

# Postcolonial nationalism and neo-Pentecostalism: A case from Papua New Guinea

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## Abstract

This article offers an anthropological analysis of a Papua New Guinean nationalist ideology deeply inspired by neo-Pentecostalism. The basis for this study comes from ethnographic material collected during my fieldwork in the Parliament of Papua New Guinea (PNG), where I worked with a group of politicians and bureaucrats who have become known for their iconoclastic and evangelical actions, including their (in)famous destruction of traditional carvings. By mapping their narratives of nation building, I examine how two dimensions of Evangelical Christianity, namely, its focus on the Biblical scriptures and its demonology, were central to the formulation of this group's nationalist and postcolonial ideology. This work provides a contribution towards broader discussions on the effect of evangelical movements on nationalism around the contemporary world and, in particular, in the Global South.

## KEYWORDS

nationalism, neo-Pentecostalism, Pacific, Papua New Guinea, post-colonialism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The relation between religion and nationalism has received increasing attention in the last 10 years, and according to Brubaker (2012), there are four distinct ways of categorizing this relationship. The first one is to consider both phenomena as essentially structurally similar. The second is a way of determining how different religions help to originate or substantiate different nationalisms. The third considers the intricate connection between the two terms, demonstrating how one dialectically forms and mediates the other. Finally, the fourth way singles out religious nationalism as a distinct social form that structures the organization of state and society at large (of which Islamism is used as a model example). In this article, I will look at a case of enmeshment between religion and nationalism in Papua New Guinea (PNG), of the third and fourth type, following Brubaker's (2012) own division.

I will do so through an ethnographic case study of the Pacific region: the neo-Pentecostal Christianity<sup>1</sup>-inspired nationalism of a group of public servants and politicians in the Parliament of PNG, priests and liberal professionals who together self-identified as the Unity Team. The Unity Team were invested in what they named the "Restoration, Reformation and Modernization Program" (RRMP). The RRMP was aimed at fostering nation building through Christian ideology instead of the more conventional focus on PNG's cultural diversity. The Unity Team became known in PNG and abroad in 2013 when they ordered the destruction of the lintel carvings and part of the Totem Pole that decorated the Parliament on the grounds. They claimed that these were ungodly and that PNG needed to become fully Christian (Eves et al., 2014; Rio et al., 2017; Schram, 2014). These artefacts were designed to be national symbols representing the traditional cultures of PNG, and the Unity Team's attempt to destroy them as indexes of the past makes their nationalist project a clear example of the way in which neo-Pentecostalism influences national politics.

This article, then, contributes to sustained discussions of the relationship between religion and nationalism. First, I explore a case in which neo-Pentecostal Christianity and postcolonial nationalism amalgamate. As I will show in the following sections, this happens through (a) a

Biblical informed understanding of PNG's history coupled with a neo-Pentecostal practice of “breaking with the past” (Meyer, 1998), which in this case is the colonial past and (b) a charismatic demonology that becomes operative in my informants' anticolonial social critique of the present. Second, by focusing on the way in which neo-Pentecostal Christianity is incorporated by local expressions of nationalism, this paper also contributes to a further understanding of the ways in which contemporary religious transformations have affected nationalism in the 20th and 21st century (Martin, 2014). This is particularly relevant in the light of widespread processes of “pentecostalization” (Gooren, 2010) of society and politics (see also Miller, 2013, pp. 9–10). The transnational character of Pentecostal Christianity may, at first, pose a problem for nationalist movements and ideologies as they try to assert unique identities and histories. However, various studies of the diverse ways in which this form of Christianity can be coupled with nationalism confirm Bialecki's (2017) remark that the relationship between these phenomena is not immutable. Bialecki (2017) claims that the materialization of this relationship allows for the incorporation of typically nationalist rhetoric and symbols. Included among those are ideas of being “chosen” by God (Smith, 2003), assertions of value which distinguish good from bad and from atypical citizens (O'Neill, 2010) and, more generally, studies on the different levels of believers' interest in national matters depending on historical context and location (Freston, 1995; Gooren, 2018.)

In PNG, anthropologists have studied cases in which Christians develop a “negative nationalism”(Robbins, 1998) according to which national belonging is perceived in a depreciative light.<sup>2</sup> In this instance, informants reveal the ways in which they associate PNG with inferiority and underdevelopment, preferring to identify themselves with a larger and international community of Christians (see also Eves, 2003). In the same vein, ethnographies have been written exploring the ways in which genetic or genealogical relations with Israel as “the chosen land” are imagined by some communities in PNG. In such cases, people see themselves as part of a broader Jewish nation or, alternatively, look up to Israel as a nation and anticipate the moral transformation of PNG as a nation state (Handman, 2014).

The ethnographic study that I present here differs from others in two ways. The first difference is that I look towards a positive nationalism, in which transnational character is de-emphasized in favour of an application of biblical narratives of liberation to the case of PNG and its postcolonial context. Second, although attention is often given to the metaphorical potential of considering the journey by which Israel became a nation, I add another layer to the way in which Pentecostal “moral transformations” (Handman, 2014, p. 248) can be achieved. Namely, I highlight how a spiritual break with colonial relations translates into a change of nature of these same relations when they are considered in a worldly sphere.

### 1.1. Method and data

The primary sources for this article were gathered during my fieldwork in the National Parliament of PNG, located in its capital city of Port Moresby, between 2013 and 2015. The main data collection method was participant observation, which included formal and informal interviews, attendance and observation of everyday life routines inside and outside Parliament and attendance at events relevant to the research. The data that I will use in this article are constituted by my experiences and observations while working with some of my main informants and my analysis of a text uploaded to the official site of the National Parliament called “2015—The Year of the Crossing Over to the Other Side” (Zurenuoc, 2015). This document was produced while members of the Unity Team were working in the Parliament of PNG as public servants, after they had instated a series of institutional changes aimed towards improving parliamentary work and strengthening PNG as a nation, something I return to in the next section. This text makes the ideological foundation of the Unity Team's

project explicit and serves as a vantage point from which this article will examine the ways neo-Pentecostal Christianity has served as ground for the nationalist ideology. It is important to highlight that I take a stance of relying on my informants' exegesis of events and experiences as well as the documents they have produced. By analysing their actions and explanations, I can fully understand their assumptions.

## 1.2 Background

The second biggest country in Oceania, PNG is situated on the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, sharing a border with Indonesia. The country has an estimated population of nine million people, and it is one of the most culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse in the world, home to 800 different languages. PNG had been under the jurisdiction of a variety of colonial powers between 1884 and 1919, including Germany, the British Empire and, after the First World War, Australia.

Before achieving independence in September 1975, PNG's path to self-governance started in the 1960s and early 1970s, with a House of Assembly set up in 1963 and the first national elections held in 1972. When PNG became an independent nation, it continued as a part of the British Commonwealth with a political structure mirroring the Westminster system, but a unicameral legislature. Among the discussions at this crucial point was the matter of deciding which national symbols would best suit the newly independent nation. There was also the dilemma of which body of law would guide the nation. In 1971, a National Identity Bill was ratified, defining the flag and the national emblem for the nation to be and then in 1975, discussions began as to what building would substitute the House of Assembly and become the National Parliament, which was finally inaugurated in 1984.

More than any other national symbol, the Parliament was designed with the goal of representing a synthesis of the nation's diversity (Briggs, 1989; Rosi, 1991; Vale, 2014), encompassing more than 800 language groups, mostly with different social organization and customs. Its design constitutes a mosaic of artistic and architectural traditions from different parts of PNG and efforts were made to ensure the material used in its construction was, as much as possible, local. But the architectural optimism embodied in the Parliament building, whose main aesthetic message was one of national unity, was met with general concern by Papua New Guinean politicians and law-makers who had the challenge of instilling national consciousness to a scattered collective of peoples speaking different languages, with different ethnicities and traditions (Vale, 2014, p. 201).

During the 1970s, political elites of PNG were interested in defining the content of what was “truly” Papua New Guinean (Walton, 2018, p. 67). Local cultures and traditional knowledge were perhaps the obvious candidates for the symbols of national distinction. So much so, that these ideas were officially recognized as PNG's foundation, and as sources for the guidance of the future of the constitution, as the Preamble attests (Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, 1975):

**WE, THE PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA—**

- united in one nation
- pay homage to the memory of our ancestors—the source of our strength and origin of our combined heritage
- acknowledge the worthy customs and traditional wisdoms of our people—which have come down to us from generation to generation
- pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now.

It is worth noting, however, that “noble traditions” are not the only ones to embody PNG's national constitution, since “Christian principles” are equally reclaimed as PNG's own values. By the time that the constitution was written, the influence and the place of Christianity in the territory was already solidly established. Missionaries had been in PNG as long as the other colonial powers, sometimes working as proxies for the metropole. During colonial times, this meant acting as representatives of mainstream Christianity, such as Catholics and Lutheran Protestants (but not limited to them).

In addition to leaving its mark in the constitution's Prelude, Catholicism also influenced local nationalist ideologies, the most famous and historically relevant being crafted by a Papua New Guinean jurist and politician, Bernard Narokobi. The “Melanesian Way,” as Narokobi (1980) called it, aimed at delineating an indigenous philosophy that not only guided but also distinguished the then new nation of PNG from Western countries.<sup>3</sup> The influence of Catholicism in this effort of crafting a national ideology expressed itself in the way in which Narokobi thought it possible to find a harmonic coexistence between Christian and Melanesian values, which he claimed to be constitutive of Papua New Guineans. The jurist argued that, as a spiritual people, Papua New Guineans saw transcendent power everywhere and that Christian values such as communitarianism were also part and parcel of the lives of the different tribes in PNG even before Christianity was introduced by missionaries. The influence of Catholicism materialized not only in Narokobi's ideological project but also in the constitution itself and in his actions as a politician (Gibbs, 2020). Narokobi was part of the Constitution Committee in the 1970s and had a long political career; his last role was as the Speaker of Parliament between 1999 and 2002. As a speaker, the influence of Catholicism was reasserted when Narokobi ruled for a large cross to be placed on the roof of Parliament. Narokobi's aim was to make a symbolic statement, recognizing PNG's double foundation as traditional and Christian (Gibbs, 2004, p. 3).

As during colonial times and after Independence, today mainstream Christianity (Catholicism and Protestant denominations such as Lutheranism, Methodism and Adventism) is still the religion that has the most adherents. According to the census (National Statistical Office of Papua New Guinea, 2011, p. 32), 44.4% of the population declared themselves as either Catholic (26%) or Lutheran (18.4%). Since the 1960s, however, PNG has experienced, like other countries in the Global South, an increased adherence to neo-Pentecostal churches in both rural and urban areas (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2019, p. 325). With the fast growth of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal representation in the country, it is to be expected that this brand of Christianity will also have its own influence in nationalist projects (see also Barker, 2013).

## 2. THE UNITY TEAM AND THE RRPM

In this section, I present the group of informants who authored or, in one way or another, supported the nationalist ideology that I analyse. This group self-identified as the Unity Team and was composed of public servants, pastors and liberal professionals who gathered around the speaker of the 9th Parliament (2012–2016), Hon. Theodor Zurenuoc, who was the MP for Morobe province in the Northern Coast of PNG. Members of the Team and their supporters were all Christians, and when not neo-Pentecostal, members still shared with them a charismatic belief in expressing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as spiritual healing or glossolalia. The Unity Team was not a formalized group in Parliament but rather an interest group. It is also important to highlight that not every person associated with the Team was a part of the parliamentary structure. Notable examples are the pastors who supported the speaker's programme. Conversely, not all parliamentary staff supported the ideas of the Unity

Team, and although not the focus of this article, many were critical of the way in which the group mixed religion and politics.

In terms of the level of education, most of the core members of the Unity Team had at least a bachelor's degree from a range of disciplines such as theology, political sciences, law, accountancy, engineering and administration. Most of my informants lived in urban centres. This placed them among what scholars working in the Pacific have called the “urban middle class” (Cox, 2014), in a country where over 80% of the population lived in rural areas and around 8% get a university degree (National Statistical Office of Papua New Guinea, 2011, p. 33). The religious support network of the Unity Team, however, was more representative of most of the Papua New Guinean population. Many Christian believers supported the Unity Team's initiative and attended their events frequently. This was made possible through the work of a Christian interdenominational network, the Body of Christ, that supported the group's events (financing transportation for believers coming from rural areas, for example) and helping the Team to organize events. For instance, pastors connected to the network would carry out daily services in the Parliament's premises. These services were also attended by Christian public servants. Many of these services aimed to use prayer to support the nation and the work of parliamentarians, which, in the period this article covers, meant support towards the work of the Unity Team.

The Unity Team's nationalist ideas took form in Parliament under what became known as the RRPM, which was officially launched in 2013. The programme's primary goal was to improve parliamentary performance and modernize parliamentary structure and bureaucracy, through measures such as improving the work of parliamentary committees and in making the communication between the institution and Papua New Guineans more transparent. This, however, led the Unity Team to a further reflection on the importance of the Parliament as a national institution, which they defined as the “engine room.” From a focus on institutional performance, the programme then transformed its emphasis towards boosting the Nation's performance and, therefore, in turn became a programme of nation building. In fact, the “Unity” in the name refers to their perceived need to “restore” the Parliament and its image as the unifying institution of a diverse country and, while doing so, achieving what they thought of as the not yet fulfilled unity of the nation.

It becomes clear, then, that the Unity Team's nationalist agenda departs from the same pre- and post- independence concerns and discourses regarding the challenges of finding a common ground, or foundation, from which to bring diverse people together as one nation. As I have mentioned, Narokobi and the “Melanesian Way,” influenced by Catholicism, strived for a harmonization of traditional and Christian principles, while designers of the National Parliament intended to create a national identity based on an aesthetic amalgamation of different Papua New Guinean artistic and religious expressions.

Now, the Unity Team would place themselves in the same institution but guided by a neo-Pentecostal orientation. The most explicit influence of neo-Pentecostalism in their nationalist ideology was to dissociate ideas of national unity from those of traditions and of local cultures. This is characteristic of a Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal tendency to require that new-born Christian break with the past (Meyer, 1998), and in post-colonial contexts, this usually meant breaking ties with practices considered to be pagan and with the people that continue to attach themselves to those practices. The literal way in which these ideas manifested themselves in the Unity Team's actions was what made them well known nationally and internationally (Elapa, 2013; Higgins, 2015; Hill, 2013), as I will describe below.

In 2013, Zurenuoc as a member of the House Committee approved the removals of a wooden lintel that decorated the Parliament's façade and of a carved Totem Pole in the Parliament's atrium. According to Zurenuoc and his supporters, the carvings were ungodly and

evil, influencing MPS to act corruptly and in other unethical ways, leading PNG towards disarray and economic stagnation. A breaking with these symbols (or embodiments) of a traditional past, which had been placed in the “engine room” of the nation, was the first step towards the team's project of reformation and modernization. In addition to that, the Unity Team also had plans to substitute the Totem Pole for another one that they named the “Unity Pole.” But before they could fulfil their plans, the Director of the National Museum, Andrew Moutu, and politician Sir Michael Somare, got an injunction from the court and the substitution was not carried out. After Moutu's intervention, the dismantled artefacts were put on display at the museum.

Later, in 2015, members of the Unity Team travelled to the United States in order to receive a 400-year-old King James Bible which had been donated by an American Missionary, Dr. Gene Hood. The Unity Team then lobbied to have a motion passed in Parliament transforming the Bible into a “National Treasure,” which was followed by its ritual placement on the floor of Parliament during PNG's Independence Day of 2015.

These actions of dismantling the carvings that decorated Parliament and then placing the donated Bible inside the Chamber of Parliament demonstrate one example from a broader religious vision from which the Unity Team would act. In addition to obvious and intentional actions, in the following sections, I will provide a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which ontological characteristics of neo-Pentecostalism have provided the Unity Team with a framework to examine and interpret history, allowing them to formulate a postcolonial critique integral to their nationalist ideas.

### 3. BREAKING WITH THE COLONIAL PAST

Thus far, I presented one example in which the Unity Team's actions should be understood in relation to their neo-Pentecostalism: the destruction of the carvings in 2013. The neo-Pentecostal axiom of breaking with a traditional and non-Christian past has gained noteworthy expression in this instance and caught the attention of anthropological literature (Eves et al., 2014; Schram, 2014). But cutting ties with some non-Christian indigenous traditions and values was not the only way in which the Unity Team envisioned a “break with the past.” In this section, I go back to the speaker's message “2015—The Year of the Crossing Over to the Other Side” (Zurenuoc, 2015). I will highlight how another “break” was equally important to the Unity Team: that with a colonial past that, to them, replicates its effects today through the ways in which Papua New Guineans are subjected to unequal, racialized relations of dependency with Australia.

The “Message” (as I will refer to it henceforth) was defined by one of the public servants who collaborated in the writing of the document as “a traditional new year's message that the Speakers commonly send to the people.” The text is indeed welcoming Papua New Guineans into the new year, but it does so by highlighting how unique that new year would be; 2015 marked the anniversary of the country's 40-year independence from its former colonial power, Australia, and the document conveyed how such landmarks point towards a time of collective maturity, in which PNG is now ready to achieve its freedom. The reader of the message is invited to imagine PNG in its ontogenetic process, from childhood to maturity and, as such, as a nation-state that is struggling and grappling with the challenges and consequences of growing up. The type of nationalist discourse that depicts countries as going through or existing in early developmental stages, as Gupta (2008) has argued, are partly conventional representations made by Western countries about the Global South, and the speaker's message may at first glance be read as reproducing these exogenous images (Gupta, 2008, p. 271). But the charismatic imagery of the document, published on the

Parliamentary website remains unpatronizing outlook due to its main focus which I will discuss below.

As the “Message” states, “at age 40, physical, mental and spiritual maturity is said to have reached its peak and succession begins” (Zurenuoc, 2015). Here, PNG is pictured by the document as having become ready to cross to the next stage of its life. Interestingly at this point, the imagery of the “Message” changes from that of a human subject to the journey of a people, the Israelites, without a nation. Hence, the second metaphor that complements the first is laid out through a comparison with the biblical event of Joshua crossing the Jordan River. This Biblical story is relevant to narratives of nationalism because it tells us about the history of Israel and its formation as a nation. Joshua was not the only leader to feature there. His predecessor is Moses who, according to the Exodus, helped the Israelites to free themselves from the Egyptian authoritarian and enslaving rule so that they could reach the Promised Land. With Moses, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

In a conversation with Charles,<sup>4</sup> one of the members of the Unity Team, we discussed how PNG's history could be compared to the passage from the Exodus. He told me that the comparison refers to PNG having had a strong “Moses Generation” up until 2015. Charles continued by saying that the particularity of this generation, between 1975 and the time of my fieldwork is that right after Independence, they were not only trying to challenge Papua New Guinean's “colonial mind-set,” but also their “past mindset.” The struggle for liberation then is oriented not only outward, as in a force from the “outside” such as Australia (Egypt) that intends to enslave and colonize a people, but also inward. Charles further told me that the “past mindset” had its own parallel in the Exodus, in terms of the “cultural beliefs” of the Israelites. This is a reference to Joshua 24:14 in the Old Testament, where we find that, after their choice to leave Egypt with Moses, the Israelites continued to worship past gods and not the monotheistic God of Christianity.

So, there are two axes of liberation here which the Unity Team refer to in their message, one internal and the other external. Along these lines, Charles saw a typical Pentecostal requirement for conversion and transformation to “break with the past” (Meyer, 1998) for national membership to emerge. He related these ideas of breakage first to tradition and local cultures and, second, externally to “Australian rule.” In this way, the break of the Israelites from their own false and pagan beliefs and from their enslaved situation in relation to Egypt, as recounted in the Old Testament, becomes a metaphor for the history of PNG and its national becoming.

Continuing to make sense of my informant's own critique of “Australian rule” during colonial times, it is important to look at the way in which the Unity Team saw this perceived relation of inequality materializing in the present. This takes me to a conversation that I had with another public servant who was working in Parliament during my fieldwork. For purposes of anonymity, in this article, I will call him Peter. We were talking about international perceptions of PNG and he complained that foreigners patronize Papua New Guineans. As he said: “they think we are all about culture, we are backward.” It is important to highlight that most of my conversation about the relationship between PNG and other nations ended up focusing on the unfolding relationship between Australia and PNG, and Peter often also referred to the ways in which Australians see Papua New Guineans. Now, Peter's statements have an ambiguous effect when left unexamined: it is not clear whether he believes that having a traditional culture equates to being backward or if this is what others believe, or if it is both. Given the Pentecostal leanings of the Unity Team and given what we know of the tendency of Pentecostal movements in the Global South of encouraging ruptures with instantiations of tradition, it would be a sensible proposal to assert that informants have interiorised not only colonial, but modern Pentecostal views of indigenous cultures as less advanced than

themselves and feel that they therefore need to break away from such influences.

The Pentecostal inspiration of the Unity Team's project does indeed have this character of rupture. This is especially visible when the focus of the analysis includes episodes of religious iconoclasm, included among those the dismantling of the carvings as described in Section 1. And while it is expected that Peter's statement is to be understood with this in mind, my point here is that the Unity Team were not only fighting against the internal influence of local cultures/customs or *kastom* (in Tok Pisin) but that a different, parallel and postcolonial battle was also at the heart of their nationalistic project. The rupture at the centre of this battle was not one with actual representations of "local culture," but rather "culture" as an abstraction and one created, anticipated or supported by foreigners. In this case, according to my informants, the foreigners referred to are the Australians. In turn, the Australians are depicted as labelling, orientalising and ultimately marginalizing others. Therefore, it is not only local expressions of culture that the Unity Team aim to overturn but also the label of being "cultured" by Australians. That is, of having its identity and distinguishes defined by a former colonial power which signals an extension of domination over time.

Evidence that the Unity Team considered this axis of critiquing Australia's conception of Papua New Guinean culture as part of their nationalist project can be seen in an event that took place during my fieldwork. On September 14, 2015, the National Museum launched a new exhibition entitled "Built on Culture: The Art of Papua New Guinea." High profile figures attended the event, including the then Prime-Minister, Hon. Peter O'Neill, the Minister for Planning, Hon. Charles Abel and the Acting Australia's High Commissioner for Papua New Guinea, Ms Bronte Moules.

"You see Australia, for example, chose to give more than 20 million to them ... they say we are built on culture. This is the battle now," this is what a member of the Unity Team told an audience in the days following September 14. Indeed, Australia had donated a sum of 25 million Australian dollars to the National Museum (a public institution) over the course of 4 years, to upgrade the museum and support its function in preserving and advocating for culture heritage.

Alongside the launching of the exhibition, the Museum showcased its restored space by displaying new artefacts, including the carved lintels that the Museum director had managed to retrieve after their removal from Parliament in 2013. As I have argued (2018), the removal of the carvings in 2013 ended up dividing representatives of these two important and central national institutions, namely, the Museum and Parliament. Although these two institutions embodied, during the time of my fieldwork, two different elite nationalist projects for the country, my account here takes into consideration how one of them, that of the Unity Team working in Parliament, understand and conceptualizes the other according to its own assumptions.

Australia's positive attitude towards the Museum and their support of its project to protect national heritage was clear in the statement from Ms Moules, Deputy to Australia's High Commission, during the opening ceremony that I attended in 2015:

The National Museum and Art Gallery plays a vital role in conserving Papua New Guinea's cultural traditions and its history. It also helps shape Papua New Guinea's national identity (...) This exhibition is a celebration of Papua New Guinea (...) It celebrates thousands of years of artistic expression by people living on these lands (...) This artistic expression has helped to lay the foundations for the modern Independent State of Papua New Guinea – a proud nation that is built on culture. For me, tonight is also about celebrating the strong and deep cultural relationship that exists between Papua New Guinea and Australia. The original construction of

this building was funded through an Australian cultural Grant, and an Australian – Martin Fowler – was the building's architect.

From this passage, one can conclude that support for cultural diversity and the cultural expressivity of PNG was indeed a part of the Australian project for PNG. This contrasts starkly with the Unity Team's nation building project, focused on the place of Christianity in the attempt to reform the country and instil nationalist consciousness into citizens. Whereas the former project has a recognition of unique traditions as its distinguishing feature and basis of its nationalist programme, the latter focuses internally on a common denominator and homogeneity of purpose and value that nationalist feelings presuppose. Additionally, it becomes clear that “the nation” becomes relevant to the Unity Team in a different way than it is for ideological projects such as Narokobi's “Melanesian Way,” namely, as a hopeful synthesis between diverse indigenous cultures and the positive aspects of Western culture. Indeed, the Unity Team was pessimistic about what had become of this ideal since the time of its crafting in the 60s. The “Melanesian Way” never was an uncontroversial ideological project given PNG's unique ethnic and linguistic diversity (see Golub, 2014, pp. 165–168). But for many Papua New Guineans, mentions to the “Melanesian Way” increasingly became more of an accusation of improper dealings (Walton, 2018, p. 67) rather than of “noble traditions.” These corrupt practices, such as nepotism, became understood as caused by a misplaced enactment of indigenous culture, such as gift-giving and *wantokism*<sup>5</sup> (attachment to one's ethnic group), and this connection turned into an explanation for the perceived failure of the State and for the illegal actions of bureaucrats and leadership. The Unity Team shared such views; they claimed there was no way of creating attachment to the nation if everyone put their own tradition before their commitment to society. As part of their program to “restore” the Parliament and to unify the nation, they found it necessary, then, to encounter what they perceived to be a “true” common denominator, Christianity.

The Unity Team's project was unsurprisingly unable to attract support—ideologically and financially—from political and intellectual elites. Although there was not a direct and sustained Australian response to the dismantling of the carvings and the Reformation, Restoration and Modernization Program in general, members of the team were acutely aware of Australian support for the museum and understood this stance—correctly or not—as a political statement against their initiative. For example, during a meeting at the Christian Fellowship taking place in Parliament, Peter framed the issue of Australia's support of the museum in opposition to the support the Unity Team received as a battle between “powers.” In a neo-Pentecostal fashion, this battle took place not only as secular politics, such as donations and international support, but also spiritually. In another group meeting organized by the Unity Team in order to access international and national respondents to their program, a pastor at the event suggested that negative responses should be taken positively. He noted that, as God's warriors, it was important for people to see and realize their effectiveness. When affirming their commitment to God, it was certain that the “enemy” was going to emerge as such.

Interestingly, in this instance, the museum and its political project did not form the centre of Unity Team's concerns. Rather, they focused instead on Australia's interest in supporting the museum. Members of the Unity Team wondered and asked what Australia's real intentions might be. In conversations with informants during my fieldwork, their position became clear. This was yet another way in which “secular ideologies” were trying to establish themselves in the country. And, most importantly, the donation was interpreted as an imposition of Australia's agenda based on mistaken notions of the realities of PNG. As one informant told me, “Australia, a secular state, wants us to accept culture as our own

foundation.” But does Australia, as a secular state, he asked me, really know what culture entails in PNG? Their answer was no. As a secular state, Australia ignored what culture really meant. That is, *kastom*, local expressions and attachment to land that could never be encompassed by one abstract concept of culture. It followed therefore that Australia was defending and supporting their own notion of “culture.” A generalized and colonial one at that.

“Australia wants us to be about culture so that we remain forever primitive and poor,” a member of the Unity Team told me. He then continued by observing that this concept of culture as an abstract entity was closely reminiscent of such usages in colonial times. This informant highlighted that when PNG was under Australia's control, it was standard to regard indigenous populations being “cultured” and therefore incapable of administering modern and western institutions. Hence, by placing Papua New Guineans as the primitive other, colonizers have safeguarded their place of dominance and superiority. The Unity Team's concerns with the extent to which Australia can define the terms of discussion regarding the place of culture in PNG's national formation shows how the issue of articulating connections to traditional cultures and to the past is still contentious to Papua New Guineans (see Keesing & Tonkinson, 1982), especially in a postcolonial context. According to the Unity Team, the phenomena of past colonial powers holding power over their colonies was not only consigned to the past but also crept into the present. The group saw Australia's readiness to support “culture” as an instance of neo-colonial domination with clear echoes from colonial racist policies that had previously used to control and intervene in indigenous people's lives.

#### 4. POSTCOLONIAL DEMONOLOGY: A PENTECOSTAL CRITIQUE

Apart from the critique of Papua New Guineans as having been and still being considered “second-class citizens” in their own country, there were also further Unity Team critiques of Australian domination. These grievances are then taken in surprising directions. These avenues form the ground from which I make an analysis of the way in which Pentecostal language ideology has an influence on the postcolonial critique of the Unity Team.

The first that we will focus upon is a critique of the name chosen to designate the then new country: PNG. According to the Unity Team, this name was already filled with Australia's patronizing and racist gaze and, as the text asserted, contained “derogative connotations.” “Papua,” they argued, relates to black people whom Australians considered to be inferior to themselves, and “Guinea” means “small pigs.” The materialization of a second-class mentality occurred in the name of the country, which according to the “Message,” came to define their national identity. So, their postcolonial and anticolonial programme included a proposal for a new name for the country as “United Tribes of Paradise.”

The second critique related to the ways in which language and power are linked to the past and to colonialism, and to PNG's relationship with Australia, as described in the previous section. For example, in the “Message,” the Unit Team asserted:

The term ‘*KIAP*’ (referring to a Colonial Administration) was carefully, intentionally and thoughtfully crafted to capture the spirit of suppression, control and exploitation. *KIAP* does not mean anything in any known languages. It is an acronym in English language which means – *Keep Indigenous Always Primitive or Poor (K-I-A-P)*. We have adopted and associated ourselves with a mindset that has kept us in prison for the last 40 years.

Since the 1880s, *kiaps* were patrol or administrative officers embodying the colonial presence (British and then Australian) in the territory that today is PNG, and until the 1960s,

they were the main adjudicators of the Native Regulations that I described in the previous section (Dinnen & Braithwaite, 2009, p. 168). As the regulations were all encompassing, administering all aspects of indigenous existence, the *kiaps* enabled such processes in this function. As Weisbrot (1981, p. 728) observed, the *kiaps* “combined the roles of policeman, magistrate, surveyors, construction foreman, agricultural extension officers, census takers, health aids and so forth.” However, in contrast to the Unity Team claims, the word *kiap* is said to be a Tok Pisin translation of the word “captain” (Nelson 1982, p. 33). There is no documentation or evidence that the word KIAP was the acronym defined in the “Message.”

Nonetheless, the claim is worthy of analysis beyond the facticity of the word's origin. What is at stake here is how the team ground their nationalist project and their Pentecostal postcolonial critique. I will begin with my claim that the Unity Team's discourse is postcolonial, which raises the question of what is postcolonial in saying that KIAP means “Keep Indigenous Always Poor”? Although postcolonial primarily refers to the temporal dimension of what comes after colonial time, here I am using the meaning the term has come to take of a critical, antihegemonic discourse that is anticolonial and which critiques neo-colonialism (Lawson, 2010). Originating in Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, the author argues that Westerners create representations of the Orient in such a way as to always depict them as inferior to themselves. As Lawson correctly observes, the strength of Said's work, and what made it so compelling outside literary studies, is how “power, knowledge and representation” are articulated in order to ground the unequal ways in which countries and regions relate to each other.

The Unity Team were certainly not the first people to notice the ways in which Australia and Australians reinforced the colonial order by distinguishing and marginalizing indigenous peoples in an “us” versus “them” logic. *Kiaps* were indeed the personification of a colonial power and their regulating of every aspect of indigenous lives was clear as it “applied exclusively to indigenes and could be made in respect of any matter having a ‘bearing or affecting the good government and well-being of natives’ (Native Administration Ordinance, section 4)” (Dinnen & Braithwaite, 2009, p. 166). Stella (2007), who developed a piece of work like Said's but offering a timely perspective in literary studies on the construction of Papua New Guinean subjects, has argued that the “native regulations” were only one of many other practices, both juridical and discursive, that legitimized and even naturalized colonial and racist hierarchical relations between Australians and Papuan New Guineans. Similarly, anthropologists working in PNG have recorded and analysed the ways in which colonial tropes have not only defined relationships between colonizers and colonized but also how they have not yet faded away (Eves, 1996; Lattas, 1998; West, 2012).

The Unity Team's critique shares with these other academic perspectives a postcolonial critique of the ways in which indigenous peoples were placed in a subjugated position and a combative stance towards the asymmetric relationship between the West and its Others. Relevant in this article, however, is that they share the assumption that language, power and representation are and were an essential aspect of not only understanding, but also of creating social realities – including that of their own condition as former colonies still struggling for real and complete liberation from the “tropes” defining them. As Stella has argued when commenting on the relationship between imperialism and language:

We employ language to define and construct our world and also to analyse and understand it. Language does not merely link meanings to sounds or merely communicate meaning. It defines and designs meanings, and more powerfully, it constructs beliefs, epistemologies, culture, and power. (Stella, 2007, p. 56)

The relevance given to words, as one can see in the case of the hidden power and significance of the Unity Team's acronym KIAPS is not merely a registering of intentions but a materialization of these intentions into reality. The fact that, for Pentecostals, language has power as a materialization of supernatural forces into the material world has been extensively studied by anthropologists working in different countries (Bielo, 2008; Crapanzano, 2000; Engelke, 2007; Harding, 2000; Keane, 1998; Luhrmann, 2004; Robbins, 2001). The study of what has been defined as Christian language ideology is, of course multiple, as it is its object (Bialecki, 2011, p. 680). Despite such variety, though, there is consensus that language for Pentecostals has efficacy not only as a communicative medium with God but also in the way in which it is connected to individual agency. For example, speaking in tongues is one of the central ways in which the divine manifests in people's lives, and believers can enact deliverance by having faith and using God's name. Often during fieldwork, I found examples of the power that believers attributed to prayer and strong utterances in order to achieve their will and intentions in the material world. Such examples were often heard during testimonies, a moment in which believers tell each other personal stories in order to attest God's power and presence in their life. Stories would range from Pentecostals wanting a computer, to those asking for a divine intervention in the current state of the country. Conventionally, those giving the testimony would talk about how they have prayed and commanded God with the strength of their faith in order to get what they intended.

If words can materialize the power and will of God, being also able to persuade God to make God's power become present to humans, then the same can happen with its opposite. "Evil forces," as my informants would usually describe everything that was satanic or not godly, can also influence the material world through words. It is in this context that the representative power of language in the postcolonial critique of the Unity Team should be understood. As the speaker's message explains to the reader, the people of PNG have lived under an "association" with words created by Australians, such as KIAP, that have imprisoned their generation in a "mind-set" according to which they are inferior in relation to westerners and former colonizers. These concerns are defined, in the text, as "spirits of suppressions, control and exploitation" that afflict PNG and its citizens (Zurenuoc, 2015). My informants would sometimes refer to other spirits, such as "Oppression" and "Poverty" as being "bondages holding Papua New Guinea down."

Recognizing emotional states and patterns of behaviour with evil or demonic forces is common among Pentecostals. Attempts to deliver persons from these afflictions is an integral ritual component in procedures of healing among charismatics. In his study about American Pentecostal's ideas of the self and of self-transformation, Csordas (1997) shows how ideas and perceptions of demons have evolved in time, from a renaissance view of demons as entities with names and a related sin "to which it had the power to tempt people" (Csordas, 1997, p. 181) to a 20th century "new demonology" that saw names of demons lose their importance and then to a focus on what these names make people feel. More concretely, as Csordas (1997, p. 181) observes, biblical names like Beelzebub and Magog began to fall out of use and in their place feelings such as "Anger," "Lust," "Depression," and "Passivity" became the focus of healing and deliverance rituals. Two main consequences of these changes stand out. First, the role of "evils" potentially affecting a subject did increase in number by becoming as numerous as the feelings, thought patterns and behaviours a person can present. Second, these "evils" can also be culturally specific, and Csordas (1997, p. 186) describes how identifying them also becomes an exercise of discriminating (and defining) nationalities and ethnicities. For example, according to this charismatic logic, Germans are afflicted by the spirit of legalism, and Africans (sic) by bitterness, due to slavery, whereas murder is preeminent among Sicilians (because of its connection to the Mafia).

Both characteristics of this "new demonology" allow it to build a meaningful postcolonial

critique, while also remaining non-secular and Pentecostal in character. It allows for the isolation and recognition of certain states and patterns of behaviour, not only emotions, to be singled out as negative and as particular to a certain nationality, for example, when the speaker's message describes Papua New Guineans as being "Poor," "Inferior," "controlled" and "exploited." Additionally, the phenomenological ambiguity of these expressions among Pentecostals (Csordas, 1997), both as states of being and demonic presences permits them to be recognized as having internal and external causations. This approach is a good fit with postcolonial critiques since we can regard both subject positions as social and economic, while creating grounds and potential for change in situations of precarity (see, e.g., Eriksen, 2009a, 2009b; Rio et al., 2017, pp. 3–4). The Pentecostal agent is, after all endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit and when faced with an equally spiritual anticolonial struggle is equipped with the means to liberate him or herself from the afflicted position of bondage. Structurally, as in other healing rituals, deliverance is made by the agent, but it also allows for changes to a tangible material situation that are, social and external to the self, such as, in this ethnographic case, the subjugated status of the nation.

The Unity Team's attention to the power of language and representation in the definition of a power struggle and imbalance acquires then its postcolonial persuasion from a new demonology that allows believers both to psychologize and socialize/historicise one's own situation.

As I have shown previously, this is defined vis a vis PNG's previous status a former Australian colony and, ethnographically, through the Unity Team's understanding that this unbalanced and colonial dynamic of power is still ongoing in the way in which Australia supports other nationalist projects in the country. These reflections of members of the Unity Team highlighted that their project is based on an anticolonial stance. They reflect not only concerns in the Global South during independence years (Loomba, 2015) but those of today in relation to neo-colonialism. As Eriksen (2009a) has observed, neo-Pentecostalism's attention to breaking with the past is not only focused on the individual level: it can be a form of social critique. What I have presented so far is, therefore, one way in which this social critique can be articulated in a postcolonial context.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The rise of Pentecostalism has had a visible impact in society and politics around the globe, particularly in the Global South. Accordingly, researchers from various fields called attention to how this form of Christianity impacts ideas of national belonging and affects national politics (Barker, 2013; Gooren, 2010; Martin, 2014). PNG is an interesting case for the study of the articulation between nationalism and evangelical Christianity. The country's cultural, ethnic and language diversity exist hand in hand with a post-colonial state that has historically struggled both with Papua New Guinean's competing forms of belonging and loyalty (Barker, 2013, p. 156) and relations of dependency with a former colonial power. Neo-Pentecostalism has encountered a unique social and political context which has thus influenced the way religion is enmeshed with national ideology.

In order to delineate how this is so, I have described and analysed the nationalist discourse of a neo-Pentecostal political group, self-identified as Unity Team, which formed in the National Parliament of PNG. Using ethnographic evidence, I have investigated how neo-Pentecostal ideas were articulated in order to form a unique religious nationalism that has influenced state politics in PNG. I have highlighted two ways in which this formulation was carried out.

First, I have demonstrated how Biblical narratives of liberation, such as the Old Testament, were used by my informants in order to frame and imagine their own history and

path to independence from Australia, a former colonial power. Through the Unity Team's ideological lens, PNG's problematic past as a former colony coupled with its current dependency on foreign powers have given a unique character to the Pentecostal need of breaking with the past. Instead of it being only a matter of distancing oneself from traditional cultures, considered ungodly, the necessary break was also with PNG's colonial past. The Unity Team's ideology has, therefore, strong anticolonial undertones and demonstrates that the influence of Evangelical Christianity can result in a strengthening in nationalist ideas instead of its weakening in favour of transnational and delocalized connections (Martin, 2014; Robbins, 1998).

The second feature of the Unity Team's entanglement between nationalism and neo-Pentecostalism was the way in which the Unity Team appropriated new charismatic demonology and attention to spiritual battles to formulate their postcolonial critique. As I and other authors (Eriksen, 2009b; Rio et al., 2017) have shown, it is not uncommon for neo-Pentecostals to relate one's negative emotions or behavioural patterns to evil and satanic forces that need to be fought against through healing and deliverance rituals. Accordingly, the Unity Team also divides the world between evil and godly forces and see individuals and the nation as subjects that need to be freed from evil forces. However, their anticolonial stance broadens the scope of what kinds of states an agent is subjected to and from which she needs deliverance, such as oppression and exploitation. The Unity Team's spiritual battle against these evils became a struggle against current states created by neo-colonialism, transforming the Pentecostal social critique into an equally postcolonial one. In the case described by this article, then, colonialism and neo-colonialism are not only contexts that explain the rise and success of neo-Pentecostalism, but they are also realities that neo-Pentecostals talk about, criticize and act against.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> As Robbins (2004, p. 119) remarks “there is little standardization in social scientific usages of terms such as Pentecostal and Charismatic,” hence it might be useful to provide inform the reader of the ways in which these terms are used here. Following Eriksen (2018, p. 165), I use the term ‘neo-Pentecostalism’ to refer to a type of Evangelical Christianity that

both displays central characteristics of Pentecostalism, such as the belief in the immediate presence and experience of the Holy Spirit, while also presenting more contemporary features, such as the focus on spiritual warfare and healing.

<sup>2</sup> Research about nationalism in PNG is, of course, not limited to the works I include here (see Foster, 1997, 2002; Kavanamur et al., 2017; Otto & Thomas, 1997). A broader

comparison between nationalisms, instead of focusing on this one type of neo-Pentecostal variation, although highly relevant, is not the primary focus here.

<sup>3</sup> Ideological attempts to distinguish oneself, nationally and culturally, from colonial powers through different articulations of the notion of traditional culture were common across the Pacific (Keesing & Tonkinson, 1982; Lawson, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> All names have been changed to protect anonymity.

<sup>5</sup> In Tok Pisin, *wantok* means “one-language” or “one-talk,” and its use is dependent on scale, referring to people from the same ethnic background, language group or the same providence, among other commonalities.

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