that land must be shared, and that the rights of small non-landowning clans protected. God is against the rich and powerful exploiting the weak, for he protects the poor, the widows and orphans (Deut. 10:18). In God's purpose for the land, "there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your

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<sup>18</sup> In most of Melanesia there were beliefs in high gods or creator gods who never revealed themselves to humankind because to do so would mean death for human beings but they were still capable of blessing humankind. The ancestors in most cases played mediatory roles between their progenies and the high gods. In most cases the names of the high gods were known, but could only be mentioned through rituals when invoking their help/blessings. For instance, between the *Kote* and *Yabim* speaking people of the Morobe Province in Papua New Guinea, one such high god was known as *Anatu*. The first Lutheran missionaries adopted the name and used it to convey to the people a resemblance between the God of the Bible and *Anatu*. In my research, I have discovered that the concept of high gods in the New Guinea Islands is fuzzy which goes to show the territoriality and/or the clanic nature of their deities, i.e. each clan has its own mythical figure or cultural hero, and clan founder.

inheritance, he will richly bless you” (Deut. 15:4). There is enough on the land for every one’s need, but not enough for the satiation of a few people’s greed.

My analysis of the case reveals that, for the church to be effective in its teaching and ministry, it has to reconsider its own claim of ownership over land it inherited from the missionary era. The church should not own land; it should only have the rights of usufruct as everyone else in the community. It should revert to leasing more of the freehold land it now has direct control over. If the church is to identify with society and/or to see justice done for the powerless in society, there are important ethical decisions it has to make.

Land and Salvation. At the land dedication, every eye was fixed on me when I scooped up a handful of dirt from right where we stood and held it for a while in my left hand. Traditionally, among the Tungag, only a *katakai i maras*, “a sorcerer” would do that if he/she were to *asipong* or *aritek*, “curse” the land. I, however, could feel the sigh of relief from those present when I lifted the handful of dirt heavenward and prayed.<sup>19</sup> But praying for the land also fitted well into the New Guinea Islands’ context

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<sup>19</sup> There was no doubt that, the dichotomous worldviews of Western Christendom, has made an indelible impact on Melanesian Christianity. Although recently one has witnessed an increasing departure from the teaching of the so-called ‘traditional missionary church,’ into embracing a more postmodernist view of Christianity.

The evidence of split-level Christianity brought into Melanesia was obvious in this situation. Never have the people been taught that God was interested or wanted to be part of what was happening on their land. Such form of blessing was only reserved for a new church building, a pastor’s house or any property that belonged to the church; it was never extended or accorded to ‘ordinary’ members of the community by the church, so the people naturally sought for the help of the local medicine man. I believe that the richness of the New Guinea Islands’ cultural and religious expressions and values provide a fertile soil for theologizing. The land issue has served to expose the existing need for the church in the islands to take seriously the need for theologizing.



whereby through rituals the personal occult forces were called upon to deliver the land from curses and energize it, so that it becomes fertile for the purpose of abundant harvest.

In the Old Testament, there is a connection between land and God's salvific plans for the whole earth. Any focus on the land, "must be set against the wider backdrop of God's purpose for all humanity. The call to Abraham (Genesis 12), . . . and the election of Israel always has the ultimate goal of the blessing of the nations (Gen. 12:3)" (Walker 2000:116). The land given to Israel was "effectively a bridgehead within God's long-term purpose for reclaiming the whole world to himself and bringing his 'new creation,' the restored Eden . . . [functioning] as a potent vehicle for God's purposes of blessings in his world" (Walker 2000:116).

On a more local level, the biblical emphasis on the redemption and healing of the land, speaks of the salvation of the land and its people, which had both spiritual and physical implications. Israel's enjoyment of the land was contingent upon its covenant loyalty. Salvation issues out of God's unchanging mercy and justice. But repentance is the key to the restoration of the people to the land.

If one were to put the cosmic plan of salvation aside for awhile, a closer reading of the Exodus would reveal that every major event beginning from the deliverance from Egypt, was punctuated by the divine intervention from God, in acts of deliverance. Two in particular: (1) the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14), and (2) the crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3-4). Both events involved crossing the water onto dry land. Dry land symbolizes rest, safety, security and celebration, all of which are synonymous with deliverance and salvation. Salvation is a cause for celebration, according to Jesus (see Luke 15:7, 10, 11-32).

Similarly, the ancestors through the land mediate life and salvation for Melanesians (chapter 2). Melanesian psychology of salvation concerns with the *gutpela sindoan*, “life in abundance,” which includes safety, security, a sense of belonging and rootedness on the land and in the community. Salvation, according to Albert To Burua, also embraces the notion of recovering one’s identity within the community and reconnecting oneself with two vital sources of life, the ancestors and the land, after one has made amend and reconciled to the community.<sup>20</sup>

Pragmatically, in both the Old Testament and Melanesian understanding of the land, salvation was for here and now, and included everything on the land (Chapters 1, 2 and 5). Everts notes, “Salvation was always real and tangible and immediate and essential and earthly and generous. The original Hebrew word for salvation is *yesa*. It literally means ‘to bring to a spacious environment’” (1999:105).<sup>21</sup> In the Old Testament, the Israelites were concerned about what God was doing in the present as a testimony to his activities of the past and a basis for looking forward to the future. The promise of the land also contained promises of future salvation. Snyder notes,

The close link between land and God’s promises helps us understand God’s kingdom now. God cares for the environment in which we live and on which we depend. He intends to redeem women and men with their environment and not out of it. God loves all his creation, not just the human part of it. Psalm 65:9 says God cares for the land; he waters it and enriches it abundantly. This is fully consistent, incidentally, with the Incarnation. (2001:29)

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<sup>20</sup> The Right Rev. Albert To Burua, one of the former Moderators of the United Church in Papua New Guinea was speaking from the experience of his people who were displaced by the twin volcano eruptions in 1994. Even though the government at the provincial level relocated and resettled the people in a number of settlements within the Gazelle Peninsula area, the people did not feel they belong. After ten years, the people were gradually rediscovering who they are. This according to Rev. To Burua is salvation.

<sup>21</sup> When a Hebrew shepherd guided his sheep toward new grasses and clear and fresh waters and away from hungry wolves and steep-edged cliffs; he was literally providing salvation for the sheep.

Crucial to the theology of land for the New Guinea Islands is the fact that God is working out his plan of salvation on the land. When people respond to the gospel message and embrace Christ; new Christian communities are established, hence the values of the Kingdom of God permeate societies. Land conflicts not only destroys relationships between the community and the church, but also hinders the church from being an effective instrument of God's salvific purposes on earth.

The Land is Good. The land in the New Guinea and in Melanesia as a whole is good land. The goodness of the earth/land, theologically underscores the fatherhood of God, who as a father he certainly knows how to give the best to his children/people, so that in return they will honor him. Melanesians are God's children/people also, and so he gave and continues to give his best, on and from the land to them. Melanesians or the New Guinea Islanders are recipients of God's best gift, the land; through the ancestors as progenitors of the islanders.

The crucial theological concern I see is in building upon the theological understanding that already exist in Melanesia (that is quickly eroding away), an appreciation for the goodness of the land. I am convinced that when the people are theologically conscientized or informed, they, with a clear conscience can oppose any form of development that is destructive to the environment, a threat to their livelihood, and that is an affront to God who gave them the best.

## 2. Covenant and Land

The notion of covenant in the Scriptures is closely related to the notion of community, so that it is possible to speak of a covenantal community. But to serve the purpose of this chapter, I chose to discuss the two notions separately.

How would the notion of covenant present itself in a theology of land? In the Old Testament, the covenant that God established with Israel through its ancestors comprised, first, a promise of prosperity, in which God told Abraham that out of the one seed Isaac, “I will make of you a great nation,” (Gen. 12:22), which is elaborated as more than the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5, see also 17:6).

Second, a promise of relationship with God himself, in which he promised to be their God and they will be his people (Gen. 17:7,8). But Israel is both a recipient and mediator of blessing. And third, a promise of land (Gen. 12:2; 17:8) for the descendants to settle on, because, “A people cannot live without land, a special place in which they can express themselves and worship the Lord” (Dyrness 1991:50).

Covenant relationship connotes indebtedness, gratitude and accountability, by Israel to the God who gave them the land and still regulate the use of the land or every other activity carried out on the land. Likewise Melanesians are indebted to God for the land they inherited from the ancestors. And just as the Melanesians were accountable to the ancestors for every activity on the land, there remains a cosmic accountability, in which all human beings on earth are ultimately accountable to God. God is the center of the covenant relationship, on the land community exist to glorify and obey God. His purposes are to be carried out on the land.

On the land, Israel is bound by the covenant to be neighborly, faithful to God and neighbors, truthful, love enemies, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness, accountable also to each other on the land, and thereby testify to the amazing community-creating power of God.

Land must now symbolize for the New Guinea Islanders a new social and spiritual bonding that transcends clan, economic, gender, and racial distinction that divide human society (Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 3:10-11). The result is a new community, “who share the same Lord and Spirit and who are committed to one another’s well being (Acts 2: 32-34). In such a community members do not leave when they are dissatisfied. They must learn to live together in harmony . . .” (Hiebert 1995:350).

### 3. Community and Land

The woman in the case study invited the community to attend the occasion of dedicating the land to God on behalf of her children. The meal at the end of the land dedication was served to everyone. For an outsider, the meal was just a natural part of the gathering. The meal actually served to affirm and consolidate the community spirit present not only in the gathering that day, but also the perpetuation of it. The gesture was symbolic of the fact that, her relationship with the community continues.

A theology of land for the New Guinea Islands must be communal, that is, it must embrace the community tenets (principles) found in both the Scriptures and in the traditional Melanesian values. When it comes to land, the basic tenets of what a community is applies here also. In this section I will be discussing land as community and place, and/or community and place as land.

The *imago Dei*. Genesis 1:26 has God saying, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” There are many and varied theological interpretations of what being made in the *imago Dei* means. There are three possible meanings to the *imago Dei* notion. First, “in our image” “presupposes an archetype in God, a pattern in which human beings are modeled so that they become the corresponding copy of the triune God (Tuwere

2002:122). It is all about God in the human face, of which the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14) is the full revelation. In Exodus (33:12-23) God would not allow Moses to see his face. He told Moses to stand on the rock to be able to see his back, as he passes by. Jesus, the rock, assumed a human face to reveal God when he entered into a human community. When Christ comes into a community, in a sense that community becomes the community of God.

The human face is special, for it represents a person. It is in the face of a person that one discovers his or her distinctiveness and identity, and it is in this distinctiveness that God's relationship has found. Many distinct human faces are forged into living communities, that is, people on the land, thus giving land its full meaning. The essence of the community is God revealing "Godself through people, the way they live together and relate to one another" (Mantovani 2001:3).

Second, in Genesis 1:26 God makes his intention known to establish human communities on earth, modeled after the community in heaven.<sup>22</sup> If the divine relationship between God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit comprises a community, then God, who is a community God sought to establish human community after his community.

From a Melanesian perspective, being made in the *imago Dei* relates to the ethical and spiritual characteristic of Yahweh the Creator, who is the author of human communities and community living. Theologically, bearing the *imago Dei*, who is community God encompasses:

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<sup>22</sup> The Rev. Leslie Boseto (1972-1980) and the Rev. Albert To Burua (1980-1988), both former national Moderators of the then United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, based their theology of creation on the perception of God as the 'community God' whose initial plan for the earth to be just one big village comprise of diversified territories and communities.

- Caring and reciprocity. Every human community comprises social beings (human beings) who like the creator has the capacity to be in relationship with each other, to give and receive love, to empathize with those who hurt. The land that is a gift to Melanesians is an important component in community relationship. As a community when one mourns the whole community mourns and when one rejoices the whole community rejoices. The community responded to the needs of individuals and rallied together to work the land. This community must extend itself to embrace or protect the rights of aliens or foreigners or sojourners in the land (Exodus 22:21-24).
- Rootedness and security. During the 1994 volcano eruption in Rabaul, East New Britain (chapter 2), 30,000 Tolai people were displaced from their land. In other parts of the world there are other peoples like the Tolai, who are displaced from their land through oppressive regimes, and as victims of political and religious wars. The whole experience of being displaced from the land amounts to rootedlessness and insecurity. It is the community, established on the land of one's birth, which provides the experience and sense of rootedness and security for the people. And while the displaced are capable of establishing new communities, it takes long for the sense of rootedness and of belonging to be fully actualized.<sup>23</sup>
- Respect. It is inclusive of respect for fellow human beings and the properties, for gender relationship, for the authorities of the elders and of God, and for other living things and the whole environment. Respect for other living things calls for

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<sup>23</sup> For the displaced, their physical community may have been destroyed, but nothing could destroy the spirit of community within them. The community ethos lives on in the hearts of people.

a recognition of the equal rights they have to live and share the land, other spaces and time with human beings. Respect causes us to strive to live at peace with one another, living in harmony ecologically with the environment, and maintaining one's connection with the spiritual roots.

Respect for spiritual authority is the basis for a humble approach and attitude towards the land and the whole environment. Any form of destruction done to the land and the environment is a testimony to how a community perceives its relationship to the spiritual authority, be it the ancestors and ultimately God.

- Healing. Old Testament communities and traditional Melanesian communities share some similarities and commonalities. One area of similarities involves the nature of communities, which are sacred communities. The everyday presence of the ancestors and of Yahweh on the land and among or in human communities, transforms those communities into sacred communities.

For this reason, when the land and fields do not yield the best harvests, the flocks and herds are sickly and not producing young, the women are barren, children are sick and when natural calamities strike the people, it is because the ancestors and/or God are offended. Broken relationship at community level and between humans and God is at the heart of all misfortunes striking at the communities. It is necessary for those broken relationships to be mended and healed so that wholeness can be restored to the community, including the land.

- Procreation. In Genesis 2:18 “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” Prior to this, after creating human beings, “God bless them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill



the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). There are two important theological notions being alluded to in these verses: (1) “To be human means to acknowledge sexual differentiation as well as sexual relationship” (Tuwere 2002:127). The male-female differentiation is basic to human community, for the procreative power of human being stemming from the sexual differentiation and sexual relationship is necessary for the replenishing of earthly communities.

And (2) the procreative power of human beings connects them to the procreative power of the land (see Genesis 1:24). Gardening in some Melanesian societies symbolizes marriage whereby the wife is the garden in which the husband plants the seeds.<sup>24</sup> Gardening hence is the extension of human procreativity and becomes a form of partnership between human beings and God in the act of procreation. The caring and the replenishing of the land and the environment is a partnership between the creator and human beings, the caretakers.

Human communities on earth cannot become the exact replica of the heavenly community. Some have argued that the word *imago* means exact copy, but the word actually connotes “some resemblance either in nature or function” (Drumell 2002:16), and so the earthly communities are resemblances of the heavenly community. Human beings are the only creatures in all of Yahweh’s creation to give back to him a more sensible and a resounding form of worship.<sup>25</sup> In reality, the land conflicts between the

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<sup>24</sup> This is a common understanding between the Sengseng and the Lakalai people in the West New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea. The Lakalai people especially have elaborate harvest festivals to celebrate the first harvest of taro gardens; at these festivals the birth of a child is re-enacted by men folks to the amusement of the women (see Chowning 1973). Among the Trobriand islanders, the yam harvest festivals is marked by the relaxing of all sexual taboos and restrictions to allow free sexual engagements that is ritually connected to the fertility and success of the next yam harvest.

United Church and the people in the New Guinea Islands are happening on the periphery of God's purpose for the land.

Community as a Place of Rest. Rynkiewicz holds,

Land was an important marker of personal and social identity. To be one's true self, one should dwell in or return to the land of one's kindred (Genesis 24:7; 31:3). Loss of land means loss of identity, becoming a stranger in a strange land (Genesis 15:13; Exodus 2:22; 18:3) where one might wander to and fro without finding comfort (Exodus 14:3). Exile is symbolized in the saying: 'How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?' (Psalm 137:4). Land is identity. (2001b:219)

For Melanesians, resting implies being satisfied with the abundance from the land, enjoying the security of being part of and being owned by the community on the land, and by the connectedness one has with the land itself and the link that land provides for the living with the ancestors. Melanesians rest when all is well with land, that is, when they are assured that the land; their most precious possession will not be taken away from them.<sup>26</sup> Brueggemann notes, "Living in land controlled by another is to live a problematic existence" (2002:11). Gutierrez also notes, "the vast Latin American majorities are dispossessed and therefore are compelled to live as strangers in their own land" (2002:11). Such a situation is hardly "a place of rest."

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<sup>25</sup> No one for a moment is denying the fact that the whole earth declares the glory of Yahweh, but in terms of intimacy only human beings have the capacity by virtue of the *imago Dei* to receive and reciprocate love emotionally and intellectually with the creator. Some may argue that even some species of primates are capable of showing similar intimacy, but this is going too far, for it is courting the danger of insinuating a similarity in the human species and primate species that denies the uniqueness of human being as created in the *imago Dei*.

<sup>26</sup> On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004 I interviewed Wala Gukguk, the only surviving leader of the Johnson Cult, in his village of Meteran. When asked for his views on the land situation on New Hanover Island; among many things he said, the reason for starting the movement was to protect the land from the foreigners (expatriates and Papua New Guineans from other provinces in the country). In his own word: "New Hanover Island is for the Tungag, the land was and will always belong to the Tungag. As long as foreigners were among us we did not feel safe. When we saw our land going away piece by piece, we feared very much the prospect of losing all of our land. We still don't feel safe, because foreigners are still coming in and stealing our trees, fish and natural resources. We are being sold into the hands of the foreigners by money-hungry educated Tungag."

Writing from a Melanesian perspective, Whiteman notes, “The central value of Melanesian culture is the continuation, protection and maintenance of life . . . cosmic life and renewal. . . . This cosmic life, as central Melanesian value, is maintained principally through right relationships with both human and spirit beings and by accumulation of indigenous wealth” (1983:65). The roots of the evil and curses must be identified and dealt with before there is any full realization of cosmic life and renewal, or life in abundance. The land, when it is free from conquest and occupation, mediates life in abundance, and truly becomes a place of rest.

Community as a Sacred Place. There are correlations between the Garden of Eden as sacred land symbolizing the presence of Yahweh and the Melanesian ideology of sacred land or shrines which symbolize the presence of the ancestral or guardian spirit or clan deity, to regulate man’s activities on the land. One also finds a similarity in Israel’s special relationship with Yahweh through which they had access to the land and the Melanesian belief, that the clans have access to the land by virtue of their relationship to the founding deity and/or ancestral stock of the clan.<sup>27</sup> Because the land is sacred it is to be respected, but at the same time the sacredness of the land is a reminder of the obligations of Melanesians to worship God, and be accountable to him for the way the land is being used.

The Environment is One Big Village. A theology of land for the islands must be ecological, re-emphasizing the traditional Melanesian religious beliefs that the

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<sup>27</sup> My research has uncovered a strong link between biblical theology and Melanesian theology in the emphases on the sacredness of the land as a gift from the divine/deity. Human beings’ responsibility towards the land is first and foremost a religious one with others only secondary. My interviews with Simon Pencil and Oliver Balbal (both Tolai), Jordan Watlen and Lamamao (both Mandak), and Morokas and Silaupogol (Meteselen village on New Hanover), have served to affirmed point. In the words of Silaupogol, “the land still bears the *ramil*, ‘finger print’ of the ancestors from whose hand we received the land” (15<sup>th</sup>, September 2004).

environment is just one big village community (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). For Melanesians the creation narratives in Genesis give them a picture of creation, especially their immediate environment, as one big village or community. They see everything in the cosmos as belonging to one another, all interrelated. Human beings, animals, trees, other living organisms in the ecosystem, and the non-empirical being and forces all exist inseparably of each other.

The whole universe is alive. Whiteman notes, “Human beings are the central focus of this cosmic life, this integrated universe. The central of the Melanesian universe is humankind, but of course it also includes plants and animals, rocks and rivers, spirits and ancestors, all belonging to an integrated universe pulsating with energy” (1984:92).

It is the well being of the community that must be protected against the greed of individualism, as an antithesis to communal harmony and community relationship. Melanesians do acknowledge individuality as one among many, not one in isolation of the many. So, alienation from the land for individual use and benefit works against the Melanesian ethos of community relationship through reciprocity.

### Summary of This Section

The reality perhaps appears farfetched from the ideal described so far. But one sees the church as the

covenant community in which Christ is the head and the desires of the members are second to the building of the kingdom of God. In one sense the church is a community like other human communities, a living reality fleshed out in the concrete human relationships and experiences of life. In another sense, it is unique because it is a gathering in which God is presence and at work (Phil. 1:1-11). (Hiebert and Meneses 1995:349)

Because of the church’s inclusiveness, anyone across the racial, color, status, age and gender barriers, can come in and find peace, rest, respect, healing, security and

rootedness, and sense the personal touch of God who is present among his people.

Hauerwas and Willimon note, “[The church is] a place clearly visible to the world in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness, and thereby testify to the amazing community-creating power of God” (1989:46).

But God *kata sukal kana lotu* (Tungag), “planted his church” in local soil. There are two significant implications in the notion of the church being planted in local soil. First, in the context of Melanesian reasoning, one can only plant something that has the capacity to reproduce itself. Dead things are buried, not planted and there are words in the local languages to differentiate the acts of burying dead things from the act of planting.<sup>28</sup> The church is a living organism with the capacity to reproduce itself in human communities. It is God’s prophetic voice calling humankind to repentance, salvation, reconciliation and discipleship. Among many things, the church speaks out against injustices committed against people and their land. The onus is on the church today to be in the forefront of the movements to conserve the environment, to see that the land is distributed fairly and that the resources are shared equitably.<sup>29</sup>

Second, for the church to be planted in local soil means, it has become part of the community, not assimilated to the point that it loses its unique identity. It implies that the ministry praxis and theologies of the church are to be carried out and developed along community patterns and contexts. The local church is equipped with the knowledge of

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<sup>28</sup> Among my people, the Tungag of New Hanover Island, the word that describes the act of “planting” is *sukal*, and the act of “burying” the dead or trash is *kelai* or *mo*.

<sup>29</sup> Part of the challenge facing me in the endeavor to formulate a local land theology is based on my concern that I am not just writing for the elite in the islands. I am determined that this dissertation becomes another vital component in the Christian education programs of the church to educate individuals and communities of the need to care for the earth, conserve the environment and the land, the just use of the land and equal distribution of benefits from the land and natural resources.

the biblical teaching which mandates human beings to be responsible users and caretakers of the environment, the land included. It (the church) therefore, is in a better position to develop a theology of land that embraces both the traditional beliefs and biblical teaching on the land and the whole environment.

### Missiological Significance of This Study

Advancing missiology, that is, the study of mission is a key area to which this study wishes to make a contribution. Missiologically my concern lies in six crucial areas. But as I discuss the missiological significance of this dissertation, there are three things I take into account: First, God was already at work among the Melanesians before the advent of Christianity. If the missionaries had looked careful they would have discovered evidences of his work within the culture of the people, including the traditional land tenure system in the islands. Had they done so, they would have theologized appropriately to address land in the islands. Second, every human society and/or community in every culture on earth is under the divine jurisdiction of God, and not of the church perse. As such, the church's presence among the people or in the community is redemptive, on behalf of God, as a transforming agent of God in society.

Third, the Holy Spirit who operates within the contexts of culture, translates the message of Scriptures into the heart and minds of the people to effect transformation in behavior, attitudes and characters. This is not a formula for successful ministry, but rather some guidelines to enable ministry to be conducted in manners that are both biblically and culturally relevant.

With those said, the purpose of this study is to develop an appropriate theology of land for the islands. The missiological significance of this study therefore is understood in the context of the outcome of the islanders being informed biblically and/or theologically on the issue of land. Six points are important here.

*First, the attitude of ownership will change.* Ownership is an ethical issue because it involves attitude. This was the problem the missionaries and the colonialists had (Chapters 2 and 3), which has also evolved into the neo-colonial mentality found among many islanders today. The wrong understanding of ownership, which leads to greed, exploitation and an oppressive attitude towards the people and land, will change. Those who are normally sidelined or marginalized for standing in the way of one's dream for possession will be embraced.

The traditional beliefs about land, which sees the ancestors as owners and givers of the land to the islanders will be enriched by the new allegiance to God who is the Lord over the whole earth, the true landowner and giver of the land to the New Guinea Islanders, through their ancestor. I am not saying that the traditional beliefs of the islanders on land was wrong, rather, like the apostle Paul, I am saying, "Before this faith came we were held prisoners by the law [put under the charge of the law], locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge [the school master] to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Gal. 3:23-25).

What the law was to the Jews according to Paul, is what the ancestors were to the islanders or did for them before the fuller revelation about the true landowner came – God the Creator.

As my analysis shows, the ancestors and their laws were instruments of God in every society in Melanesia. They acted on behalf of God, to achieve his purposes on the land. The conclusion emerged from my research that the institutions of the clans in the islands were avenues through which God worked for proper arbitration, distribution and fair use of land. The respect the islanders gave to their ancestors, to whom they accorded ownership of the land, must now also be given to the true landowner. To honor and respect God is to use the land wisely and to respect the rights of other to use the land.

The islanders will be able to see that land is not to be possessed and exploited for one's greed, but to be cared for. The issue of stewardship must be re-addressed, emphasizing the important role they play as caretakers of God's earth. Ownership implies authority; the owner is the authority over the earth and the land. The implication is, the islanders submit to the divine authority of God over the land, and to the authority in the community, which God has also ordained to serve his purposes. "Submission means we will handle things God's way and not ours. Only after we submit to his authority, we have a clear perspective of our positions as stewards, underrulers, or keepers of what is rightly his domain" (Woodley 2001:150).

*Second, ownership entails relationship and sharing in Melanesia, an ethical value violated in the Western land practices* (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Reciprocity is one of the many virtues of the Melanesians, whereby sharing contributes to the well being and survival of communities and individual families. Land as a gift from God is for sharing, a sharing attitude that must now go beyond clan interests, to embrace the socially marginalized from smaller non-landowning clans and sub-clans and foreigners.



The islanders must embrace the ‘sharing heart’ of God, who has the ultimate landowner, took the initiative and commitment to share with human beings what could have rightly been his to keep, land. Though the land is a gift from God for the benefit of all, the economic pressures of today, with its temptation for people to deal dishonestly with land, is real factor. The issue at stake here is not about making a living on the land; rather, it is about where others in the community fit into one’s life. How does one see his/her fellow human being? Is he or she is someone who should equally benefit from the land? How can one keep land given for sharing, without a sense of guilt?

The people in the islands will come to know that, the land is their “birthright” from God who is also present on the land. Their birthright to the land and sea can never be replaced by “legal rights,” for outsiders are only interested in their God-given natural resources, but interested in listening to and empowering them (Boseto 1995:69). God is the one who empowers them on the land he provided them with, as a gift to cherish and to share. God’s presence among the islanders in and on the land means he requires them to walk humbly before him, to do justice and to show respect for the rights of others to use the land.

The redemptive presence of the church in the islands, is symbolic of and an extension of the presence of the Kingdom of God among the people. The church’s presence in the communities, is not to impose what it believes to be right for the people, but to foster and facilitate a spirit of understanding that may lead to people making informed and life changing decisions.

Land symbolizes relationship and community living, which includes the ancestor and the generation to come. Melanesians must come to realize that the God who related

to Israel through the land was also among their ancestor relating to them on the land. Through the wonders of Christ's incarnation, that God is also among them today, relating to them through the land, thus the community is a place where rootedness, safety, security, identity and a sense of belonging is realized. A community is a place of peace and rest where the presence of God is also felt. This is not some kind of an utopian dream, but a reality that can be rediscovered. Right relationship with God the landowner and Christ, the ancestor of all Melanesians, is the key to a right attitude towards, creation, and the land and to other communities on the land.

Every community in the islands can be healing communities, reaching out to others inside and beyond who are hurting. A theological understanding of the essence of the community can enhance the cultural virtue of Melanesian communities as 'weeping'<sup>30</sup> and reconciling communities. Land conflicts are indicators that something is amiss. Relationship serves to bridge estrangement resulting from the conflicts, for it contributes to social and communal solidarity, and harmony in the community.

*Third, when the people are theologically informed, they are able to live prophetically on behalf of the weak and powerless in societies.* These people have been robbed of their land by powerful mining and logging companies, who in the process are destroying the livelihood of the people. The church must proclaim and live the whole gospel, avoiding "the mental dichotomy that separates evangelism from social ministries and see both as ways to bear witness to the transforming power of the gospel" (Hiebert and Meneses 1995:346).

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<sup>30</sup> In a Melanesian psychology of community, the notion of a "weeping" community is that, "when one mourns and weeps, the whole community mourns and weeps."

The people would also want to exercise their ethical responsibility of caring for the health and well being of the land as well. The earth is suffering both physically and spiritually (Romans 8:20-22). On the physical aspect of the suffering of creation, the environment, climate and seasons tell the story loud and clear. Job instructs human beings to ask the animals, birds, fish, trees, and so forth to tell their story (Job 12:7-10). They are certainly telling their stories, but not all are listening, thus the earth/land is getting more polluted and sick.

Christians need to take practical steps to heal the land. There are several practical means available to Christians such as put pressure on the government to introduce and sponsor reforestation schemes<sup>31</sup> and/or stop the use of manufactured brands of fertilizer, and return to organic ways of replenishing the nutrient value of the land. In 1989, an agronomist from the government Lowlands Agricultural Research Station in Kerevat, in the Gazelle Peninsula advised students and faculty members of the Rarongo Theological College to introduce a particular form of legume to put back nutrients into the soil.

The use of factory made fertilizer interferes with the natural processes of nutrient production going on in the soil. It is estimated that from the day one ceases the use of manufactured fertilizer to the period when the natural processes of nutrient production begins in the soil, it takes fifteen to twenty years or even longer.<sup>32</sup>

Spiritually, the land is suffering through moral pollution: corruption, sexual immoralities, injustices whereby the poor are marginalized, oppression of the powerless

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<sup>31</sup> In 1996, on an afternoon the students and professors of the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji, joined other students from the University of the South Pacific, the Catholic Pacific Regional Seminary, other colleges and schools in the city of Suva to plant young mangrove at different locations around the city. The planting of mangrove seedlings were done in areas where human activities had resulted in the depletion of large area of mangroves, resulting in the disappearance of some particular species of fish and crustaceans.

<sup>32</sup> According to Oliver Balbal (Interview: July 23 2004)

in society by the powerful minority, witchcraft and sorcery, and much more. When the land is polluted it suffers, and so as Woodley notes, “When the land is spiritually polluted, we must go about healing the land according to God’s protocol” (2001:153). For spiritual healing to take place on the land, it must begin with an attitude of repentance within the community. It requires humility from the community, in approaching God through confession and seeking his forgiveness. Healing comes through the forgiveness of God.

In 2000, the nation of Fiji went through its third political coup leaving it so demoralized. The usually very strong religious and peace-loving nation was totally left in a state political confusion and spiritual doldrums. Christians throughout the nation crossed denominational boundaries as they came together for months of fasting, confessing and repenting on behalf of the whole nation, asking God to forgive their sins and heal their precious *vanua*, “land” and/or “country.” A revival broke out, leading to people repenting of sorcery and witchcraft, and other forms of “wickedness” resulting in God actually healing the land as both turf and nation.<sup>33</sup>

Among several cases of God healing the land, three in particular I must refer to: (1) in the interior of the main island of Viti Levu, where the Methodist missionary Thomas Baker was murdered in 1830 and over the years as split-level Christianity reigned in the area, the land increasingly became infertile. The people planted large gardens but the harvests were pitifully small, lasting almost seventy years. During the 2000 revival as the people turned back to God and even took a step further in inviting the descendents of the Rev. Baker to come from New Zealand for a feast of reconciliation, the land has once again become fertile. The harvest is not only plentiful, but root crops

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<sup>33</sup> In a one hour presentation

and other fruits of the land are of better and high quality, (2) a river in one other part of the island of Viti Levu that was bitter and undrinkable for fifty years is now safe for human consumption, and (3) the reefs are teeming once again with many species of fish that had disappeared for good number of years.

Coincidence is not an appropriate way of describing these phenomena. In Melanesia, when relationship between the people and the spirits or the ancestors was unhealthy the land also suffered the consequences. Similarly in the Old Testament, when the Israelites sinned against Yahweh, the land also suffered the consequences.

Rynkiewich notes:

When people abused each other and refused to follow God, the land itself was defiled or polluted (Lev. 18:25, 19:29, 35:33-34; Deut. 21:23; Jer. 3:1-2, 3:9, 4:20). If the people sinned and defiled the land, the land itself would not produce, community would fail (Deut. 11:17), and eventually the land would 'vomit out her inhabitants' (Lev. 18:25). The land itself took on a persona and was an active partner in the triad of people-land-spirit. The land suffers when people suffer and his healed when people are healed. (2001d:220)

The situation in Fiji and a similar situation in the West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea,<sup>34</sup> is an example of the spiritual connection between the land and the relationship between God and human beings, just as God cursed the land because of Adams sin, the land will always suffer the consequences of human waywardness towards God.

When the islanders are theologically informed, they are able to see a broader perception of the land, that is bigger than the portion of clan land they often quarrel over,

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<sup>34</sup> In 2003, a missionary couple with Wycliffe Translators in PNG, Carle and Victoria Gustavison came to visit with us at our house in Wilmore, Kentucky and recounted to us the story of the revival that had been going on in an area in the West Sepik Province for almost three years beginning in 2000. Believers went out into fields and purposely stood at particular spots where their enemies' blood was shed during tribal fighting, confessing and asking the Lord to heal the land. God did heal the land, the manifestation of which was in the abundance of the harvests from the land. Yams were ten times the sizes of ones they used to harvest before the revival. I followed up the story when I went back to PNG on my research trip, and found that the story was true.

and that the responsibility is much greater than just gardening or cash cropping on the land God gave them, and that they are also responsible for the good of others on the land.

*Fourth, one other major contribution this study can make is to facilitate a situation whereby the church as the community of "wounded healers" take the initiative to reconcile* with those that may have been hurt by the land dealings of the missionaries in the past, from whom the church inherited the land. Part of the reconciliation process may require either a public apologies from the church to the parties that have been hurt or the church returning some more lands to the people. The redemptive presence of the church in the community can be hampered by the irresponsible attitude it has towards the people who feel the church needs to reconcile with them.

*Fifth, the study will help the churches to address the theological issues raised by the land conflicts facing their establishments (local congregations) and the communities they served.* The theological issues in this case are not confined to Christianity. Significantly, the traditional religious values of the land in Melanesia raise such key theological issues as the sacredness of the land, land as gift, land and healing, land and salvation, and land as a community that links people to the ancestors. The reconciliation of the two theologies of land forms a basis for a profound dialogue between the two, hence the task of theologizing.

*Sixth, all theologizing process has to take seriously the worldviews of the people, at the center of which land is one of the key components.* Land is an integral part of the total life's experience and cultural realities of the islanders. In this study, I take the view that any contextual theology of land must seek to address key cultural themes that relate to it, such as symbolism or images of land, folklore and folktales about land, land rituals

and ceremonies, and the cultural importance of land to the people. In addition, land as an important component in the social structure of every indigenous peoples of the world.

The task of theologizing on the major themes relating to land must involve the indigenous churches; it is their prerogative as the hermeneutical communities. The local church must “maintained its self image,” seeing itself as the church of Jesus Christ in its local situation; mediating the work, the mind, the word and ministry of Christ in its environment (Tippett 1973:155). To do so, there is a need for the churches at the level of local congregations to articulate the issues within their cultural contexts. Within every culture are some forms of redemptive analogies and/or points of contact within which the theologizing process begins to take shape.

### Missiological Challenges

The conclusion emerged from my research and experiences that any one can develop a theology, but if the theology does not address life’s reality, then it cannot impact societies. Grenz and Olson raise two crucial questions: “What is the relationship between theory and life? Does theology stand apart from life?” (1996:120). Theology cannot stand apart from life, because theology is the product of real life’s experience. Theology like a map that enables a traveler to navigate his way through his journey, enables a faith community to navigate its way through life’s quests and challenges. It provides answers to some of the difficult existential questions people ask.

But a map has to be used to serve its purpose, likewise for a theology to serve its purposes, it must be put to use or applied to life’s situation. The land theology for the

islands has to be implemented if it is address the issue of land conflicts between the church and communities in the islands.

With these said, I make four suggestions for implementing the theological insights I developed in this chapter. I have the whole church in mind, that is, the United Church in Papua New Guinea when I make these suggestions.

1. The United Church has eight theological institutions which comprise: (1) a major theological college, the Rarongo Theological College, (2) a lay leadership-training center, Malmaluan Timal Center, and (3) six regional Bible Colleges. My recommendation towards the implementation of these theological insights would be for these institutions to incorporate into their curriculum a course on Practical Theology, in which among many other areas would address the issues of land. I see the significant of this study as providing the basis to foster theological discussion among the students and for encouraging the students to think theologically about the issue of land.

The knowledge acquired from this research will enable students who will later become ministers and pastors in their local congregations to minister effectively to land conflict situations in the islands and other parts of Papua New Guinea. The knowledge may also be used to address other issues in the church. Because this research is based on a high view of culture and a high view of Scripture, and with its emphasis on contextualization, it will be one more valuable contribution to theological education in the islands and other parts of Papua New Guinea.



Since the inception of the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree program in 1974 at the Rarongo Theological College, students have written some scholarly theses, in which they demonstrated their ability to theologize. There is, however, not a single thesis on land, thus this study could be use to create such an awareness of the seriousness of ministering in land conflict situations.

2. At the congregation level, this study can be developed into a booklet, which will become a teaching manual. The manual could be used as a basis for Bible studies, group reflections and for sermon preparation, in the attempt to communicate to the church the theological insights on land in this study. During the research trip, it became obvious that Bible studies and group reflection were most effective ways of getting across to the people and hearing from the people their views on the significance of the land. Melanesians are not used to the monotonous way of one person preaching, they are used to group interactions.
3. Storytelling and dramatization of stories are two other useful ways to implement the theological insights in this study. Melanesians are excellent storytellers and natural actors. During my research trip I was a guest preacher at an annual thanksgiving celebration of the Morobe circuit in the Urban Synod of the United Church in Papua New Guinea, held on 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2004. A drama was presented on the importance of giving, it was so well presented that the message was very clear. Some years back (1988), I watched the creation story being dramatized by a group of young people from the United Church's youth ministry program; it had a real impact on the audience that night.

4. There is a relationship between land issues and discipleship.<sup>35</sup> Discipleship begins when one response to the call of Christ to follow him, but it does not stop there. Discipleship involves being and living for God in the world in relation to the earth and land. Good stewardship of land and respecting other's rights to use the land is one characteristic of growing in discipleship. Respect for the environment constitutes our obedience as disciples of Christ to God's mandate for us to care for creation (Gen. 1:28), not to exploit the land and suppress others rights.

Discipleship is growing in Christ likeness, which among many theological truths, constitute a high respect for what God created. Christ had a high respect for creation, so much so that in his teaching he turned to the natural environment to convey to his listeners his message on the Kingdom of God. In his parables he used the land, trees, water, fish, birds and animals to convey spiritual truths. If the church is a self-destruct community, this growth cannot be nurtured.

The church as the community of God in the world is a discipling community, and as such it proclaims the glory of God in the world. It does so by upholding the values and principles of the Kingdom of God, making it "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 4:13,14). Israel was told to live a godly life on the land so that pagan nations are drawn to God. The redemptive

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<sup>35</sup> In one of the reflection groups, in my dad's village, the discussion flowed into the concern about the people's gardens being destroyed by wild pigs. A man stood up and offered his explanation as to why the pigs are destroying their gardens. According to him, the pigs were allowed by God to punish them for living disobediently in the eyes of God. As followers of Christ, they have not also honored him with the first fruit of the land.

presence of the church on the land should be felt, hence magnetizes or draws people to God.

### Areas for Further Study

I trust the theological approach I adopted whereby I use Scripture and culture to develop a theology of land has provided a model for the church to continue theological discussion and teaching on the following issues:

1. Ownership. The research has revealed that one of the causes of land conflicts has been the issue of land ownership. It is not a simple phenomenon to be resolved that easily. The issue is both complex and fragile, because one is dealing with an issue that is deeply lodged and/or embedded in the ecology of relationship. However it is going to be addressed, the social, religious and cultural ramification must, in the first place, be considered seriously.

This is one issue whereby the dialogue and/or the processes of networking must be ongoing. By networking, I mean church workers must learn how to penetrate the existing social groups in the community to discuss and listen to the people's view on ownership. But church workers must receive training in this area, because it is a process of discipleship, it is helping in the formation of a Christ-like attitude in the people towards ownership. Today, the church is doing all the talking and listening less to the people. There is a need for continual teaching from the Scriptures on the issue of land ownership to counter the selfish spirit of ownership.

2. Compensation. Can the church learn anything from all the pressure on it to either return the land to original customary owners or to pay compensation for the land

on which it occupies? There is a need for the church to reconsider the socio-cultural significance of compensation. There is something deeper, behind all the angry demands made by landowners, on the church to compensate them for their land. If compensation is one avenue through which the conflict situations can be addressed, then it needs to be pursued. To facilitate this kind of ongoing reflection, the church should engage the services of anthropologists and/or other trained resources in the area of conflict resolutions.

3. The Roles of the Clans. One fear I have is the danger of reducing the clan systems of the islands into a “culture of silence.” Silencing and/or relegating the clan systems to the periphery of society as more and more Melanesians espouse the individualistic spirits of the West, is self-inflicting, thus imposing upon society a form of genocide that may not be in the magnitude of ethnic cleansing, but equally destructive. How can the church best utilize the clan systems to its advantage instead of seeing educated Melanesians bringing about their demise? The church in Melanesia is God’s one big moiety (household) made up of all different clans and sub-clans. The land issues involve all of God’s people, in the clans. This is another area that needs further studying and assessments.
4. The Task of Theologizing. I would like to see two things happening: (1) continuity in the task of developing a theology of land for the islands. What I have done is only one part, the rest is yet to come, (2) a much greater involvement of the local church and or local communities, as the true hermeneutical communities, in the process of developing a local theology of land for the church in the islands. There is a need to spend more time in dialoguing with the local

churches and local communities in the islands for one to come up with a theology that is truly from the people, by the people, for the people. Due to the limited time I had, and the distances I had to cover, and the unpredictable circumstances surrounding some of the key informants I partially achieved the task I set out to do.

### Conclusion

This study is not a search for a new theory to resolve the land conflicts; rather, its purpose is to develop a theology of land for the island that may be capable of facilitating dialogue leading to understanding the differences. It is an effort to facilitate a process of reconciliation between the church and the people in the New Guinea Islands. The earth and the land is the Lord's and the people in the New Guinea Islands are simply caretakers. The land is given to them for their use and enjoyment and worship of God. It is not a private possession, for them to keep; it is for the use of every one as required by traditional property laws (chapter 2). Private ownership denies others the rights to use and benefit from the land, as the Western land ideologies demonstrated (chapter 3). The study is a step towards:

- Renewing, in the islanders, a deep sense of the cultural, social and religious significance of land as an integral part of a whole way of life, not a commodity to be sold and bought to satisfy the greed of a rich and powerful minority.
- Underscoring the theological significance of the land as a gift from God through our ancestors, for the benefit of all people. The islanders need to know that God gave the land not to be used to exploit the humanity/personhood of individuals in society whose identity is derived from the land.

- Underscoring the biblical teaching on the earth and/or the land as exclusively belonging to Yahweh. He is the ultimate landowner, and human kind through all its social and political structures, and all its other social and religious mechanisms simply hold accessory rights or the rights of usufruct. All the clan systems in Melanesia play the role of custodianship over the land. They are not the owners of the land, just as every member of the clan does not. All the clans are held accountable to the ultimate landowner for the land they hold residual rights to and accord accessory rights to all their members.
- Laying a foundation for a theology of development in the islands that respects the cultural values of the people and embraces the teaching of scriptures.

The church's ministry in the islands is to present a clear biblical and teaching on land (chapter 5). The teaching must address the relevant cultural and religious aspects of the land, in order to give the people sense of: (1) the origin of the land, (2) how they receive the land, (3) the purpose for them receiving and being on the land, and (4) the future of the land. Most of all, life on the land is only a preparation for the spiritual inheritance that God prepares for his people.

## **Appendix A. List of Interview Questions**

I wish to arrange the interview questions into the following categories.

### 1. Interviews with some Individuals

1. How do you know that this land belongs to your clan? Please tell me your story.
2. If the ancestors were still able to communicate with us, what do you think they would say about the way the land is being used today?
3. Please tell your story of how the land was acquired by the missionaries.
4. Why do you think your ancestors gave the land away to the missionaries?
5. What was the nature of the giving? Was it a gift or an exchange?
6. Why are there conflicts now?
7. The land belongs to God and not to our ancestors and our clans. What is your opinion?

### 2. Interviews with Church Leaders

1. How do you feel about the land conflicts between the people and the church?
2. What is your opinion on the accusation of fraud and deception leveled against missionaries by most people in the way they acquired land from their ancestors?
3. Should the United Church own land?
4. In my opinion the church is being unfair by not paying attention to the people's struggle for land. The church should in the name of justice return some portions of land to the people. What is your opinion on this?
5. If you were to address the land conflicts theologically, what would you say?
6. What is the United Church theological standing on land? Does the United Church have a theological understanding of the value of land?

7. How does the church see its role in the environmental issues being spearheaded by the Non-government Organizations (NGO)?

3. Interviews with Land Officials: Lands Advisors and Land Court Magistrates

1. What are the main functions of the Lands Office and lands court nationally and on the provincial level?
2. What nature of land conflicts do you deal with through you offices? What are some of the causes of the conflicts?
3. How much of the conflicts are the results of the clash between the Western and indigenous land ideologies? Do the courts take this issue into consideration arbitrating land conflicts?
4. What advice does your office give to those involve in the land conflicts?
5. What percentage of the land conflicts involves the churches?
6. I believe our land court system is also to be blamed for some of the ongoing land conflicts in the islands because at times legal decisions are made in favor of wrong people, those who are not the owners of the land. What is your opinion?

4. Other Professionals

1. What is the significance of protecting the environment or the whole ecology?
2. Protecting our land is the key to our survival and identity. What is your opinion?
3. What do you say about the possibility of your children and/or grandchildren facing a future without rights to land, clean and healthy environment?



## **Appendix B. A List of Interviewees**

The list of interviewees will be provided in the following categories.

### **1. Ordain Church Leaders**

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. Burua, Albert    | November 6 <sup>th</sup> 1999; July 5 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 2. Butut, Robinson  | June 20 <sup>th</sup> 2001                                 |
| 3. Gaius, Saimon    | November 2 <sup>nd</sup> 1999                              |
| 4. Gapi, Timothy    | June 27 <sup>th</sup> 2001                                 |
| 5. Kapman, Gerson   | June 29 <sup>th</sup> 2001; August 12 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 6. Lentrut, Beniona | August 7 <sup>th</sup> 2004                                |
| 7. Morton, Amos     | July 15 <sup>th</sup> 2004                                 |
| 8. Noah, Leslie     | September 8 <sup>th</sup> 2000                             |
| 9. Sauten, David    | June 19 <sup>th</sup> 2001                                 |
| 10. Teko, Nelson    | November 11 <sup>th</sup> 1999; July 12 <sup>th</sup> 2004 |
| 11. Tioty, Ezekiel  | July 7 <sup>th</sup> 2004                                  |
| 12. Waisale, Nason  | November 1 <sup>st</sup> 1999                              |

### **2. Lay Church Leaders**

- |                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Buia, Biango   | November 10 <sup>th</sup> 1999  |
| 2. Padana, Roy    | July 13 <sup>th</sup> 2004      |
| 3. Pencil, Simon  | July 12 <sup>th</sup> 2004      |
| 4. Vekas, Sion    | September 14 <sup>th</sup> 2004 |
| 5. Watlen, Jordan | June 26 <sup>th</sup> 2001      |

### **3. Clan Representatives and Other Individuals**

- |                  |                                 |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Gukguk, Walla | September 14 <sup>th</sup> 2004 |
|------------------|---------------------------------|

- |                             |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Mas, Martin              | June 27 <sup>th</sup> 2001     |
| 3. Mitik, Samuel            | June 19 <sup>th</sup> 2001     |
| 4. Morokas                  | September 9 <sup>th</sup> 2004 |
| 5. Pasinganmalus, Gerson    | August 30 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 6. Pasingantapak, Ekonia    | August 30 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 7. Rambalis, Thomas         | June 29 <sup>th</sup> 2001     |
| 8. Silaupogol               | September 9 <sup>th</sup> 2004 |
| 9. Steven, Paul             | August 4 <sup>th</sup> 2004    |
| 4. <u>Professionals</u>     |                                |
| 1. Anis, Pedi               | August 12 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 2. Balbal, Oliver           | July 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2004     |
| 3. Banlovo, Martin          | August 14 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 4. Batari, Elenas           | October 4 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 5. Biamak, Samela           | July 12 <sup>th</sup> 2004     |
| 6. Bino, Robert             | October 5 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 7. Gion, Sition             | August 12 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 8. Kusak, Micah             | August 5 <sup>th</sup> 2004    |
| 9. Toliken, Peter           | August 12 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 4. <u>Reflection Groups</u> |                                |
| 1. Metemulai village        | August 27 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 2. Kosai village            | August 29 <sup>th</sup> 2004   |
| 3. Katangan village         | September 4 <sup>th</sup> 2002 |
| 4. Baungung village         | September 7 <sup>th</sup> 2004 |
| 5. Meteselen                | September 9 <sup>th</sup> 2004 |

6. Metekavil village September 10<sup>th</sup> September
7. Metemana village September 12<sup>th</sup> 2004
8. Meteran village September 13<sup>th</sup> 2004

### **Appendix C. A Brief Description of the Formation of the United Church**

On January 19 1968, the then United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands came into being. The formation of the United Church in PNG and the Solomon Islands came about as a result of a merger of the Papua Ekelesia, a denominational arm of the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Methodist Overseas Mission (Australia and New Zealand) and the United Church of North Australia (Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians). Williams wrote of the merger saying, “Gifts of shell money, pig tasks and a handshake were the traditional and symbolic means by which agreement joining the Methodist, the Papua Ekelesia and the United Church [of Australia] was sealed in Port Moresby on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1968, and the United Church came into being” (Williams 1972:1).

The constitution and other by-laws of the church were drawn up in Papua New Guinea. The church was also registered in Papua New Guinea as the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Strictly speaking, the Solomon Islands government did not legally recognize the Church. The United Church existed in the Solomon Islands as the ninth Region or Synod of the Church, headed by a regional bishop. For 28 years, the Church remained United Church in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, with a common Theological College based in Rabaul, East New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea.

Owing to the distance factor, the legal factors involving the church being registered in PNG, the political boundaries and other factors, it was decided it is time to inaugurate two new churches to be known as the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the United Church in the Solomon Islands respectively. In 1996, at final Assembly

meeting of the Church under the old name, United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, in Munda, Solomon Islands, two new United Churches were inaugurated. The United Church in the Solomon Islands elected the Right Rev. Philemon Riti as its first Moderator and the United Church in Papua New Guinea elected the Right Rev. Samson Lowa as its Moderator.

The United Church Solomon Islands now has Seghe Theological Seminary as its main theological institution, but until a degree program is introduced, the church is still sending its students for either the Bachelor of Divinity or Bachelor of Theology at the Rarongo Theological College in PNG.

#### **Appendix D. A Brief Description of the Melanesian Institute**

The Association of Clerical Religious Superiors of the Roman Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands founded the Melanesian Institute in June 1968. The idea of such an institute grew out of a discussion by young Divine Word missionaries studying together in Rome in 1966. They were concerned with the need for new missionaries to have a solidly based introduction to cross-cultural ministry. The idea was formulated in a ten-page paper presented to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, in April 1967, by Rev. Dr. Ernest Brandewie.

After much groundwork, the MI came into being with Rev. Dr. Hermann Janssen as its first director. The first Orientation Course for new missionaries took place for ten weeks from November 16, 1969 to January 31, 1970. The institute, situated in Goroka, a township in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, is strongly ecumenical in its orientation and ministry praxis. The mainline denominations are well represented on the faculty of the institute. Since 1976, with the appointment of Rev. Brian Turner as its first member of the MI faculty, the United Church has actively participated in the research program of the institute. I joined the faculty in January 1997 and in August 2001 I came to study at Asbury, as a faculty member on study leave.

“The primary purpose of the Melanesian Institute is to help churches in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands to understand more clearly and to respond more authentically to the needs of Melanesian people” (Whiteman 1983:133). The MI takes seriously two assumptions: (1) The belief that the Christian gospel has a universal truth relevant for all people, which transcends all cultures, but which is in belief and practice,

must be grounded in the cultural context of each believing community. (2) The numerous and diverse cultures in Melanesia must be understood in depth if church workers, both national and expatriate, are to communicate a Gospel that is both good news and relevant news. The Melanesian Institute takes both Christianity and culture seriously, thus the relationship between Christianity and Melanesian cultures is fundamental to all our activities.

The institute is mindful of its relationship with all the churches and other educational institutions in PNG and the Solomon Islands. And so, in its functions, the Melanesian Institute does researches and teachings. The institute is not specifically a training institute like the schools and seminaries; rather, we see our work as complementary to that of the training institutions. We help these institutions to see the significance of contextualizing their training programs so that they are relevant to Melanesian contexts. Faculty members are made available to teach short courses at a variety of church training institutions. Currently, the institute still runs bi-annual Orientation Courses for new missionaries but since 2002, it is running a special Orientation Course for national church workers

Our researches are published in three publications or journals, the CATALYST that comes out three times a year, the POINT, which is, published twice a year and the UMBEN in Pidgin English (no longer in production), used to come out once a year.

## Appendix E. Additional Tables

### A Summary of Alienated Land in Papua New Guinea over the years

**Table 2. Alienated land in Papua New Guinea over time.\***

Year	Area	Customary	Alienated	Admin/Gov	Freehold	Leasehold
1850	Papua New Guinea	22,700,000	0	0	0	0
	P & NG	23,300,000	0	0	0	0
		46,000,000	0	0	0	0
1884	Papua New Guinea	22,700,000	0	0	0	0
	P & NG	23,272,000	283,275**	0	283,275	0
		45,972,000	283,275	0	283,275	0
1914	Papua New Guinea	22,295,300	404,700	393,960	10,740	121,400
	P & NG	23,015,630	284,370	12,140	272,230	0
		45,310,930	689,070	393,960	295,110	121,400
1940	Papua New Guinea	22,991,775	708,225	697,485	10,740	127,000
	P& NG	22,938,180	361,820	148,485	213,335	148,480
		44,929,955	1,070,045	845,970	224,075	275,480
1975	PNG	44,100,000	1,900,000	1,342,000	218,000	340,000
2000	PNG	43,700,000	2,300,000	1,700,000	220,000	380,000

\*I have rounded off most of these figures to emphasize that these numbers are not accurate measures of land, but rather estimates gathered from many sources, few of which agree. For example, a recent figure of land area for PNG is 45,985,400 hectares (Allen, Bourke and Hanson 1996:530), though many previous figures are larger (e.g. Kaitilla 1995:108 cites 47,614,000 hectares, following Alan (1977) and Freyne and Wayi (1988:B75). Sources for this table include: Mair 1970, Sack 1973, Sack and Sack 1975, Sack and Clark 1979, Rowley 1958, Rowley 1966, Firth 1983.

\*\*These were claims that were, for the most part, not substantiated by the German New Guinea Company (Sack 1973:125)

(Adopted from Michael Rynkiewich 2004:1-20)



### A Summary of the Land Acquired by the Methodists from 1875-1914

The following is a brief summary of the total land acquired by the Methodists in the forty years since 1875. This is not an exhaustive list of all the land that were and are currently owned by the church.

**Table 3. Methodists Acquisition of land in the New Guinea Islands**

NAME	USE	DATE	HECTARES	TENURE	TRADITIONAL
Vunasale (Kabakada)	Mission Plantation	1/4/1899	0.6392	Freehold	Tarue, Kivung, ToVue
Naono (Tavui)	Unoccupied	1/4/1899	1.51	Freehold	-----
Rabuana	Teacher's Station	1/4/1899	-----	Freehold	-----
Bai	Teacher's Station	1/4/1899	0.6592	Freehold	-----
Pilapila	Teacher's Station	1/4/1899	2.2946	Freehold	-----
Tuguman (Nonga)	Teacher's Station	1/4/1899	1.55	Freehold	-----
Matalau	Teacher's Station	As early as 1880	-----	Freehold	Kirika, Matava, and Ia Babalie
Ravaule (Ratavul)	Teacher's Station	1/4/1899	1.3230	Freehold	-----
Tokudukudu	Teacher's Station	1912	0.8734	Freehold	Ia Ialam
Rakunat	Teacher's Station	1914	-----	Freehold	Turagik, Robin and Monongia
Tokabai (Korere)	Teacher's Station	-----	1.2724	Freehold	Temeti, Lokia and ToPaklak
V'kulakum (Tavui)	Teacher's Station	5/7/1903	0.5130	Freehold	-----
Rakale (Ravuvu) (Kurakurup)	Leasehold	-----	0.3913	Freehold	-----
Ratung	Teacher's Station	Prior to 1884	-----	Leasehold	To Ngunia, To Atuna and To Mule
Vunavatikai	Teacher's Station	Prior to 1884	-----	Freehold	To Pobuar, To Keake To Lane, To Tenaen and To Kololoi
Vunairima	Institution	Prior to 1925	Approx. 500	Leasehold	-----

**Table 2 contd.**

Vunakambi	Plantation	Prior to 1925	Approx. 400	Freehold	-----
Kaling (Palabong) (Namatanai)	Mission Station	1876	1080	Freehold	A clan in Kalil
Namarodu (Namatanai)	Mission Station)	1876	54	Freehold	Julius Chan's clan
Napanta (Namatanai)	Mission Station	1876	10	Freehold	Puabar and Vutong
Kimadan	Head Station CTI	1907	1070	Freehold	Kimadan clan
Pinikidu	Mission Station	1907	Approx. 50	Freehold	-----
Omo (Kavieng)	Mission Station, CTI	Prior to 1906	-----	Freehold	-----
Halis (Namatanai)	Mission Station, CTI	1910	Approx. 1000	Freehold	Gions and Tokmun
Ligga (Kavieng)	Mission Station, CTI	1928	Approx. 1080	Freehold	Leri
Ranmelek (New Hanover)	Mission Station, CTI	1920	Approx. 1080	Freehold	Uggui
Umbukul (New Hanover)	Mission Station	1920	0.50	Freehold	Parrot clan

Over 60% of the United Church land in the New Guinea Island is titled as Freehold land. The remainder is leased under titles of Mission, Agriculture, Pastoral, Residential, Business or Special land. These lands no longer belong to an expatriate mission, but now belong to the fully indigenized United Church in Papua New Guinea. That does not mean that all the previous landowners are satisfied. Many of the portions of land are still subject of bitter conflicts.

**A Summary of other Land Titles: Owned or Leased by Churches today**

**Table 4. Parcels of land owned or leased by Churches, Missions and Religions. Year 2000**

<b>Church or Type of Church</b>	<b>Percentage of all Church Land</b>
Anglican	4.4%
Catholic	26.7%
Evangelical Lutheran	14%
United Church	26.6%
Gutnius Lutheran	1.9%
<i>Sub-total: Mainline Churches</i>	<i>73.6%</i>
Baptist churches	3.8%
Evangelical churches	10.2%
Para-churches/Service Missions	2.1%
Pentecostal churches	5.7%
Other Protestant churches	2.8%
Seventh Day Adventists*	0.15%
Jehovah Witnesses	1.10%
Mormons	0.42%
Islamic Society	0.09%
<i>Sub-total: Other Churches and Religions</i>	<i>26.36%</i>

\*This figure is well below the amount of land needed for the 520, 098 adherents reported in the 2000 census. SDAs sometimes record land with only the name "Adventist" in the title, and thus a search of land with the name "mission" or "church" in the title would miss them.

*Source: The Melanesian Institute Land Database.*

(Adopted from Michael Rynkiewich 2004:1-20)

## Glossary of Indigenous Terms

### 1. Mandak Terms

*ebibenet.* A term that refers to a matrilineal, exogamous clam.

*Ebolout.* Womb

*Emalam.* A moiety, named after a type of sea eagle.

*Erandi wuruk.* Older male members of the community, or big man of the clan.

*Erus.* Breast, breast milk.

*Evenugun.* Shell money.

*ewentus.* A matrilineal, exogamous sub-clan.

*katanbet.* The special site where rain magic is performed.

*malanggan.* It is a sacred ceremony, which belong to a secret society of the same name. The totemic figures are a variety of carved or constructed ritual objects representing birds, pigs, snake and so on. All these are brought out on display the ceremony where the masked figures dance. It is also associated with New Ireland fertility rites.

*mis.* A pan-New Ireland generic term for shell money.

### 2. Tolai Terms

*Apiktarai.* Branch or segment of a descent group.

*Dukduk.* Name given to the male secret society, represented by a totemic mask prominent in maintaining social order in the community.

*Gunan.* Place, village.

*Lualua.* Leader or elder in a group. Some parts of the Gazelle Peninsula use the term to speak of the leader of a clan.

*Lotu.* A Polynesian term brought by the Fijian missionaries to the New Guinea Islands and means: (a) Christianity, (b) church service, (c) to worship.

*Madapai.* A piece of land of particular significance to a clan, often the place first cleared by the founding ancestor of the clan.

*Malira.* Magic, or magical charm (especially love magic).

*Motono.* Part of the beach set aside for fishing activities and taboo to women, the group based upon it. It is the place where the first ancestors of Tolai clans went ashore when they migrated from New Ireland.

*Ngala.* Another word for a leader of the clan, just like the word *lualua*.

*Patuana.* A founding ancestor of the clan or local lineage.

*Pia.* Land as turf and as the dirt.

*Tabu.* Shell money.

*Taraiu.* A secluded place used by the members of secret societies such as the dukduk and the tumbuan. This one example of the sacred places of the Tolai destroyed by the German planters, hence angering the Tolai.

*Vunatarai.* A group of the same matrilineal descent that share a common identity; local lineage, clan.

### 3. Tungak Terms

*Inangun.* Shell money.

*Katam.* A practice of leasing the land to a member of another clan to use until it reverts to the original land owing clan.

*Kiraus i vag.* A practice giving the land to another clan or individual member of a clan as a gratuity gift service rendered.

*Maratibtib.* A novitiate who enters into seclusion as a child to be prepared as a warrior.

*Pasingan.* An overall leader of a community, but usually an elder of a clan

*Patmani.* An exogamous clan or belonging to a same matrilineal descent.

*Rina.* Village, hamlet.

*Seukopos.* Refers to the practice of one paying full price of the land from another for the purpose of transfer of right of ownership.

*Roe.* Land, dirt.

*Tus.* Breast, sub-clan of a common maternal grandmother.

*Vosap.* A fight leader who takes the warriors out to fight in inter-clan skirmishes.

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