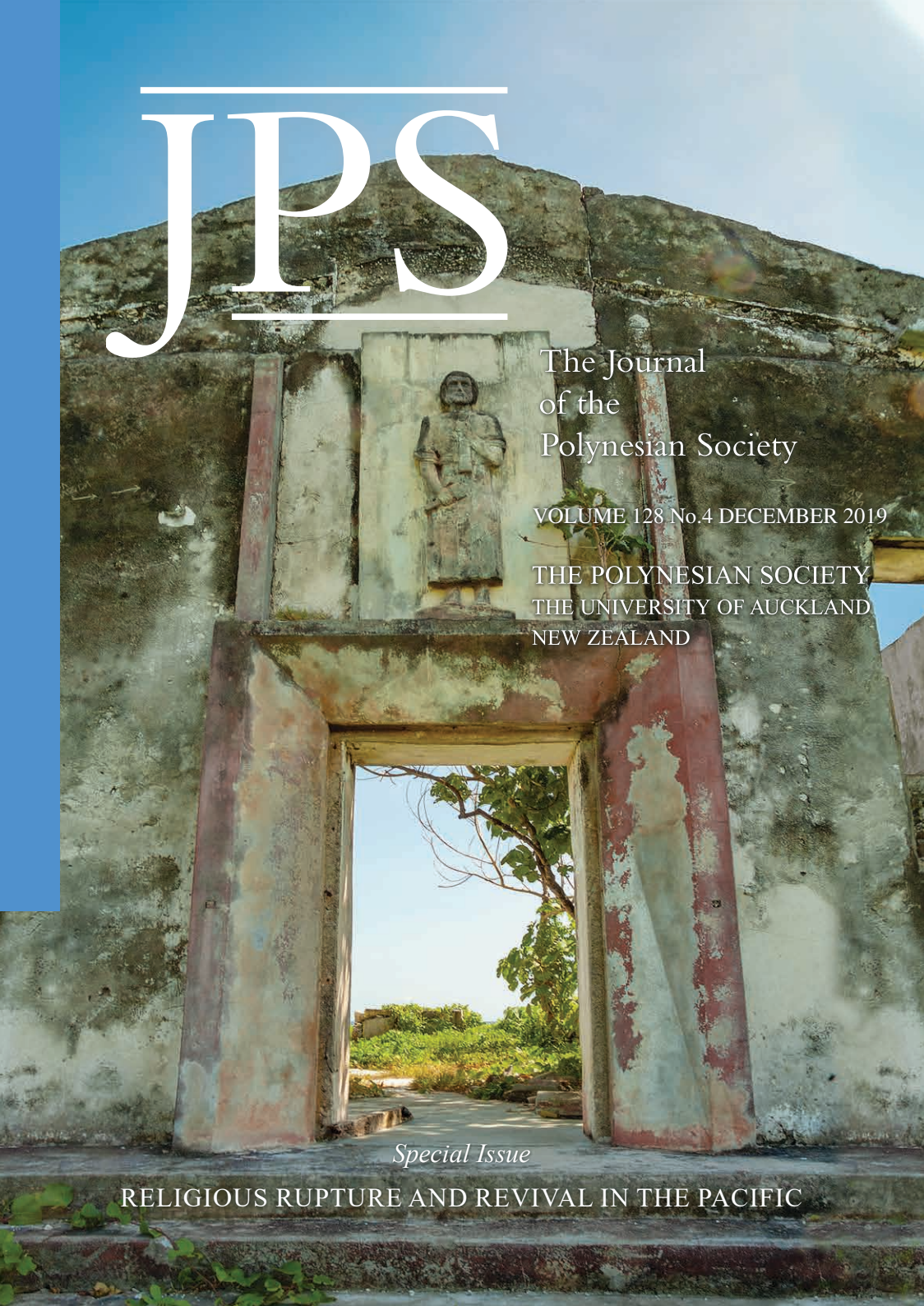

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RELIGIOUS RUPTURE AND REVIVAL IN THE PACIFIC

RESCUING HONIARA, RESCUING GWOU'ULU: NEGOTIATING FRICTIONAL VILLAGE–TOWN RELATIONS AND POLITICO-RELIGIOUS (DIS)UNITY IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

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ABSTRACT: Speaking to debates about the management of difference in and between towns and villages as well as secondary conversions and breakaway movements in Melanesia, this article examines the efforts of an Anglican village church to maintain social cohesion through politico-religious unity in Gwou'ulu, a multi-clan village in North Malaita, Solomon Islands, and its urban enclaves in Honiara. It focuses on an Anglican "rescue mission" that Gwou'ulu sends annually to Honiara to remind their urban relatives about the values, interests and priorities of their ancestral Anglican home. An analysis of this "rescue mission" and the controversies that surround it reveals an ongoing struggle between villagers for the politico-religious future of the village within and beyond its immediate geographic boundaries. Gwou'ulu villagers are increasingly questioning the capacity of the Anglican church and its leaders to provide stability in urban–rural insecurities, and, as a result, have begun breaking away from mainstream Anglicanism in a quest for alternative social and moral orders untainted by their religious leaders' apparent spiritual impurity and even corrupt behaviours. By distancing themselves from Anglicanism as the force that has meant to unify the village since its inception as a Christian refuge in the early twentieth century, Gwou'ulu villagers then not only break away but also apart, exaggerating rural frictions with and alienations from (urban) modernity.

Keywords: Social cohesion, insecurity, secondary conversion, Anglicanism, village–town relations, Solomon Islands

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Gwou'ulu residents started preparing for what many considered one of the most important annual events shortly after my first arrival in the village, a predominantly Anglican settlement of approximately 250 adults and 170 children[1] located at the northern border of the Lau Lagoon in Malaita Province, Solomon Islands. The Anglican men's fellowship, commonly simply referred to as "Mens", was planning to travel to the country's capital, Honiara, in June 2014 to visit kin from Gwou'ulu who had temporarily or even more permanently migrated to town, often to attend school or to more actively participate in the cash economy. Gwou'ulu residents described the primary goal of this trip as one of "missionisation". The dual intention was to remind

urban relatives about Christian village values—about what it means to be a man or a woman *of* Gwou'ulu—and to highlight the particular moral dangers of urban lifestyles away from the safety and moral guidance of the village and, at its centre, the Anglican church.

This article examines this so-called "rescue mission" as exemplary for villagers' struggles to maintain social cohesion among Gwou'ulu villagers, irrespective of their location of residence, through a shared belonging to the Anglican village church. My analysis is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork between February 2014 and February 2015 and a follow-up visit in November 2018, including eight months in Gwou'ulu and five months with Lau speakers in Honiara. It reveals not only insecure village–town relations—many Gwou'ulu villagers are concerned about a moral decay among town-based kin—but also, if not even more so, an Anglican politico-religious unity that seems to be in continuous peril, at least from the perspectives of a vast majority of my interlocutors. I show how villagers experience Gwou'ulu as existing in a perpetual state of insecurity and as increasingly in danger of "breaking apart". This is the case, first, because of its increasing extension to town and, second, because of religious breakaway movements in the village that have grown sceptical of Anglican leaders' capacity to provide the foundations for a peaceful social order in Gwou'ulu. For the majority of villagers, those who (for now) maintain their belonging to the Anglican church, rescuing Gwou'ulu residents in Honiara means, thus, also rescuing Gwou'ulu, through what many of my respondents perceive as a necessary process of ongoing reconversion to the Anglican foundations of the village.

There is a growing literature that engages, in particular, with religious breakaway movements, secondary conversions, indigenous churches and periodic revival movements in Melanesia (e.g., see Barker 2012; Burt 1994; Macdonald 2019; Maggio 2016a, 2016b; Robbins 1998; Scott 2005; Timmer 2015). This research has yielded fascinating insights into how social and political uncertainties are expressed through different denominations and ethno-theologies. However, its theological and ritual emphases has also meant that considerably less attention has been paid to how these processes of conversion—including decisions *not* to convert or to seek reconversion of others—are entangled with the role of religious leaders in everyday (village) governance and what this means for experiences of social cohesion and political (in)stability in both rural and urban environments. By following Rodolfo Maggio in "[emphasising] what [Gwou'ulu villagers] actually do and talk about … rather than their theology as a set of ideas and practices" (2015: 316) or the relationship between different theologies and denominations, this article seeks to rectify this shortcoming and to encourage additional research on the everyday dimensions of politico-religious practices.

To this end, I begin with an outline of the historical positioning of Christianity and especially the Anglican Church in Gwou'ulu governance before discussing Gwou'ulu relationships with Honiara. From there I move to an examination of villagers' motivations for "rescuing" Honiara and describe some of the strategies that they deploy, such as a remapping of Honiara settlements to align with village-based prayer groups. Finally, I shift to a discussion of why the rescue mission was deemed to be a failure, and how this failure is linked to a broader disillusionment with Anglican leadership in the village as well as to broader uncertainties surrounding contemporary village–town relationships. Crucially, while I present debates about past and present experiences with social instabilities in Gwou'ulu and how to respond to them, what all my interlocutors shared in common, and what I observed throughout my fieldwork, is the conviction that the village itself is always threatened with falling apart, necessarily unstable and in need of ongoing, and ideally better, "rescue" efforts.

GWOU'ULU: AN ANGLICAN VILLAGE

Gwou'ulu was founded between 1900 and 1910[2] as an Anglican Christian refuge on the Malaitan mainland, removed from the manmade or artificial islands that the Lau had built for centuries and that would remain, for another 30 to 60 years, a stronghold of the ancestral religion.[3] From the arrival of its first settlers, Gwou'ulu was, thus, designed and intended to be governed by the Anglican Christian principles that its Lau founding fathers had brought back from British labour plantations in Queensland and elsewhere in the Pacific.[4] Unlike ancestral villages, Gwou'ulu never had a men's or women's seclusion area (*maanabeu* and *maanabisi*), the most central sites in the ancestral ritual complex (see Maranda 2010). Instead, the village was, and continues to be, organised around the Anglican church building and the liturgy that defines its ritual cycle. Similarly, instead of separate men's and women's houses, nuclear households immediately defined the village landscape, irrevocably violating gendered ancestral pollution taboos and exposing anyone who may consider returning to "old" ways to the wrath of, and likely death by, their *agalo* 'ancestral spirits'.[5] Without a *maanabeu* and its most sacred site, the ancestral skull pit, and based on Gwou'ulu founding fathers' commitment to offer a place to settle to anyone who wanted to leave ancestral ways behind, Gwou'ulu then also became one of the first multi-clan, denomination- rather than descent-based villages in the region and, as such, has faced the challenge of managing difference among its residents from its inception.

The spatial organisation of Gwou'ulu, the way it reshuffled and agitated gender relations (see Hobbis 2016) and the presence of multiple clans has ever since posed its fair share of challenges to residents alongside, and closely

entangled with, the broader spiritual transformations that conversion to Anglicanism have entailed. While, as David Hilliard suggests, the Anglican Church of Melanesia had from early on aspired to "create a self-governing church—'a native one and not a mere exotic'—that would conserve and not destroy the indigenous social order" (1978: 294), the history of Anglican–ancestral syncretism in Solomon Islands has been anything but smooth. This is as much evidenced in how, in some cases, converts had to physically destroy ancestral shrines as a prerequisite for baptism (White 1991) as in the broader anxieties that have accompanied the demise of the ancestral ritual cycle that did, like elsewhere in Melanesia, "much of the work of setting the moral tone of everyday life" (Robbins 2010: 159). The words of one of Pierre Maranda's Lau respondents forcefully illustrate this anxiety:

> Now my guts ache … those that have kept to our ways of life, they still have guts. We, the Christians, have become nobodies. We must forget our genealogies, and we have instead to learn those of Jesus and David and other people that mean nothing to us … My guts ache. (Maranda 2001: 107)

Much can be, has been, and still needs to be said about the history of these frictional and anxiety-generating encounters and the complex relationship between continuity and change that they entail (e.g., see Maranda 2001; Ryuju 2012). What is most significant to note here is, first, that many Lau, like other Solomon Islanders (see Burt 1994; Scott 2005; Timmer 2015), seek to systematically integrate Christianity and its promise of unity in ancestral descent-based disunity in their cosmological and social orders; and second, that these orders entail an unquestionable belief in both the Christian God and ancestral spirits. Simultaneously, revealing the continued challenges that are entangled with Lau commitments to ancestral–Christian integration and ontological preservation, an everyday, at times violent, uneasiness persists about syncretic efforts that have by no means stabilised but that remain open to renegotiation and reinterpretation.

In the case of Gwou'ulu this uneasiness and its potential for conflict are exemplified in regular exorcisms performed by the village priest.[6] During my fieldwork, the Anglican village priest was sporadically called to perform exorcisms for households that worried about the presence of malicious agalo. On other occasions, however, the priest forcefully entered houses whose residents had not requested an exorcism. The priest and his supporters deemed it crucial to clean all houses of ancestral spirits that they, but not everyone in the village, considered to be "demonic" and a fundamental obstacle to peace and wellbeing. Thus, the priest would force his way into any house in which he, or others, expected to find evidence of communication with agalo irrespective of the maliciousness that was or was not the intent behind this communication.

The priest and his supporters considered their work to be one of persistent but essentially always unfinished missionisation with the goal of ideally strengthening but at least maintaining the dominance of Anglicanism as a spiritual as well as a social and political force in Gwou'ulu. Under the mantra of "never look back, never turn back, never go back", displayed in English on the walls of the priest's office and frequently integrated into his sermons, Anglican church leaders worked to achieve this not only through exorcisms but also through a rigid structuring of village life around church activities and governance. Before this priest arrived in Gwou'ulu in 2010, one to two services per week had been the norm. In 2014, there were daily evening services in addition to the mass on Sunday mornings and two weekly morning services, one for men and one for women. To ensure villagers' overall commitment to Anglican worship, the priest recused himself from organising most of these services. Instead, he delegated this task to the youth and women's and men's fellowships as well as to six newly created prayer groups. These groups would spend much of their free time on relevant preparations as well as other church events. For instance, members of the Anglican Mothers' Union, which includes nearly every married adult woman in Gwou'ulu, volunteered their labour each Tuesday to help with elderly villagers' gardens.

Anglican leaders also worked steadily to decrease the significance of clans as sources of ancestral belonging and political power. They sought to realise this by ensuring that at least one Christian leader would be present whenever major conflicts, which usually occurred along clan lines, needed to be resolved. They also framed all conflict resolution with Christian prayers. Additionally, all major decision-making with regards to village governance was shifted to church committees, or alternatively, to public forums that only took place in the church building and immediately following a church service. This meant that, by 2014, all village bylaws, from women's dress codes to a ban on consuming and producing alcohol, had been made by, or adjusted in consultation with, church leaders and were publicly justified based on Christian principles.

Little of this may come as a surprise; after all, there is a plethora of research on the centrality of Christianity in religious, political and social life in the Pacific (e.g., see Tomlinson and McDougall 2012). However, the centrality of Christian governance in Gwou'ulu lifeworlds warrants restating because of how significant, but also somewhat unexpected, this firm Christian leadership was from the perspective of many of my interlocutors. In their discussions about the past and present life in Gwou'ulu, villagers often emphasised that Christian governance and a communal commitment to Anglicanism and Christian morality was never certain and that it had only recently returned to the village. My respondents described the village before the arrival of

the current village priest in 2010 as having existed in a state of continuous upheaval. I was told that past church leadership had failed to adequately guide villagers in their moral decision-making and to unite them under their shared faith. Before 2010, Gwou'ulu was said to have been "haunted" by widespread and uncontrolled alcohol consumption, frequent extramarital affairs, escalating land disputes, and subsequent, at times violent, conflicts between individuals and clans. The new Anglican priest and his supporters, but even some of his more critical parishioners, such as those who were "victims" of undesired exorcisms, repeatedly assured me that the new priest had "returned" Christian order to Gwou'ulu. His arrival and leadership were said to have provided a necessary anchor for this diverse multi-clan village that had required continued dedicated Anglican missionisation since its foundation at the turn of the twentieth century.

The rescue mission to Honiara is a core component of these reinforcement measures implemented by Gwou'ulu church leaders. They, like other villagers I talked to about this, agreed that Gwou'ulu as a source of Anglican belonging should not and cannot be confined to its immediate lands, but that it necessarily extends to the urban environment of Honiara as the most frequent destination for (temporary) migrants and, as such, as a source of both possible strength or insecurity. In the following, I briefly sketch village–town relations. I pay particular attention to the villagers' concerns about the moral challenges of urbanisation and the potential for fracturing therein.[7]

THE VILLAGE–TOWN CONTINUUM

Gwou'ulu residents move regularly between the village and Honiara. The trip includes a flatbed truck ride to the provincial capital, Auki, which takes around six hours, and an equally long ferry ride between Auki and Honiara. Often the journey takes even longer due to irregular road maintenance and unreliable connections between the two modes of transportation (see Hobbis 2019). Still, these arduous circular rural-urban movements have become routinised as a defining and even desired but ultimately also necessary feature of village life. On the one hand, Gwou'ulu villagers recognise (temporary) migratory movements as valuable in their own right, especially for young men. As Rodolfo Maggio suggests, temporary migration has been "a constitutive characteristic of the Malaitan economy as a whole" (2018: 101), one that precedes the arrival of Europeans at Malaitan shores and, as such, does not necessarily disrupt the lives of the migrants or the villages of which they are a part. Historically and today, migrants often leave the village to access goods and services that are otherwise unavailable and that, in turn, help them to solidify their own sociopolitical positions within the reciprocal relationships that are the cornerstones of kin and village networks (Maggio 2018; Moore 2017).

On the other hand, many of my interlocutors noted that this intrinsic value is increasingly subsumed by a growing dependency on migratory movements, which now involve not only men but also women and all age groups. Gwou'ulu villagers have become so dependent on the continuous flow of people and goods to and from town that it has become rare for all or even most members of a nuclear family to be based in the village at any given time and for them to even attempt to meet even basic food needs solely through self-provisioning gardening, fishing and barter activities. Even efforts aimed at decreasing Gwou'ulu dependency on this remittance economy, mostly by attracting development projects or better educational and health infrastructures to the northern Lau Lagoon, require villagers' regular and often continuous presence in town. Because of a gradually solidified centralisation of most government and significant nongovernmental services in Honiara (see McDougall 2014), the capital has become the only location where negotiations for rural development can and do take place. These negotiations often span over seemingly never-ending periods of time and require almost permanent residency in town, at least for those clan and village leaders who lay claim to Gwou'ulu lands. Many of my interlocutors, thus, conceived of regular trips to, and prolonged stays in, town as increasingly unavoidable for the wellbeing of the village as a whole, be it because of the remittances that are generated or the services that these (temporary) migrants may provide, now or in the future—e.g., a university student may one day become a bureaucrat and help Gwou'ulu attract desired development funds.

Prolonged absence from rural environments is not, and has never been, without its moral quarrels and is a potential source of social fracturing. Historically, the foundation of Gwou'ulu and other Christian villages like it are indicative of this uncertainty. After all, the very existence of these villages represents an at times violent process of politico-religious upheaval that swept across Malaita as a result of temporary migrants' conversion to Christianity on labour plantations and their commitment to Christian missionisation upon their return (see Burt 1994; Moore 2017). The memory and continuity of these social, political and religious tensions are now also evident in Gwou'ulu villagers' concerns about the consequences of (temporary) movements to town in 2014. Those who are primarily based in Gwou'ulu fear that their urban relatives, removed from the moral guidance provided by the Anglican village church (rather than any other Anglican church), will forget or even actively reject village values, interests and needs as an ideal and primary motivating force for any stay in town.

Echoing broader research on urban–village relations in Melanesia (Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017), many Gwou'ulu villagers described urban lifestyles as seductive, immoral and in essence "the opposite of 'home' (*hom*)" (Berg 2000: 6–7), threatening villagers of losing their "true identity"

(Gegeo 1998: 293). The urban melting pot is felt to encourage the emergence of new, "modern" sources of belonging beyond village-, kin- and language groups and to provide opportunities for behaviours that fall outside the moral norms of village environments (see Gooberman-Hill 1999; Jourdan 1995; Maggio 2018). Urban spaces allow for excessive consumption of alcohol and gambling, for dancing outside of community-sanctioned, usually religious events, and more broadly for more flexible socialisation based on individual interests and desires. Many villagers are also worried that the urban encourages lazy lifestyles. Young villagers especially head to town as so-called *Masta Liu* ("Masters of Walking"), moving seemingly aimlessly through town and between the households of their more regularly employed urban relatives.

More frequently, however, Gwou'ulu villagers express worries about the effects of urbanisation on the educated and politically more powerful residents of Gwou'ulu in Honiara—bureaucrats, (small) business owners and clan leaders. Because of their long-term stays in town their village-based relatives fear that they get too used to these urban, often immoral freedoms and luxuries while being especially susceptible to building new social networks. Many of these more powerful villagers raise their families solely in town. They tend to reduce their visits home and are suspected of increasingly seeking ways to avoid contributing to reciprocal exchange relationships with extended kin and the village community at large.[8] Rural residents further note that these urbanites struggle to instil in their children an understanding of life in the village and of their ancestral lands as the basis for belonging and social identity. This worry is especially pronounced when urban children fail to learn their vernacular language (see Jourdan 2008).

Crucially, in some cases, this alienation has culminated in religious conversations. Within "the complex and varied religious landscape of the capital city" (Maggio 2015: 317), urban residents leave behind their spiritual Anglican roots and, according to Gwou'ulu villagers' critiques, too frequently align their denominational belonging with that of their dominant urban networks. Reasons for conversions are likely more complex than this proposed realignment of allegiances (e.g., see Maggio 2015, 2016a, 2016b; McDougall 2009). Still, Gwou'ulu villagers' worries that such conversion entails a turning away from village- to town-based identities highlight their suspicion towards urbanisation as an immoral process that threatens Gwou'ulu cohesion. Villagers' concerns may also not be that unwarranted. As Maggio (2016b) argues, some, especially men, convert from mainstream churches to Pentecostalism specifically as a way to overcome seductive urban lifestyles; and as John Barker points out: "Many of the new churches make considerable demands on their members, including tithing and the assumption of various

prohibitions that collectively serve to diminish their connections to members to their natal communities while tightening their identity on their church" (2012: 78). In other words, urban residents, embroiled by the immoralities of town, may be—and are, based on my interlocutors' fears—perpetually pulled away from their village homes, from what it means to be a man/woman *from* Gwou'ulu.[9]

For Gwou'ulu villagers this causes a series of seemingly escalating challenges. Many of my (still) Anglican interlocutors, again irrespective of their respective stances towards Anglican village leaders' everyday interventions in their lives, see a firmer "unification" under the banner of the Anglican village church as the only way to maintain the precarious moral and social order that has been part and parcel of this multi-clan village since its beginning and that seems to be increasingly stretched to its breaking point through geographic extensions to town. This is where the rescue mission comes into play. When I first arrived in Gwou'ulu everyone I talked to described it enthusiastically, filled with hope that the mission would be able to restrengthen Gwou'ulu cohesion alongside a village–town continuum that most contended should be based on, and unquestionably dominated by, rural *Gwou'ulu* Anglican values and interests.

RESCUING HONIARA, RESCUING GWOU'ULU

The rescue mission takes place at least once, and ideally twice, a year. The primary annual mission is led by the Anglican men's fellowship—every married, divorced or widowed Anglican man of Gwou'ulu is automatically included—and headed by the village priest. Church leaders expect all members of the Mens who are of good health and based in Gwou'ulu at the time of the mission to participate in the one-week return trip to Honiara. The second mission, cancelled during my fieldwork in 2014 due to a lack of funds and a scheduling overlap with the national election, takes place under the purview of the Anglican Mothers' Union. Both rescue missions, and their extensive costs, especially travel fees for all participants, are financed by combining weekly church offerings, additional individual donations and at least one fundraiser such as a bake sale.

Organisers and supporters of the mission see its primary goal as affirming village values and needs among Gwou'ulu urbanites. The mission is expected to emphasise, first, village unity beyond the geographic confines of the village and, second, the positioning of the Anglican village church as the cornerstone for this urban–rural solidarity. Simultaneously, the mission is designed to de-emphasise any possible differences and frictions as they may exist between the clans, families or individuals who are participating in the event. At a most basic level, organisers seek to achieve this by requiring

all participants to acquire travel and event uniforms that are to be worn throughout the mission (Fig. 1). In the village priest's words: "We are one community with one mission in one uniform." The travel uniform consists of a pair of blue jeans shorts and a dark green T-shirt, while the event uniform includes a pair of black shorts and a white dress shirt. Both shirts receive a custom-made print applied by the village priest's wife. Participants have to procure the uniforms themselves, usually by leveraging their remittance networks in town. Those who fail to do so are deemed to have shown a lack of commitment to the mission and the future of the village. They are subsequently barred from the mission as well as publicly shunned for not participating in it.

Mission organisers further aspire for uniformity through the structural design of the mission. Everyone who travels with the mission to Honiara has to return to Gwou'ulu with it. In other words, the mission is not to be misused for a "free" church- and community-sponsored trip to town, irrespective of the reasons individual participants may have for staying behind. During the trip, participants are also not allowed to stay with their town-based relatives as is common during other visits to Honiara. Instead, leaders of the Mens coordinated, in 2014, the construction of a temporary shelter for all members

Figure 1. Welcoming Gwou'ulu Mens, who are wearing their green travel uniforms, after their mission to Honiara. Author's photograph, 2014.

of the mission in Burns Creek, a settlement on Honiara's western border and home to several families from Gwou'ulu living in and around the capital. A leader of the Mens travelled ahead to ensure the shelter would be completed in time and to collect funds, materials and volunteers for its construction among current urbanites. Yet, in the spirit of unity, he also returned to Gwou'ulu just in time join the mission for the full circle. Just like the men were to wear the same clothing, the village priest explained to me that they were to move to and through town as one, to sleep as one, to eat as one and to pray as one in a newly affirmed communion with their urban relatives.

Once in Honiara, organisers aspire to reach out to as many Gwou'ulu urban residents as possible. For this purpose, the Anglican church committee has remapped Honiara to evenly distribute Gwou'ulu residents into six groups following a similar six-fold remapping of Gwou'ulu itself that purposefully disregards and cuts across clan lines in settlement patterns. In both contexts, remapping and regrouping is envisioned to increase religious and social connections between Gwou'ulu residents beyond "centralised" meetings during Anglican church services in the village or in town (here muddled in joint worship with Anglican Christians from across Solomon Islands and often significantly reduced overall church attendance). Village-based church leaders then encourage these groups to organise their own, ideally weekly, prayer meetings and occasional fundraisers, jointly prepare dances or food for village-centric events in Honiara or Gwou'ulu, and so on. Simultaneously, Gwou'ulu church leaders seek to exclude anyone who is not immediately linked to Gwou'ulu through close kin networks from these activities. The aim is to prevent the groups from "thinning out" and from becoming part of the broader mix of alternative forms of Christian belonging in town.

The rescue mission acknowledges and reaffirms the significance of these groups by spending one day with each of them, co-organising discussion groups, prayer sessions and joint meals. The rescue mission also distributes gifts among these groups, in particular, *hom kaikai* 'home foods' such as *gara* 'cassava pudding' and *koa* 'mangrove fruits with clams'. Hom kaikai serves as a type of "reverse remittance" (Marsters *et al.* 2006) that emphasises the circular rather than a unidirectional flow of goods between the village and town (see also Maggio 2018). In addition, eating together and reminding urban residents of the tastes of hom kaikai, food grown in Gwou'ulu ancestral lands, literally allows for "incorporating"—from the Latin "in" and "corpus" (body)—all activities of the rescue mission in the history of Gwou'ulu and the lives of Gwou'ulu ancestors who have worked its lands (Hobbis 2017). Similarly, the act of praying together anchors joint activities not only in a shared reminder of Gwou'ulu Anglican heritage but also in a promise, made in the eyes of God, to live their lives based on Anglican Christian principles and the unquestioned centrality therein of the family in and of Gwou'ulu.

Discussion groups, in turn, are designed as opportunities for urban and rural residents to communally identify ways to address moral concerns. The discussions are tailored to focus on the seductive and immoral nature of urban lifestyles, as defined from an Anglican village perspective as a continuous quest for individual monetary enrichment fuelled by easy access to alcoholic excess and sexually promiscuous behaviour.

On the seventh and last day of the rescue mission, all groups come together for the Eucharist, cementing their union with each other in the highest Anglican ritual. Urbanites present their gifts to Gwou'ulu, specifically for the nuclear families of those men who joined the mission and who demonstrated their commitment to Gwou'ulu even though it meant neglecting their responsibilities as food providers at *hom*. In a continued emphasis on unity all participants receive the same gift, a 20 kg bag of rice. This rice is purchased with funds raised by Gwou'ulu urbanites and represents gifts from the urban village to the rural village rather than the usually individualised remittances within immediate kin and clan groups. Finally, once *hom,* Gwou'ulu missionaries to town are welcomed with a day of celebrations. This includes dances prepared by those who remained behind and a small feast in recognition of the significance that villagers attribute to this strengthening of village–town relations in favour of Gwou'ulu rather than Honiara ways of being.

A FAILED MISSION

While much of what I described earlier occurred in 2014, it is also an idealised portrayal, what should happen for the mission to be successful, recounted to me by the village priest and other church leaders who hoped to maintain the positive image of the mission. Other villagers' discussions were much more critical of the achievements of the mission, in particular of its legacies in Gwou'ulu itself. A couple of weeks before the Mens' departure to Honiara a longstanding conflict between two factions, divided along clan lines, resurfaced and openly challenged village unity and its proposed public display during the rescue mission.[10] The village priest immediately asserted that his and the church committee's Christian faith will ensure objectivity and a commitment to peace and unity in the village, and that, therefore, they should be in charge of conflict resolution. However, confidence in this objectivity was quickly scattered. A prominent member of the committee was directly involved in, and blamed by some for, the conflict, and several villagers considered the church committee's suggestions biased in favour of their prominent member's clan.

Panic started taking hold in Gwou'ulu, because of the conflict itself and how it was felt to threaten the rescue mission and with it one of the village's primary tools for strengthening village unity across the distance. In

hopes of saving the situation, representatives from both parties and church leaders eventually agreed to reach out to David (a pseudonym). David was well respected for his capacity as "peacemaker", for finding solutions to conflicts that all parties could accept as morally just and fair in terms of the compensation payments suggested. David's standing in the village was, however, also controversial. Though baptised and occasionally attending Anglican church services, David, in as far as still possible, oriented his life and decision-making alongside the prescriptions of the ancestral religion. Years ago when he took a second wife—an acceptable practice for influential men in ancestral times but now deemed to be an immoral, essentially sinful behaviour—the Anglican village community banished him and his new spouse from the village core to its outermost borders. As a result, even though many villagers express deep respect for David's capacity as a peacemaker, they are wary whenever they need to rely on his mediation skills. After all, so I was told repeatedly, the continued significance of David in village affairs laid bare the limitations of Anglican Christian leadership and morality in the village, while in turn suggesting that, perhaps, the abandoned ancestral ways might have been superior in maintaining a stable social order after all.

This tension between Anglican and (nostalgic memories of) ancestral ways was accentuated further, and eventually undermined the foundations for an effective rescue mission, when David's intervention was successful even though he, like the initial Anglican negotiators, belonged to one of the clans most directly involved in the conflict. When compensation was paid a few days before the Mens' departure, villagers' relief had already been dampened by the repeated inability of church leaders to bring peace to Gwou'ulu at those moments that it mattered the most. Disappointed, several Gwou'ulu men withdrew themselves from the mission. One disgruntled participant emphatically explained to me that "our community is not a true community. We are liars when we present ourselves as one … not everyone here truly follows Christian principles; our leaders say one thing but do another".

The mission organisers quickly chastised those who had withdrawn their support as further destabilising Gwou'ulu and endangering their influences on urbanites. However, I did not notice any public outcry. Instead, in our conversations many rejected their leaders' sentiments, noting that critiques of the rescue mission were valid and that, given the situation, any member of the Mens was within their right not to join the event. When the church committee, thus, decided to go ahead with the mission without, it seemed to some, reflecting on what had just gone wrong, the rescue mission lost much of its proclaimed legitimacy before it even started. Instead for many of my respondents, it revealed continued inadequacies in Anglican leaders' capacity to hold the village together, across the village–town continuum but significantly also within the village itself.

The mission did not end better than it started. Upon the Mens return, organisers wholeheartedly proclaimed the overwhelming success of the mission. They highlighted that many of their urban relatives had participated in the events and that discussions had revealed shared concerns about urban lifestyles. They had also agreed about the dangers that "lost identities" pose to their ancestral home in Gwou'ulu and the survival of moral ways of being in a quickly modernising Solomon Islands. However, organisers ignored a crucial factor in their reports. Unity had not been maintained when concluding the trip. Several participants had used the trip to Honiara as a free ride to town and did not return to the village after the mission's conclusion. Most significantly, one of these men was a powerful member of the church committee who had been especially vocal in his critique of the men who had excused themselves from the mission after the conflict. This man's failure to come back with everyone else was quickly identified by critics of the Anglican church as another indicator for how their proclaimed Anglican leaders fail at providing the moral example and leadership that the village is felt to require to maintain its inherently unstable social cohesion.

After the mission, church attendance dropped for several weeks and regular clan meetings were reinstituted to discuss both important clan and village affairs, including those related to conflict resolution. Church leaders immediately worked to regain villagers' trust and commitment to Anglican leadership. However, the failure of the rescue mission, given its wide-reaching potential consequences as the currently primary tool for communally influencing village–town relations, had opened old and new wounds. It laid bare the continuing, and according to some, intensifying, failures of Anglicanism as a source of stability, wellbeing and social cohesion in Gwou'ulu and across the village–town continuum.

RELIGIOUS UNCERTAINTIES AND FRACTURING

In villagers' discussion of the events surrounding the failed mission, they quickly pinpointed similarly contentious decisions by the village priest and his supporters that illustrate this broader crisis of confidence in the Anglican church despite the seemingly solidified Anglican leadership in Gwou'ulu since 2010. The most prominent example of this is the village priest's effort to establish a "prayer mountain". Villagers' and the priest's explanations of the envisioned prayer mountain echo Joel Robbins's (1998: 310–12) descriptions of "spirit discos" among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. The prayer mountain would, similar to spirit discos, be based on "group possession dances" during which "male and female dancers [jump] up and down … to the rhythm of Christian songs" and eventually "shake and flail violently, careening around the dance floor without regard for others or for the … pattern of the dancing" (p. 311). Events on the prayer mountain

would also be exceptional in their length—lasting for at least six hours and overnight—and in how they would allow for villagers' spiritual renewal in individual connections and communications with the Christian God through temporary "possession" by the Holy Spirit.

While many of my interlocutors were enthusiastic about the prospects of this prayer mountain, several others rejected it because its liturgical style moved too far beyond Anglican formal ritual culture. These villagers noted that if they were truly Anglican they needed to seek knowledge among those who had been ordained by the Church of Melanesia rather than through an individual relationship with God (see also Maggio 2016a: 68–73). From this perspective, the prayer mountain would offer not a "true" but a "sinful" interpretation of the Christian God's will and potentially attract his punishment. Additionally, several villagers were concerned that the prayer mountain would bring about the wrath of their ancestors. In his quest to further weaken the presence of ancestral spirits, the village priest and his supporters had chosen a site for the prayer mountain that belonged to an abandoned *maanabeu* at the outskirts of Gwou'ulu land (an approximately 40-minute walk from the village). Another Christian priest had cleansed this maanabeu through an exorcism, which allowed everyone, including women, to visit the site without having to worry about immediate retribution from ancestral spirits. However, transforming the maanabeu into a dedicated site of Christian worship was a different story, and many feared retributions from their ancestors—and justly so, several added.

Some villagers publicly expressed concerns about their priest's capacity to fend off ancestral spirits should they attack at this formerly sacred space. These villagers noted that the priest, along with other Anglican leaders in the village, had violated the Christian God's prescriptions too often to ensure his protection. Evidence for this was found in how the priest experienced a series of personal tragedies around the time he restrengthened his efforts to establish the prayer mountain after the failed rescue mission: his oldest daughter was admitted to the National Referral Hospital, his wife's father died, and his grandchild passed away shortly thereafter. Gwou'ulu villagers described this to me, and discussed this amongst each other, as a further sign for the priest's spiritual and moral failures, in the eyes of God and/or their ancestors (no one knew for sure which one).

The prayer mountain and the rescue mission are prominent examples, but by no means the only ones, for when and how Gwou'ulu villagers publicly and in our more private conversations questioned the capacity of the Anglican church to provide the guidance that was necessary to manage difference within Gwou'ulu and its extensions to town. Following David's example, many contemplated and some chose to return (partially) to ancestral ways. These villagers, and others like them that I met elsewhere in North Malaita, describe

themselves as "neutrals",[11] men and women who do not identify as belonging to any Christian denomination and who seek to follow ancestral prescriptions in as far as possible within the confines of their respective Christian villages. Others become "backsliders":[12] they occasionally attend church services, but they withdraw themselves from any active participation in church events and express sympathies towards the ancestral religion. Again others consider alternative Christian denominations. During my fieldwork, despite most Gwou'ulu villagers' insistence that they are an unquestionably "Anglican village", eight families resident *in* Gwou'ulu had converted to other Christian denominations. Two families had joined a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation with a church building about two kilometres outside of Gwou'ulu. Six families had become members of the Pentecostal Kingdom Harvest Church under the leadership of a Gwou'ulu-based priest. These villagers had, using their priest's influence and the broader sense of discontent with the Anglican church, successfully negotiated for a plot of land at the immediate outskirts of Gwou'ulu to construct their own church building.

The presence of such so-called "secondary converts" or "breakaway movements" in Gwou'ulu is not unexpected. Rather it follows similar trends and motivations across Melanesia (e.g., see Barker 2012; Burt 1994; Eriksen 2009; Maggio 2015, 2016a, 2016b; McDougall 2009), often linked to frustrations and disillusionment with the status quo that mainstream Christianity represents. As Maggio points out in his examination of Anglican conversion to Pentecostal churches in Honiara: "[Mainstream] 'religion', in their [secondary converts'] eyes, misleads the believer to the extent that religious institutions … aim at their own perpetuation rather than the establishment of the Kingdom of God" (Maggio 2015: 320; see also Eriksen 2009; Maggio 2016a). My observations in Gwou'ulu echo this sentiment. Those who are seeking to distance themselves from their Anglican roots question the commitment and capacity of their religious leaders to effectively address the challenges that they face, in this case, in particular, pertaining to the insecurities that accompany the need to manage difference within Gwou'ulu and alongside the village–town continuum. Crucially, as they question this capacity and shift their religious belonging, they both illustrate and exaggerate Gwou'ulu's ongoing struggles with diversity.

In response to this exaggeration through secondary conversions, the Anglican village priest works continuously to reintegrate these "broken away" individuals and families in Anglican activities. During my fieldwork, he was particularly concerned about further conversions to the Kingdom Harvest Church and promoted charismatic worship within the Anglican church such as the prayer mountain as a result. Perhaps most effectively, the priest co-organised weekly charismatic services with Gwou'ulu Pentecostal families *in* the Anglican church building. He described his goals to me as twofold.

First, he wants to show how Anglicanism continues its role as *the* unifying force in the village. Second, he aims to demonstrate the ever expansive syncretic capacities of Anglicanism wherein Anglican worship can entail the Pentecostal "personalized relationship with God" (Maggio 2015: 316) as well as conventional Anglican hymns, liturgy and rituals, thus in essence seeking to create a reformed Gwou'ulu Anglicanism that can account for *both* the priestly and personal connections in Christian worship that used to be a defining feature of the ancestral religion (see Maranda 2010).

Many of my interlocutors welcome these efforts as a way to maintain religious cohesion as a, so perceived, prerequisite for effectively managing the differences in the multi-clan village. However, my conversations with Gwou'ulu villagers further revealed that several worried that it may be increasingly too late to rescue Gwou'ulu, that Anglicanism and with it the unifying founding principle of Gwou'ulu will continue to crumble, despite, but also because of the failures of, efforts such as the rescue mission. Martha, a middle-aged woman who had spent extensive time in Gwou'ulu and Honiara, expressed most clearly what echoed throughout many of the conversations I had with villagers about the mission, secondary conversions and social cohesion in Gwou'ulu more broadly: "Gwou'ulu is like town now—everyone prays for themselves." In other words, Gwou'ulu appears to at least some of my interlocutors to be just as doomed as Honiara, too diverse to be managed effectively and peacefully, multi-clan since its inception but now also multi-denominational, a fractured religious space bereft of any clear and essentially trustworthy spiritual guidance that may be able to unify those who call Gwou'ulu *hom*, in the village or in town.

* * *

The controversies surrounding the Gwou'ulu rescue mission to Honiara raise important questions about Melanesian experiences with politico-religious diversity and the management of difference both in and between rural and urban environments. On the one hand, the mission signifies the importance that Gwou'ulu villagers attribute to a unified politico-religious order as foundational to social cohesion within the village and its extensions to town. The mission also represents villagers' commitment to, and ingenuity in, identifying ways to counter the negative effects of urban dependencies on rural environments. On the other hand, the failure of the mission, despite widespread support and no clear opposition to it among Gwou'ulu residents, reveals forcefully the struggles that villagers face when managing difference both at *hom* and in town; and it shows how these struggles are entangled with the politico-religious uncertainties that have accompanied processes of religious conversion since Christianity first arrived on Malaitan shores.

My research then raises crucial questions for ongoing debates about Melanesian breakaway movements. Much attention has been paid to individuals' and groups' ethno-theological motivations for leaving beyond mainstream Christianity (see Macdonald 2019; Maggio 2015, 2016a; Scott 2005; Timmer 2015). In addition, often the same research has emphasised the theocratic efforts of breakaway movements to "'[take] back the nation' in ways that seem to owe much to the Christian politics of North America" (Tomlinson and McDougall 2012: 9; see also Eriksen 2009; Maggio 2015, 2016a; Timmer 2015). However, far less is known about how secondary (and further) conversions are tied to the management of difference and social cohesion on a village level, potentially without any explicit or primary national or even global aspirations. Future studies should also pay closer attention to the social and political implications of shifts between different denominations and their theological emphases in rural environments. This particular article did not explicitly engage with Gwou'ulu ethno-theologies, instead emphasising the religious dimensions of everyday village governance. Still, it indicated tensions between priestly and individualised relationships with spiritual forces and herein raises questions about how these tensions may be symptoms of, but also contributing to, villagers' overarching sense of insecurity and lack of a strong unified social order that Gwou'ulu villagers (nostalgically) described as characteristic of ancestral settlements.

Simultaneously, Gwou'ulu experiences challenge contemporary engagements with the nature of village–town relations in Solomon Islands and Melanesia more broadly (e.g., Berg 2000; Gegeo 1998; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017; Maggio 2018; McDougall 2017; Strathern 1975). Much of this debate has engaged with diversity or the management of difference as first and foremost an urban concern. In so doing, it has often at least implied that it is this very diversity that distinguishes towns from villages, and possibly even that diversity is not a significant topic of investigation in rural environments. This is not surprising. After all, these observations are largely based on the emphasis that Melanesians themselves place on the rural–urban differences, in particular as they pertain to the morality of urban lifestyles and how they transform and essentially weaken kinship ties. As I have shown, Gwou'ulu villagers are no different in their descriptions of town. However, these descriptions are very much situated in a context wherein also the rural *hom* is experienced as a perpetually fractured space and wherein it is this very rural diversity that drives and deepens Gwou'ulu villagers' worries about the immoralities and dividing forces of town. This, in turn, suggests a need to rethink debates about Melanesian urbanities and ruralities. It calls for a more in-depth engagement with everyday

experiences with, and governance of, diversity as a rural phenomenon and as one that is, simultaneously, fundamentally entwined with histories of, at times multiple and in some ways perpetually ongoing, religious conversions.

NOTES

1. Gwou'ulu experiences high fluctuations in numbers of residents, especially due to (temporary) migrations to town.
2. Gwou'ulu land disputes are closely entangled with the founding year. The broad timeline (1900–1910) reflects the uncertainties and competing narratives involved in these disputes about who should be deemed the founding father/clan of the village.
3. See Ryuju (2012) for a discussion about the contemporary "unsettling" presence of these artificial islands in the Lau Lagoon as material evidence for the ancestral past and its, at times, frictional relationship with the Christian present.
4. For a detailed discussion of Malaitan participation in the labour trade, its links to Christianisation, and the broader history of Malaita see Moore (2017).
5. See Köngäs Maranda (1974) for a discussion of gendered relations and taboos in ancestral villages.
6. The village priest is a Lau speaker from an Anglican village in the southern Lau Lagoon.
7. My analysis focuses on the perspectives of Gwou'ulu villagers primarily resident in Gwou'ulu, rather than Honiara, at the time of and surrounding the "rescue mission". This said, I also talked to Gwou'ulu villagers based in Honiara about the mission and about attitudes towards Honiara and urban lifestyles more broadly. Their attitudes echo Marilyn Strathern's (1975) classic study of migrants in Port Moresby. While many of my urban respondents freely admitted to enjoying urban lifestyles, they agreed with villagers' assessment of their immorality and its potentially negative consequences for Gwou'ulu itself and appreciated their support in counterbalancing the "immoral" influences of town and, thus, in maintaining their *hom* 'home' identities.
8. See Geoffrey Hobbis (2017) for a discussion of some of the strategies that urbanites employ to avoid giving.
9. For a more detailed discussion of the complexity of this disconnection between villages and town from the perspectives of urban migrants, see McDougall (2017).
10. I follow villagers' requests not to discuss the particularities of the conflict in writing, acknowledging that the immediate cause for the dispute has been reconciled and compensation has been paid. Instead and sufficient for the purpose of this article, I limit my descriptions to the way in which the conflict was resolved and how this process weakened both parties' (and other villagers') trust in Anglican leaders' commitment to unity, before and above the immediate survival of Anglicanism as the dominant Christian denomination in Gwou'ulu.
11. The English term was commonly used.
12. The English term was commonly used.

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