[p. 136]

Abstract

Contemporary anthropological debates over the political implications of the global explosion of Evangelical and Pentecostal forms of Christianity frequently center on a 'break with the past' and reliance on the working of divine power. In this article, we intervene in this debate by exploring people's wonder about new global geography and historicity and the ways in which this wonder is opening up a space for local state building by an Evangelical/Pentecostal movement on the island of Malaita, Solomon Islands. We present and discuss the origins of a particular theocratic impulse of this movement to show how the movement's theology evokes and supports the institution of a form of governance. This challenges the widespread observation that Evangelical/Pentecostal believers are politically quiet.

Introduction

We know [we are a lost tribe of Israel] because we [To'abaita speakers] know where we come from, and our genealogy was there, and we have the remains of what people took from there and came here with. We have some special – what the first people brought from Israel – we still hold it ... I've been to one of those secret places and I saw the inscriptions on the stone are still there ... That place is very strict ... [A] secret place. You can never go there, only once when I went with brother Michael Maeliau, I went there. So we have a tabernacle system there, you come in the Outer Court, Inner Court, Holy of Holies. The three levels were there ... [W]hen you come to the Inner Court you can see the laver, then you see the altar, you can climb three steps, then you offer sacrifice. Just at the bottom by the side of that step was a stone standing under there, they inscribed the writings, the writings of Jews. So I went there ... and I saw it very clearly. That is when the first people came, and they settled there, somewhere in Baelelea [language group, neighboring To'abaita], where Michael is at this time. And we landed there and we came and people are now in this place. That's where we come from. I shared that theory to my [Australian] friend and he's never left Michael Maeliau [p. 137] to this day. Israel is our identity but we did not keep their Judaism ... There is somebody who God showed that place to. Even before, people were very scared of coming to that area because even birds that fly over that place die. (Festus Faenile, personal communication, Malu'u, December 2014)

What is to be made of the simultaneous expression of awe, fear, and power – in a word, the wonder – in widespread stories of this kind in North Malaita? To us this invites an investigation of particular global geographies and historicities among To'abaita speakers. We will do this by exploring how a North Malaitan prophet, inspired by the voyage of Pedro Fernández de Quirós' 1606 expedition to La Austrialia del Espíritu Santo, produces a historicity that firmly locates Malaitans as a people chosen by God to play a leading role in the fulfillment of His plan. This historicity traces a clear continuity between Malaitan *kastom* ('original and true tradition') the Mosaic constitution and the present practices of this Evangelical/ Pentecostal movement which includes building a sovereign form of governance at the level of local communities and beyond. In this paper, we shall investigate the conditions of the possibility of a sovereignty informed by an Evangelical/ Pentecostal ethno-theology.

The prophet is Michael Maeliau, the founder and leader of the All Peoples' Prayer Assembly (APPA), a regional and worldwide movement active since the early 1980s. APPA is a breakaway organization from the South Sea Evangelical Church, which since the early 2000s increasingly came to see Maeliau, once one of its leading pastors, as a heretic. Maeliau, conversely, thinks that the mother church is not sufficiently open to prophetic revelations and instead is too reliant on 'white' exegesis of the bible. APPA is now an independent church with its own clergy and distinctive doctrine. It has a growing membership in Solomon Islands while at the same time enjoying active engagement with a flourishing international network of prayer movements. The role of Malaitans in the final Restoration is rooted firmly in the belief that Malaitans are a people covenanted to establish a theocracy in which God rules as Sovereign. The chosenness of Malaitans is thought to be a natural state, an integral part of the authentic Malaitan self, which embodies the full legacy of age-old ancestral *kastom*.

That this Evangelical/Pentecostal movement is forging a political sovereignty invites us to intervene in contemporary theoretical debates about the political implications of a global explosion in the popularity of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianities. We shall show that the theocratic impulse of the movement led by this prophet is not obstructed by a widely observed ‘complete break with the past’ or a reliance on the working of divine power in the ‘messianic now’ which some scholars have argued pushes such movements toward political stagnation. In doing so we particularly focus on the influential theoretical arguments along these lines advanced by Ruth Marshall (2009, 2010). Joel Robbins (2011, 144), amongst others, sees that the work of Marshall joins an already large body of scholarship on Pentecostalism that expresses disappointment over the potential of Pentecostal theology to institute stable forms of sovereignty. In a discussion [p. 138] on the social productivity of rituals, Robbins finds that Pentecostalism is in fact capable of shaping a wide variety of new socialities and that this is reflected in research findings:

For some, the churches are progressive, a force for democratization that in many cases cannot yet express itself in political situations that are not ready to go in the directions they point. For others, they are cradles of authoritarian attitudes and precursors to, or active promoters of, totalitarian tendencies. For yet others, they are simply new opiates of the masses, leading people to an otherworldly quietism and taking them out of battles that, if they knew what was good for them, they should be fighting. These kinds of claims tend to be made in the subjunctive mood: they are most often forecasts rather than analyses based on concrete cases. (2010, 63)

In this article, we contribute to the discussion with a concrete case on the social formation of Evangelicalism/Pentecostalism by looking at what wonder evokes amid a community in North Malaita that is involved in APPA. We focus on a new historicity for people on Malaita that flows into a cartography in which Malaita is fundamentally connected to Israel, and Malaitans are accorded a biblically privileged status in relation to the hastening of the coming of the eschaton in messianic time. We show that the wonder evoked by this historical geography is best thought of not as indicating or creating a conversional rupture but rather as wonder at the re-realization of the Israelite identity of Malaitans, as an instance of the ‘wonder of coincidence’, which purports to uncover an unlikely, hidden, amazing, and ontologically transformative relation between two seemingly distant and unrelated lands and peoples. APPA’s project of discovering Israelite identity is about wondering about and finding connections between these two entities. The coincidences discovered or invented through mapping and historicity amaze people as the revelation of relatedness and identity. In that sense, the wonder we are looking at fits Michael W. Scott’s definition of wonder as

an index and a mode of challenge to existing ontological premises. Wherever there is wonder, there has been a destabilization, whether fleeting or prolonged, of specific assumptions about the nature of being or becoming. But wonder is not only a spontaneous response to such destabilization; it is also a mood that can be created and sustained as a way of contesting received ontological limits and reconfiguring ontological possibilities. (2016, 3)

While national and European versions of the modern history of Solomon Islands tend to commence with the attempt by Alvaro Mendaña to locate King Solomon’s Ophir (1 Kings 9: 26–28) in 1568, the North Malaitan prophet holds Fernández de Quirós’ 1606 voyage as evidence that Solomon Islanders have always been in a covenant with God. Maeliau uses the historical space of European discovery to forge sovereignty in North Malaita for building a state from which people can conquer the region and further battle spiritually for a road back to Jerusalem.

This spirit of crusading reconquista looks similar to the ways in which European settlers in Latin America struggled with satanic forces. As an extension of theology conventional in the Iberian Peninsula at the time (Luque and Mondragón 2005) these Europeans were concerned about the extent to which Satan had taken hold [p. 139] of the people in these colonies and this gave rise to a variety of ideas and actions around ‘exorcism’ (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006). In the case of Solomon Islands, the exorcism entails intertwined processes of the purification of the life-worlds of followers of APPA, the building of a state, and a cosmological warfare to conquer all heathens and devils along the road back to Jerusalem to prepare the world for the Second Coming.

We believe that the Prayer Assembly in Australia in 2006 is pivotal to the move of God in and from the region. We believe that the Quiros [sic] Declaration in 1606 was ordained of God and prophetic for our region. For this reason, we felt very strongly that we must celebrate this 400-year Anniversary together as

a family in Australia, because it was Australia that eventually came to bear that name. The 400 years reminds us of Israel's 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Our own history has been riddled with convicts and all sorts of slavery-related activities and oppressive forces. We want to put this history behind us for good. (Maeliau 2006, 33)

The movement's different historicity and the related reconquista opens up a new cartographic sense of the world that no longer features colonial and post-colonial marginalization but revolves centrally around Jerusalem, the holiest place for APPA, and its relation to Malaita. In this wonder, Solomon Islanders become Israelites whose fate is prophesized in the Old Testament and in such New Testament verses such as Acts 1:8: 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. As they consider their island to be literally (furthest away from Jerusalem) and figuratively (last to receive the Good News) the end of the earth, it is the providential responsibility of Malaitans to return the Word to Israel.

After introducing and contextualizing the movement's developing historicity and our conceptual approach to wonder, we address the interconnections between historicity and cartography present in our case study, specifically in the form of spiritual mapping. We argue that the wonder induced through this historical cartography establishes the foundation for the key political dynamics of the movement. Following this we further explore the political theology of APPA to show how the deployment of wonder opens up the space for religious authority to be primarily vested in the prophet. We present the more recent development of the establishment of APPA's All Peoples' Communion, which focus on theocracy-building, as an example of the capacity of this authority to be concretely institutionalized. We conclude by exploring the implications this case has for the theorization of sovereignty, both as it relates to the movement and in relation to Evangelical/Pentecostal political theologies more generally.

Following Coleman and Hackett's (2015) recent work on the anthropology of global Evangelicalism/Pentecostalism, we refer to these Christianities conjointly. A range of factors make the distinction between the two very unclear, with Coleman and Hackett (2015, 10) citing such commonalities as 'mistrust of fixed and hierarchical liturgies, emphasis on the need to proselytize, desire to develop a 'personal relationship' with God and scripture, and distinctions between those who have [p. 140] and those who have not given themselves to Christ.' Yet, as the authors also note, it is this kind of definitional discussion that can be difficult to maintain in the face of actual empirical dynamics. In this article, we pick up on the analytical utility of considering both Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, and thus draw on the literature on these Christianities in our discussion of APPA.

Spiritual mapping

From a period appropriately called 'Fire in the Islands' (Griffiths 1977) in the 1970s during which personal holiness and asceticism dominated people's engagement with the acts of the Holy Spirit, evangelicals in North Malaita became increasingly interested in the relationship between Malaita and Israel, and the wonder about what a theocracy might bring. Featuring in the final chapter of *Fire in the Islands* (Griffiths 1977, 205–208), Maeliau reportedly said the following in Sydney in early 1975 while on his way home to Solomon Islands after three years at the Bible College of New Zealand:

'Prayer is the highest and purest form of ministry,' he began. 'There is a sense in which we are in the presence of God at all times, but there is a real sense in which we make a definite act of entering His presence. It may be in a group, but often in private.' (Griffiths 1977, 205)

More recently, a sequence of revelations to Maeliau indicate a shift from individually 'entering His presence' to a group, a national effort, or even a global event. This shift is increasingly giving force to the establishment of a theocratic state for which the geographies and historicities of Maeliau and APPA are key sources. Increasingly this amounts to an existentially heightened project that redefines the colonial period and its connection with European geography. What is making these APPA discourses wondrous in the context of Solomon Islands is the ontological alternative they offer. They marvel at an alternative that will uncover the deeper meaning behind present appearances. First of all, they challenge the premise that Malaita and Israel are worlds apart, and, secondly, that the Bible and Malaita are unrelated entities.

In European history, the Iberian epic of the Portuguese-born Spanish Pedro Fernández de Quirós' 1606 voyage to 'La Austrialia del Espíritu Santo' is representative of a crusading reconquista (Kelly 1966). In 1606,

Fernández de Quirós led a Spanish expedition from Peru to ‘discover the unknown Southern part’ of the globe. Yet, according to people in North Malaita, Jews from the Middle East travelled into the Pacific well before Fernández de Quirós.

Their narrative is an illustration of how geography and history merge in a holistic way, especially in Maeliau’s 2006 book entitled *Uluru: The Heart of Australia: A Collection of Spiritual Events and Insights Preparing the Way for the King of Glory*. This book details prophetic events that occurred around the 400th anniversary of Fernández de Quirós’ journey to Oceania in Australia, where a number of prayer congregations were organized by APPA to seize upon Fernández de Quirós [p. 141] blessing of Oceania. In the book, Maeliau employs ideas about ‘Solomon’s Ophir’, ‘The Australian Land of the Holy Spirit’ and ‘the uttermost ends of the earth’ to substantiate a new history for To’abaita. In the first place we focus on this text to examine Maeliau’s exploration of the history of his people that intimates affinities between biblical literalism and a world in which Malaita and Israel become linked.

Similar to Maeliau’s other accounts (1976, c.1980, 1987, 2003), *Uluru* focuses on the looming advent of a new time for Christians while underplaying the theme of making a complete break with the past in favor of local understandings of kastom and Christianity. For Maeliau and other leading people in the APPA, a lot of this creative work finds its roots in the widespread understanding that Judaic rules are the foundation of To’abaita kastom, that all To’abaita or, in some accounts, all Malaitans come from one or more Israeli ancestors, and that a To’abaita nation is firmly located in God’s plan for humankind. Further credit to this idea is fostered through revelations from God, and to some extent it mirrors Jesus acting from a space that was outside the status quo:

His was a protest discourse in its time and it arose from the margins just as we To’abaita live in the margins. He was challenging the center, and we [APPA] are challenging the West and white theologies. (Michael Maeliau, personal communication, Tel Aviv, December 2013)

It is important to note that this historicity is performative. It is created in the act of communication with the scripture, To’abaita people, history books, the reviewers and publisher of *Uluru*, and, above all, with God. As such it is a praxis of a historically and culturally specific form of historical consciousness, with its own grammar of expression and criteria of objectivity (Ballard 2014, 97). Chris Ballard notes this in a stimulating article in which he explores the space that opens up between Greg Dening’s poetic for histories (1991) and Marshall Sahlins’ historicities (1983), that is, between an Oceanic poetic of historical consciousness (Dening) and ‘different cultures, different historicities’ (Sahlins).

Maeliau’s historicity can thus contribute to developing our understanding of Pacific historicities, in particular with respect to the growing role of Christianity in evolving historical consciousness in this pervasively Christian region. We thus take up the suggestion by Ballard (2014, 111) that an important focus of our inquiry must center on the ways in which historicities transform with the adoption of new religions and the emergence of new elites seeking to define history for political purposes. In our case this new elite, of which Maeliau is a member, is religious and political at the same time and seeks to define the agenda of history for the sake of defining and establishing new group, regional, provincial and national identities.

This historical bridging facilitates the common practice of North Malaitans reading themselves into a number of passages in the Bible, for example as being the remnant of Israel in Romans 11 and as being at the uttermost ends of the earth in Acts 1:8. However, there is no explicit mention of To’abaita, Malaita, or Solomon Islands in the Bible. Through intertextually bridging the gap (Tomlinson 2014) between the newly evolving To’abaita historicity and scripture, [p. 142] European discovery of the Pacific paves the path along which holiness journeys from and back to Jerusalem: ‘We believe that the Prayer Assembly in Australia in 2006 is pivotal to the move of God in and out of the region’ (Maeliau 2006, 33; 2014).

The resulting spiritual mapping of the world is primarily based on Maeliau’s 1984 revelation which puts Malaita at the epicenter of a tsunami transforming the world, culminating in the second coming of Jesus (Maeliau 2007). It also finds inspiration in readings of the spiritual and celestial battles that need to be fought, under Maeliau’s leadership, to unblock the paths back to Jerusalem. As these paths are blocked by demons similar to the way De Quirós presented himself as the ‘Christum-ferens’ of Terra Australis (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006, 50), Maeliau portrays himself as the bearer of Christ to his new world, Jerusalem.

Just like De Quirós believed that the difficulties he encountered were a plot by the devil, Maeliau tends to suggest that the arrival of the Millennium, which depends on To'abaita returning the Word to Jerusalem, is blocked and slowed by unbelievers, such as Muslims in Indonesia. To battle these demons, there is an urgent need for what Maeliau calls a 'celestial war' or 'unseen battle' (2006, 35–47). The convocation at Uluru reported in the book was

the decisive battle for the heart of Australia ... It was a war for the whole world, and this particular battle happened to be for Australia. The Captain [Jesus] is not only interested in some countries but is determined to conquer the whole lot. In fact, even that does not fully describe it at all. We might as well call it the battle between Heaven and Hell. (Maeliau 2006, 35–36)

This is the wonder of coincidence evoked by these providentially grounded historico-cartographies. In the following section, we consider how this wonder institutes a form of sovereignty that has lasted for around a decade now.

Wonder and theocracy-building

Having outlined the historicity of this movement, we turn now to its implications for sovereignty and state-building. A characteristic of Evangelicalism/ Pentecostalism frequently emphasized by scholars working in Melanesia and elsewhere is that of a rupture or break with the past. Thus conversion is seen as entailing a radical departure from original kastom, longstanding political economic configurations, kinship systems, and pagan ways of being in general. Recent work has, however, brought the general applicability of this view into question (Chua 2012; Winchester 2015).

In her insightful work on Pentecostal political theology in Nigeria, Ruth Marshall (2009, 2010) partially premises her argument that Pentecostal movements persistently undermine their own reach toward theocracy on this break with the past. On her view, conversion is a process of subjectivation, founded on rupture, which emphasizes interiority and the self's relation to God to such an extent that it precludes the possibility of a unified Pentecostal community coming [p. 143] about in any significant way. A democratic access to communication with God implies an incapacity for the monopolization of religious authority, so there may be a Pentecostal ethics but a Pentecostal politics comes to seem like an oxymoron. As we have mentioned above, these characteristics are frequently ascribed to Evangelicalism as well.

APPA's historicity contradicts the argument that rupture is a necessary marker of Evangelicalism/Pentecostalism. This historicity provides the basis for the particular form that religious discourse and practice takes here. Followers of APPA do not see kastom as something ungodly and to separate themselves from, but rather as evidence that Malaitans have always been a people chosen by God, as God's polity.

As Timmer (2015b) has previously mentioned, adherents' understanding and experience of the relationship between kastom and Christianity is not only one of direct continuity but near identity:

[The To'abaita] experience of Christianity centers more on perceived continuities between tradition (kastom) and church (lotu) while engaging with modernity ... In the main they do not experience a tension between these two traditions of knowledge but see similarities between the two in relation to how they both relate to the scripture. (Timmer 2015b, 179)

A commonly cited example is calling on ancestors in ritual settings, seen as being the same as Jewish practice in this regard. This is, moreover, not a question of whether Christianity has 'really' induced a rupture so much as how Christianity is experienced in relation to kastom and followers' reflections on the basis of that experience, an example of which is contained in the epigraph to this article. It is a wonder at the re-realization of the fundamental connections between Malaita and Israel, the re-remembering of Israelite genealogies, and the providential implications of this for 'the most hated people in all of Solomon Islands' – 'the last poor people in the world,' as some followers have put it. This may be theologically grounded in part of Maeliau's essentialistic reading of Deuteronomy 32:8:

When God gave the command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, he not only knew exactly which directions the specific people groups were going to take, but he sovereignly guided them to where they should eventually settle down. Whatever had been their shortcomings, failures and departure from God's standards and specific purposes, God's sovereignty ensured that their destiny and redemptive

purposes were preserved for the right moment down through history ... The original decrees of God have not and will never be changed. (Maeliau 2006, 29–30)

It follows that while Malaitans may have swayed slightly from their ordained role, they have remained the same from the time prior to their arrival on Malaita until the present. Now is the time for them to bring the ‘second half of the game’ (Maeliau 2006, 38) to its conclusion. This, moreover, has a clear parallel to Scott’s description of the wonder of identity among the Arosi (referred to in the Introduction to the special session, and see Scott 2014, 43).

In a letter to the South Sea Evangelical Church of 26 September 2005, Maeliau identifies three ‘great invasions’ of Earth by God: the birth of Jesus Christ; the [p. 144] presence of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; and the upcoming global revelation of God in all of His glory. Each great invasion has been or will have been prophesied prior to its occurrence, by Isaiah, Joel and Maeliau, respectively. The third great invasion will happen shortly before the final return of the Lord and consists of various wonderfully spectacular demonstrations of God’s power. Maeliau relies primarily on revelation for this understanding but also supplements it with passages such as Acts 2:19–21 – ‘I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

While we do not want to project Giorgio Agamben’s (2005) reading of Paul onto the ethno-theology at hand, it is perhaps useful to note his insistence on the interrelation of *chronos* and *kairos* when looking at the issue of a ‘double messianism’ (Marshall 2010, 206) here. This double messianism is shown in an understanding of the ongoing manifest presence, as distinct from the imminent physical presence, of God in the world (Maeliau in a letter to the South Sea Evangelical Church, 26 September 2005). The world being between the second and third invasions implies that Agamben’s discussion of the replacement of the prophet by the apostle does not apply: now is a messianic time that is nonetheless prior to the arrival of the Messiah. The future thus remains a significant focus. Marshall’s observation of the simultaneous urgency and immanence of change is particularly salient here, but we want to draw attention to the implications of the ongoing relevance of the prophet in relation to authority.

Despite movement leaders’ assertions that if one can be trained such that ‘prophetic ministry is an aspect of your life – not for ruling anyone, but as a personal aspect of your life,’ that ‘if all Malaitans can listen to God and talk with God, they are all prophets’ and that, accordingly, ‘dependence on one person will phase out’ (Glen Waneta, personal communication, Malu’u, January 2015), in a more fundamental sense access to communication with God is emphatically not democratic. While on the one hand Maeliau (2006, 39, 42) calls on all believers to open themselves up to God in order to be ready to participate in spiritual battle at any moment whatsoever, on the other he says that his view of the spiritual realm in celestial war is not even comprehensible to the ordinary person.

If the differential content of spiritual contact is considered this becomes quite clear. Consider the following account of an All Peoples’ Communion (see below) governor:

One day I was in Baelelea [in North Malaita] and my second-born son was climbing an apple tree, when he was a small boy. He was going with some young people and the Lord reminded me, ‘Pray for your son because Satan wants to throw your son down.’ So I quickly prayed, and when I came I heard that he fell down from the apple tree but there was nothing wrong with him. (Festus Faenile, personal communication, Malu’u, December 2014)

[p. 145] Contrast that to an account of the prophet written in Uluru:

From the Solomon Islands the Lord told me to go up to Uluru (Ayers Rock) to make a universal public announcement. When I asked the Lord why, he said, ‘Because all the ungodly Princes over the nations were in Sydney for the Olympic Games showing off their Pride, Pomp and Glory.’ The Australian Prince was playing host to all the Princes of the world. And so, if from Uluru I were to call the attention of the Prince of Australia, all eyes would be following him. In September 2000 I climbed to the top of Ayers Rock and made this historic announcement: I Rev Michael Maeliau, a true descendant of Adam, to whom God gave the right to have dominion over the earth, but you Satan, through deceit took it away from my ancestor Adam; in view of the fact that Jesus Christ, the second Adam, having fulfilled all legal requirements to

secure all things back, and having awaited the kairos moment, I have now reclaimed everything that had been forfeited. Here this day on Ayers Rock, I declare this announcement; ‘You, Usurper Princes over all the nations; Your time is up. I now call you forth, Sons of God, the legitimate Princes over the nations, I proclaim to you, Arise! Take back your legitimate positions as designated by God from the beginning.[’] This declaration was a repetition of the one made at Aroma Centre in the Solomon Islands, which in effect triggered the Celestial War. (Maeliau 2006, 21–22)

Where the former, while significant to those involved, is of the banal and everyday nature that Marshall (2010) rightly describes as characterizing the great majority of witnessing, the latter is of a more profound quality and does not concern mere day-to-day issues, but rather the ultimate fate of humanity. The relevance of this distinction in general is evidenced by the responses of those hearing of Maeliau’s prophecy, compared to the relative shrug elicited from accounts like the former.

The figure of the prophet may be described as an archetypical charismatic leader (Kojève 2014) and this certainly applies to Maeliau. But beyond that, what is significant here is the way in which others experience this authority. While remaining skeptical of the idea of an authoritative or sovereign ‘monopoly’, we therefore propose that the wonder inspired among others in relation to prophesy at least in part serves to generate the authority vested in the prophet. To be clear, here wonder is not in itself a type of authority, but rather the ontologically disruptive mood. This wonder forms the foundation for the authority and state-building efforts which we shall discuss below. Even if, as Marshall argues, individuals do not gain religious authority merely from their institutional position, is the reverse not far more likely? It seems fairly clear that Maeliau holds such a prominent position precisely because of his great capacity for prophesy, his ongoing involvement with miracles, and his capacity to evoke formidable and wondrous realities.

This is not a position without precedent in the literature. In discussing ‘shock and awe’ military strategy, Rubenstein (2006) has shown that the deployment of wonder in the form of extreme violence that inspires widespread horror is a significant sovereign move in the contemporary world. This is largely in agreement with the emerging anthropological literature on de facto sovereignty (Hansen and Stepputat 2006), and it is in line with the ‘destabilizing’ reconceptualizations of sovereignty that our work is situated. [p. 146]

Yet here we are not so much concerned with approaches to sovereignty that emphasize violence, the power over life and death, excess, and states of exception. Rather, via the discussion of wonder in relation to APPA, we are continuing a more fundamental project (see Timmer 2015a, 2015b) of analyzing the cultural and ontological frameworks at play here. These frameworks underpin authority, and thus to a large degree shape the particular forms that dynamics of sovereignty take in particular settings.

Wonder provides us with a particularly productive approach here insofar as it is an index of ontological transformation (Scott 2014) and thus allows us to simultaneously infer the converse of such transformation – an ontological ‘business as usual’ – and the potentiality disrupting that baseline. It is from this contextually specific angle that we take issue with the idea of saying in any definitive way that Pentecostalism/Evangelicalism generally or necessarily involve either continuity or discontinuity. One must remain open to the dynamics of the specific instantiation of these Christianities that is being considered. In the present case, we find a clear emphasis on the consolidation of authority, which is established and maintained through the invocation of wonder. Significantly for the literature to which we refer, this increasingly plays out through concrete, institutional idioms, which we turn to now.

The All Peoples’ Communion

Since the problem of Pentecostalism/Evangelicalism and sovereignty has been described as one of the impossibility of institutionalizing a connection between power and religious law in these settings (Marshall 2010), a note on the current strides being made by APPA toward forming institutions is fitting here. Statebuilding in North Malaita is a key stepping stone for the return to Jerusalem, and recent efforts to actualize this in institutional forms have come under the banner of the ‘All Peoples’ Communion’ (APC). Maeliau has implicitly underpinned this turn in his 2003 response to the Solomon Islands civil conflict entitled *Trouble in Paradise*. In this book, he advocates for increased autonomy for Malaita in the form of self-ruling and God-fearing communities.

The civil conflict that began in 1998 is locally known as tension or tensun. Overall disgruntlement and tensions between people from Malaita and Guadalcanal, partly related to poorly regulated urbanization, led to a civil conflict that began in 1998 and was only effectively subdued with the arrival of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003 (Fraenkel 2004; Kwa'ioloa and Burt 2012; Moore 2004). Following a series of violent clashes between Malaitans and people from Guadalcanal in the period from 1998 to 2002, Malaitan politicians rejected the plan for a federal government system discussed during the Townsville truce negotiations. They demanded their own executive governor and legislative assembly. Until now, constitutional reform has stalled, feeding a sense of ongoing crisis in the nation and uncertainty about [p. 147] its origins and authenticity (Western or biblical?) and its destiny (ongoing failure, or becoming part of the restoration to Jerusalem?) among Malaitans.

In this situation, Maeliau's idea of APCs evoked enthusiasm among many to contribute to organizing and participating in 'estates' or 'communities' as the social and economic nuclei of the local nation-state. As the state is perceived as the New Jerusalem, these nuclei are to be run as the model for all the yet to be converted nations along the path back to Jerusalem. With pretensions to a world order and to firmly root nations in scripture, APCs are not just oppositions to the current state and nation of Solomon Islands, they are assemblages that make the thought of the state critical elements in people's life worlds (Barker 2013, Timmer 2013). Recognizing how the concepts of the state and nation are deployed allows us to show how they are seen as kastom, religious and aesthetically true Malaitan elements.

Estates are cohesive 'micro-nations' that appropriate the Solomon Islands' House of Chiefs boundaries in order to delineate their territory, reflecting a common practice in the movement of absorbing pre-existing institutional formats and discourses into the holistic APC system – self-consciously and otherwise. Originally referred to as the 'E-State' system, signifying eternal and excellent state (Faiau 2013, 142–147), the APC system is designed to be a scalable and holistic way to capture the 'seven spheres of society' for God and thereby attain what Jean Comaroff (2010, 24) has referred to as 'holiness through wholeness'. The seven spheres of society concept can be found in international Evangelical/Pentecostal discourse and is written into the evolving APC constitution. The spheres are arts and entertainment, business and finance, church and religion, distribution and information (media), education and science, family and home, and governance and law.

Of particular interest here, both analytically and for APC leaders, is the last sphere: governance and law. Here too there is an emphasis on the continuity of church and kastom. Since 12 is the 'Biblical number for Government' (All Peoples Communion n.d.), an APC government consists of 12 elders drawn from people of high standing in either kastom or church domains, who form the Council of Elders, including one governor to oversee them. This micro nation-state is able to carry out all the functions associated with a modern state and enters into a federation with other Communities. Five of them are there for spiritual direction and seven are there for physical governance, reflecting a distinction that is persistently made between physical and spiritual elements that finds its basis in APPA's theology. The latter seven correspond to the seven spheres of society. More generally APC is a physical extension or complement of the APPA: it is a push toward the physical-spiritual integration and wholeness that is seen critical to theocracy-building.

APC leaders pick up on the ongoing push toward a decentralized federal state structure in Solomon Islands by presenting Communities as a successfully functioning system for local government for already ten years, and at the same time they actively promote the APC system at the provincial and federal level. Two key [p. 148] leaders in the movement, Maeliau and Glen Waneta (who, as a key figure in the movement, is sometimes described as Maeliau's 'right hand man'), are currently Provincial Members for wards in Baelelea and To'abaita regions, respectively. One strategy would be to appropriate the Solomon Islands state for the APC system by placing key members in government positions and encouraging non-member politicians to see the holy and effective nature of governance along these lines and thus to adopt the system. From here the system could spread to the rest of the Pacific and then the world in order to simultaneously prepare for and hasten the establishment of the promised global theocracy.

Yet the ideal close to home would be to form an independent state of Malaita in which to run the system, which Maeliau has been calling for. This reflects a common sentiment on the island and is strongly

underpinned by the understanding of a covenanted nation of Malaita. While it may take on an especially heightened significance in relation to the demands for justice and development after the tensun, this ethno-theologically informed view should not be reduced to a mere reaction to the harsh postcolonial, post-conflict 'context'.

Conclusion

We have tried to show how wondrous geographies and historicities that are built around particular connections between Malaita and Israel form a basis for theocratic state-building. While the movement that gains its appeal from this wonder is Evangelical/Pentecostal in nature, its ongoing efforts to institutionalize a connection between power and religious law are not undermined by this. The religious law in this case is complex because it amalgamates ongoing interpretations of kastom and varying exegeses of Moses' law. However, in line with how people imagine it, the essence of this domain is Mosaic Law.

The idea of being covenanted powerfully persuades APPA adherents into believing that the leaders are subject to a divine voice that is mostly inaccessible to them. This belief is fed by Maeliau's view that theocracy under the Mosaic covenant is a real possibility. To Maeliau, such a theocracy is a natural state, a paradisiacal situation that cannot be challenged. APPA's theology thus weakens the claim of the 'secular' state while strengthening the force of religious wonder and the wonders about local sovereignty and a related notion of nation. Religious wonder then underpins a system of governance that is interpreted in terms of a theocracy, 'a government in which those who lead the people are God-fearing people', as a follower of APPA put it.

But we would miss the main point if we assume Moses' law to be like a constitution for an alternative state within the state of Solomon Islands. For Malaitans it is not so much the content of these laws but the story of Moses giving law to the Israelites. This is the wonder that triggers the imagination of people like Maeliau as it foregrounds the complex nexus between theology and an emerging notion of a political sphere. If Jerusalem can be built on Malaita (Timmer 2015a), the [p. 149] story of Moses is about instituting a To'abaita or North Malaitan political form that breaks with the ways of the Egyptian pharaoh – read the modern Government of Solomon Islands – in which leaders are both kings and gods.

The Mosaic constitution, as a story and as part of a published text written by Maeliau and other members of APPA, generates the wonder that the political order requires. So what we see evolving in North Malaita is a binding of a political theology of creation to literary and narrative wonder. In combination with the rhetorical reservoir of Christian scripture, which is very effective amid communities in North Malaita, we can imagine how people like Maeliau can mobilize people to engage in APCs and a state-building effort in general. Maeliau's revelation is thus also a revolution; it is tied to a mission of transforming the world, of world-making and of world-unfolding.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the people of Manakwai village and many others in the region who welcomed us to their homes and shared a lot with us. An early version of this paper was presented at the 2015 meeting of the Australian Anthropological Society in Melbourne. A number of people read the paper at various stages of its development and provided useful feedback. We are particularly grateful to Chris Houston, Michael W. Scott, Matt Tomlinson, and the reviewers for this journal. Jaap Timmer's part of the research was supported under Australian Research Council's Discovery Projects funding scheme (150102312).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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