

Commentary: Modernism, Jews, and Frazer

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ABSTRACT

The outstanding papers in this collection raise important points for not only a fuller understanding of the contemporary Pacific, but also for issues of identity and belonging much further afield. Specifically, I propose that we can approach these papers from a Jewish Studies perspective gazing upon Melanesia, but also from a Melanesianist perspective surveying the broad field of Jewish Studies. For in many respects, the case studies ask us to rethink conventional boundaries. Melanesians, I argue, draw variously on Israelite, Israeli, Biblical, and Jewish themes, all refracted through Christianity, to re-centre themselves in a global history so they are both valid and validated. But in so doing, we must ask ourselves, If Melanesians lay claim to Jewish affinities, broadly construed, what do these claims pose for Jewish identities as well as the very concept of identity in terms of notions of diaspora and centre? Indeed, if Melanesians are Jews, then how do we define not only Judaism but also Melanesia? My goal, then, is not so much to focus on the chapters as to use the chapters to probe fundamental questions about self and society in a globalised, mutable world.

Keywords: Jews, Melanesians, identity, Sepik River, Papua New Guinea.

In his mid-20th century modernist classic, *Tristes Tropiques*, Claude Levi-Strauss famously declared that he rarely tackled a new intellectual problem without first rereading a few pages of Karl Marx, either *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* or the *A Critique of Political Economy*. This intellectual bravado alluded to a particular philosophical outlook on how best to understand society – that beneath the ever-changing and subjective facades of experience we can discern or model a hidden, stable, hence, truthful pattern to social reality. Anthropology must therefore presume a fundamental discontinuity between reality and appearances precisely in order to glimpse continuity within and between cultures that otherwise remains obscure.

Today, Melanesianists and most other social scientists are reluctant to hang their intellectual caps on the totalising, and for this reason, now-dated modernist projects of Marx, Levi-Strauss, and other purveyors of Grand Theory. But I confess to glancing often at my first edition, three-volume set of Sir James Frazer's *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend, and Law* (1918). As an exemplar of the audacious encyclopaedic approach to cross-cultural comparison that characterised the proverbial armchairs of an earlier era, Frazer's compendium is second-to-none. Where else in the realm of legitimate scholarship are Melanesians likened to Ancient Israelites? The entire enterprise seems absurd (but see Boon 2008). Surely no reader of this journal seriously contemplates an ancient voyage of Hebrews to the southwestern Pacific Islands. Any parallels in cultural form quickly crumble amid the most basic methodological principle of functionalism. We might as well compare the shapes of noses. Hyperdiffusionism, as Malinowski (1931) made sure, had its day. The only Jews in Melanesia, to be somewhat facetious, are anthropologists.

But as this collection of absorbing papers so powerfully reveals, many Melanesians today disagree with scholarly orthodoxy and advocate fervently for pre-modern Hebraic diffusion

into the Pacific Islands. The intellectual folly of early anthropology is now an indigenous strategy for redressing the post-colonial persistence of global inequality. Melanesians draw on Jewishness, we learn, as refracted through vernacular Christianities, to (re)create their identities anew so as to merit, or so they hope, validation. Frazer is alive and well, albeit in ways he himself would never have imagined. And so is Levi-Strauss. For by looking to the Israelites, Melanesians glimpse the hidden patterns of reality.

I write this commentary as a long-time Melanesianist, but also as an anthropologist of Judaism and an ethnic American Jew (*e.g.*, Silverman 2001b, 2013a). This triangulation of moral, scholarly, and personal commitments frames my responses to the papers in this collection. The essays are at once about a region I have studied for over two decades – yet also about my own sense of self, not directly, but through the increasingly prominent role of the ‘Jew’ in shaping Melanesian identities and politics. My comments are thoroughly dialogical, then, irreducible to any singular statement or conclusion. My goal, however, is to push the boundaries of the significance of these papers away from a focus on Melanesia. I do so because these papers pose fascinating questions for other scholarly disciplines, especially Jewish Studies. In turn, I am confident that other intellectual terrains could greatly benefit from reading these papers. After all, the ‘Jew’ is a worldwide category. And it is from that global place that I offer my comments.

I begin with recent events in Papua New Guinea (PNG) concerning the role of Jews, Israelites, and the Old Testament in shaping the appearance of the nation-state, specifically, the façade of Parliament House. I then reflect on Israeli flags displayed in Wewak, a provincial town in PNG. Next, I turn to the individual papers. I see these varied Melanesian movements as a plea for validation, an effort to re-position Melanesia from the periphery of the global system to the centre of the divine cosmos, and a search for a stable structure to history and society. Melanesians, in this latter regard, seem rather modernist in their biblically framed yearning to attain the riches of modernity. I also highlight issues of diaspora, chronotopes, and exegetical strategies used to ‘make sense’ of biblical texts. Last, I propose that Melanesian ‘Jews’ raise intriguing problems for essentialising the boundaries and content of both Jewishness and the so-called ‘Melanesian Way’. For most scholars, there are Jews – and there are Melanesians who *think* they are Jews. The conventional categories of ‘Jew’ and ‘Melanesia’ remain distinct. I disagree. If there are ‘Melanesian Jews’, then we need to rethink *both* terms of that paradox. The papers in this collection do not themselves raise this issue. But in the spirit of broadening the dialogue, and also to complement the outstanding Introduction to the volume, I offer this provocation.

Finally, I briefly reflect on the Eastern Iatmul people of the Sepik River, PNG, who never voiced Hebraic affiliations. But in July 2014, Henry Gawi, unprompted and over a few bottles of South Pacific lager, declared ‘*mipela Jewish*’. That is, ‘We are Jews’. In this way, Henry and others appropriate the longest-standing trope of European otherness in order to claim kinship with Europeans and modernity. But I think it important not solely to try to explain why Melanesians claim Jewish identities or to remake themselves into a new kind of being. We anthropologists have a lot of experience with responding analytically. What about ethics?

THE SPEAKER AND THE LINTEL

Recent events in PNG (as of early 2015) dramatically make evident the power of the Hebraic God, albeit through the hands of humanity, to shape Melanesian identity. In December 2013, the Speaker of Parliament, Theo Zurenuoc, announced his plan to remove the carved spirit faces from the façade of Parliament House. Workers attacked the frieze with chainsaws. The event was bitterly debated in the country and featured in overseas media (see Eves et al. 2014; Schram

2014; Dundon, this issue). The membership of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) even deliberated the formal endorsement of fellow-anthropologist and Director of the National Museum and Art Gallery in PNG, Dr. Andrew Moutu, who opposed the destruction as ‘a perverse political form of millenarianism’ (Evava 2013). Many Catholic and other, some might say judicious, clergy in PNG agreed. But the Speaker and his proponents countenance no such theological moderation or pluralism. So offensive are the demonic idols, reported one pastor, that God cursed the nation. By purifying the country of its pagan legacy of ‘idolatry, immorality and witchcraft’, the Speaker aimed to set in motion a spiritual awakening that would finally enlist the Heavenly Father in the ever-elusive project of modernisation.

As part of his Melanesian Jeremiad, the Speaker also aspires to replace the massive, blasphemous ‘totem pole’ in the Grand Hall of Parliament with a National Unity Pole. The decorations on this *axis mundi* include carvings of the Bible, the PNG Constitution, the word ‘unity’ in each of the 800-plus vernacular languages of the country, and an eternal flame ‘symbolizing the light that comes from the Word of God’ (Zurenuoc 2013). The Unity Pole would usher in an era of morality and prosperity by renouncing Satan and rebirthing the country as godly. In fact, the Unity Pole would also include a copy of the prior ‘New Covenant Between the God of Israel, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and the People of Papua New Guinea’ signed in 2007 by Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, the first and several-term Prime Minister of the country.¹ Both covenants affirmed divine Law as the rule of the land.

Not incidentally, the Grand Chief’s 2007 covenant was ‘witnessed’ by Reverend Michael Maeliau of the Deep Sea Canoe movement, discussed in Timmer’s and Brown’s essays in this issue, who claims to have located the Lost Temple on Malaita, Solomon Islands.² Another signatory was Reverend Michael Sanasi, Coordinator of the All Pacific Prayer Assembly in PNG. The online invitation to one such rally displayed two drawings, one of a trio of yarmulke-clad Israelites, arms raised, trumpet blaring, and standing atop the wall of Jerusalem (Sanasi 2007). The other depicted an outrigger canoe adorned with the PNG flag, sailing to the Holy Land. In all these declarations and iconography, we see a slippery semantic substitution of Melanesians for Jews in pursuit of utopian, millenarian ideas – a course of action mapped by the Creator, leading to salvation.

The Speaker of Parliament and his supporters are all avowed Christians of a fundamentalist or Pentecostal orientation. As such, much of their rhetoric and symbolism is drawn from the *Tanakh*,³ the Hebrew acronym for the ‘Old Testament’, which to the Speaker (no less than to Jews everywhere), is not so old at all. The Speaker advocates a fuzzy supersessionist or Covenant Theology whereby Christ actualises the promises made by the Hebraic God to Israel, but does not outright replace the totality of Mosaic Law. Indeed, one senses that the Speaker and his adherents, as is often the case among fundamentalist Christians, are far more versed in the Hebrew Scriptures than the Gospels or Letters of Paul. It was the Speaker himself, in fact, who invoked ‘the God of Isaac, Abraham and Jacob’. Furthermore, one letter-writer to the *Post-Courier*, a PNG daily, reminded readers that a more recent Prime Minister, Peter O’Neill, ‘formally established diplomatic relations with Israel, the nation of God with whom Sir Michael made the covenant’ (Kuwimb 2013). O’Neill visited Israel in 2013, and ceremonially planted a tree in the Grove of Nations in Jerusalem. In several ways, then, the elected leadership of PNG ties the future of the nation to Jews both ancient and modern – without ever mentioning them by name. And the entire project of ‘cleansing’ a building from sin resembles nothing if not the priestly protocols known as the Holiness Code in the Book of Leviticus. The way forward is backwards – to be a Christian is to act like a type of Jew.

Prime Minister O’Neill also instituted Repentance Day (26 August). According to Pastor Jack Edward from the Shema Evangelism Ministry, the coordinator of the annual holiday, the occasion calls for ‘the people . . . to come together and pray and ask the Lord to forgive us for the wrongs that are happening in our nation’ (Fox 2011). The name of his ministry derives

from the monotheistic credo of Deuteronomy 6 that begins in Hebrew *Shema Yisrael*, ‘Hear O Israel’. Both orthodox and acculturated Jews recite this cornerstone prayer at nearly every devotional occasion; it should also accompany your final breath, especially in martyrdom. Although Jesus’ utterance of the prayer (Mark 12:28–34 and elsewhere) has been widely incorporated into Christian liturgies, most Jews understand the use of the term ‘*shema*’ by a Christian group as tantamount to theological theft. The term is often used by organisations intent on evangelising Jews. Religious sects in PNG, however, aim not to convert Jews, and thus ‘culminate’ Judaism out of existence. Rather, as these essays show, these movements seek to evangelise Melanesians by drawing on Jewish and Israelite imagery.

In fact, the PNG Community Development Minister, Loujaya (Kousa) Toni, reportedly drew support for the ‘cleansing’ of parliament from meetings with messianic groups during a visit to Israel (Radio New Zealand International 2013). These non-Melanesian ‘Prayer Warriors’ linked the prosperity of PNG to the destruction of the demonic symbols, and allegedly planned to travel to PNG in 2014 to help complete the purging. I do not know if they ever did so. But a worldwide Jewish news service reported in 2007 that a delegation from PNG visited Israel, and donated gold bullions – even some of their wedding rings – to the Temple Institute, a controversial Ultra-Orthodox Jewish organisation in Jerusalem, much-beloved by Christian evangelical groups, dedicated to rebuilding the Temple at a moment’s notice (Nahshoni 2007). Papua New Guineans, Jews, Hebrews, Israelites, Israelis . . . Frazer could not have done one better.

Or Marx, for that matter. The goal of modernist social science to discover the schema of social life seems ever more appealing to Melanesians. In the 1950s and 1960s, Highland New Guinea ethnographers railed against African-derived models of social structure for wrongly attributing formal order to Melanesian societies. Today, anthropologists often appeal to metaphors of instability to understand the post-colonial region. But Melanesians, like Marx and Levi-Strauss, now favour an unwavering pattern to history that explains and stabilises what otherwise appear to be the detached fragments of their social reality.

Frazer, like Marx, understood history as moral progress. In the Preface to *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, Frazer (1918:10) admitted to dwelling on the ‘lower side of Ancient Hebrew life’. But such ‘traces of savagery and superstition’, he continued, which ‘underlay the civilisation of ancient Israel’ no less than modern Europe, only serve to highlight ‘the glory of a people, which from such dark depths of ignorance and cruelty, could rise to such bright heights of wisdom and virtue’. Frazer thus seemed to de-centre Victorian virtue and imply that any ‘base people’ might aspire to moral ascension. The speaker of the PNG Parliament, I suggest, and the Melanesians discussed in this issue, would surely agree.

Among contemporary Melanesianists, Marilyn Strathern (1990) alone has seriously discussed *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*. She sees Frazer’s compulsive amassing of decontextualised ethnographic facts as negating ‘any sense of specificity’ about either the Israelites or Melanesians. Of course, Frazer’s goal was not to showcase fine-grained ethnology, but to establish the credibility of biblical customs through parallels with tribal peoples. Frazer looked to Melanesians to validate the Hebrews. Today, Melanesians draw on biblical practices and affirm a quasi-Jewish identity to validate themselves. By reducing cultural specificity, Frazer marvelled at how far the Israelites had come. The Melanesians in this issue do likewise in order to see how far they might go.

ISRAELI FLAGS IN WEWAK

In 2008, I returned briefly to Wewak after a long hiatus. Much had changed, of course, including the arrival of mobile phones, brightly printed public health posters about HIV and



Figure 1: An Israeli flag in a tradestore.

domestic violence, and Israeli flags (Fig. 1). One such flag, tattered and tacked to the wall of a trade store, seemed oddly juxtaposed with bottles of Coca-Cola, Gillette razor blades, and Colgate toothpaste. Nearby was a clock ornamented with a colourful portrait of Jesus, and computer printouts of several biblical passages that invoke Jerusalem, such as Zechariah 2:5 and Psalm 122:6. Melanesian space, time, commodity desire, and commercial success were thus folded onto Holy Land.

In fact, I glimpsed numerous pictures and texts pertaining to Jews, Israelis, and Israelites. This current collection of essays helps us understand the complex web of meanings that frames, and is framed by, this increasingly common imagery. The flags do not endorse a particular nation-state, at least not in terms that most inhabitants of modern Israel – never mind most diasporic Jews – might approve. The tradestore proprietor likely knows little about the rise of historical Zionism in the late 19th century and might even be aghast at its secular, socialist roots.

The flag also does not celebrate Judaism *on its own terms*. Rather, the flag declares affiliation with a diffuse notion of Jewishness vaguely associated with Jesus. Of course, the form of Judaism familiar to Jesus has not been practised for over two millennia. Jesus was not a Jew in any sense that would be recognised by Jews today – and most Jews today would hardly be recognised as Jewish by Melanesians. Jesus and other first-century Jews practised Second Temple Judaism, which pivoted around hereditary priests, animal sacrifice, and not surprisingly, the Second Jerusalem Temple, all of which perished during a failed revolt against Rome in 70 ACE. In my view, then, Israeli flags in Melanesia today are best understood as localised variants of Christian Zionism or philosemitism (see, *e.g.*, Lassner and Trubowitz 2008; Karp and Sutcliffe 2011). The flag rejoices in the *idea* or *ideal* of Jews as part of a



Figure 2: Sign for the Israel Ministry Centre, Wewak, Papua New Guinea.

Christian narrative that fuses modernity with heavenly salvation. The route to a prosperous future lies not in the Melanesian past of ‘idolatry, immorality, and witchcraft’, to invoke the Speaker of Parliament, but in a ‘new covenant’ with the Hebrew Scriptures, and thus with ‘Jews’, as incarnated in Christ.

A few years later, I saw even more Israeli flags in Wewak. Four were draped outside an electrical repair shop. Another was painted on the side of a house. Posters throughout town advertised a guest speaking at the East Sepik Messianic Congregation on the topic of ‘It is the Time of Realignment & Torah Restoration’. This Torah was not the Five Books of Moses as understood by Jews, but as interpreted as a grand allegory of the Saviour. Similarly, the sign for the Israel Ministry Centre (Fig. 2) displays unmistakably Jewish symbols, including a yarmulke, *tallit* or prayer shawl, and seven-branched menorah, not to attract Jewish congregants, but to communicate the conviction that PNG can thrive by assimilating into its identity the role of the Jew as defined by evangelical Christianity. That said, paintings on another house (Fig. 3) included the Israeli flag and the Lion of Judah, but also stylised spirit faces and crocodiles, suggesting that the local matrix of Jewishness, Christianity, tradition, and indigeneity resists any simple or stable configuration.

THE PAPERS

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, writes Lynda Newland, Maori leaders by the time of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 invoked the ancient Hebrews to challenge ‘foreign rule’ and European hegemony. The same rhetorical repertoire of desolation, exile, and Babylon occurs in African-



Figure 3: Paintings, Wewak, Papua New Guinea.

American spirituals and Rastafarian reggae. Tropes of Jewishness are widely employed in the service of resistance. Yet Fijians did not initially incorporate Old Testament tales into their oral narratives to defy colonialism but, instead, to communicate with missionaries and other Europeans across a vast gulf, we might say, of power. The ‘lost tribes’ trope was an instrumental claim to access European knowledge and technology. Such claims drew on the grammars of Christianity as well as Western scientific discourses – at that time, needless to say – preoccupied with diffusionism and the search for origins. Local appropriations of biblical imagery, in other words, were an effort to be seen and heard, that is, to engage with Europeans using biblical signifiers that sometimes conveyed meanings that were misconstrued by the very missionaries and Europeans who conveyed those signifiers. Ironically, these appeals to ‘Jewishness’ occurred in an era when Jews themselves were colonised subjects across Europe.

Earlier, I mentioned the proclivities of Melanesians, like fundamentalist Christians everywhere, to invoke the Old rather than New Testament. To a large degree, as Newland comments, local people readily identify with the content of the Hebrew Bible, such as agricultural cycles, genealogies, and ritual protocols. As many Melanesians feel mired in a state of abjection, I add, it is no surprise they are drawn to a religious system interwoven with notions of purity, pollution, and cleansing. It is not theology that drives Melanesians to claim Jewishness, but what Sahlins (1985) called the ‘structure of the conjuncture’.

At the same time, Fijians and other Melanesians draw on the Bible to affirm global sameness rather than to account for cross-cultural differences, thus inverting, in a sense, the tale of Babel (see Derrida 1991). Gewertz and Errington (1991, Chapter Five) made a similar argument for an effort by the Chambri of PNG in the 1980s to write their own ‘Bible’, a collection of ancestral narratives that Westerners would hopefully invest with as much ‘truth’

value as Scripture. Fijians also harnessed the Bible to challenge Europeans in various ways, most dramatically and recently in the 1980s to justify Sitivini Rabuka's military coup. Before then, continues Newland, Fijian invocations of the Old Testament, Jews, and Ancient Israelites were, in addition to a means of engaging with missionaries, local political strategies. In fact, one has the sense from Newland's paper that we ought not even to speak about 'Fijians' or any other group voicing appeals to 'lost tribes', as if such groups were undifferentiated or homogenous polities. Rather, Newland shows us the crucial importance of focusing on how particular leaders and groups harnessed Israelite tropes to advance specific claims in precise historical and political settings.

Typically, argue anthropologists, Melanesians deploy Hebraic identities to become better Christians. Such affirmations are not really about Jews. But I want to suggest that the boundaries between pseudo-Melanesian Jews, or neo-Jews, and authentic Jews are far less clear. If Melanesians profess a Jewish identity, then such avowals, I propose, require us to interrogate not just Melanesian subjectivities, but Jewish ones as well. This, in large degree, is my overarching theme.

Edwin Jones's paper, also about Fiji, tells that while some iTaukei or indigenous Fijians claim descent from a Lost Tribe of Israel, travelling by canoe from Africa, they also understand their ancestors to have emerged from the local hills. Syncretism need not imply seamless integration. Methodist Fijians weave together local practices and Old Testament passages and so dwell simultaneously in Melanesian and biblically-based cartographies. Thus iTaukei Fijians fuse biblical cleansing rites with indigenous practices to address historical events, such as the 19th-century murder of a missionary, that explain contemporary travails. Throughout the issue, Melanesians identify with 'Jews' in order to thrive in both local and global spheres. The importance of the Lost Tribe trope is not that Fijians and other Melanesians are *lost*, but that they are *found*, indeed, centred on the compass of salvation.

Moreover, Melanesian approaches to biblical texts recall, at least in my reading of these essays, the tradition of classic rabbinic exegesis, called *midrash*. In this interpretive approach, 'the [sacred] text is realised in being interpreted' (Gruenwald 1993:11–12). The papers in this volume attest to the emergence of what might be called Melanesian *midrashic* strategies in which the Old Testament becomes a real force in everyday lives only through interpretive dialogue with the political economy of the post-colony.

Terry Brown, the former Anglican bishop of Malaita, writes about George Umai's ethno-theology that traces Malaitans to Jews through a remarkable migration that included Jerusalem, South America, South Africa, India, and the interment of the Ark of the Covenant on Malaita. The specifics of Umai's account are novel. But the structure of his tale is classically Melanesian in its (re)configuration of mythic history, migration, geography, and genealogy in order to make sense of the present and to discern a moral framework for action. Umai's account, too, like many such scenarios in the issue, establishes Melanesia as a kind of *Ur-home*, some original society of ancient Jews that preceded Europeans and Christianity.

Several authors in the issue – Brown, Timmer, Maggio – argue that Melanesian appeals to biblical idioms and tropes of Jewishness seek to engage with, rather than shun, modernity. Such rhetoric also challenges the secular roots of the nation-state. Max Weber (1946), who famously argued that modernity required the 'disenchantment of the world', would have been puzzled. The papers in this volume certainly provide evidence for the existence of what S.N. Eisenstadt (2000) and others, including Hefner (1998) as discussed in the Introduction, termed 'multiple modernities'. These papers, too, of course, provoke the idea of a multiplicity of 'Judaisms' – but a plurality that expands beyond the varieties of Jewish practices normally classified as authentically Jewish by most Jews living in the West. Ironically, the final editing of this Commentary (July 2015) occurs when there is considerable dialogue and controversy in the USA and Israel over the legitimate place, if any, for so-called 'black Jews' or 'Hebrew

Israelites' in the wider Jewish community (see Ben-Ari 2015; MaNishtana 2015). Despite Weber, there is considerable enchantment with Jews at the margins of normative Judaism – and considerable tension over who defines the 'centre', both in Melanesia and beyond.

I find George Umai's Ark, hidden and buried on Malaita, a captivating vessel of anti-Weberian enchantment both traditional and modern. This Ark contains all manner of regalia – and all seen as fully enchanted by Melanesians, if not by the Germans and Australians who once reigned with flag, medal, and crown – as well as magical and sacerdotal wonders drawn from both a men's house and a church. The Ark also evokes a container or basket, perhaps to symbolise uterine generativity (see, *e.g.*, Losche 1995), and recalls the inside/outside ontology that organises knowledge across Melanesia and Aboriginal Australia (Silverman 2001a:197). Europeans revealed Scripture to Melanesians – but Melanesians discovered (or re-discovered) the hidden truth: that local people were the original elect of God. In all the papers, Melanesians reject their unseemly slot at the global periphery and draw on the Hebrew Bible and notions of Jewishness to position themselves at the centre of space, time, and history.

We read similar issues in Jones's paper on Methodist genealogies in Highland Viti Levu, Fiji. I was fascinated to learn that the editor of a weekly newspaper understood 'Fiji' as an acronym for 'Father of Israel in Jewish Island'. This interpretation recalls the hermeneutic method known as *gematria* that flourished in medieval Judaism. The rabbis assigned numerical values to biblical letters and phrases, thus revealing esoteric meanings. I am not asserting that rabbinic Judaism directly influenced Melanesians. Nor am I advocating a universal theory of reading. Rather, I want to ask two questions. First, what are Melanesian modes of biblical exegesis? And, second, might we illuminate the unique contours of these interpretative styles, if any exist, through comparison with other traditions such as the very 'Judaism' Melanesians now often invoke?

Jaap Timmer probes Old Testament themes among To'abaita speakers on North Malaita, Solomon Islands. Here, too, biblical Israel models a utopia that will enable success in the contemporary world and justify, moreover, local people's ties to the land. Timmer focuses on the All People's Prayer Assembly (APPA), also called the Deep Sea Canoe Movement, that syncretically integrates political aspirations for local sovereignty with missionary teachings about Israel and, most interestingly, popular American evangelical books. The To'abaita understand the Holy Land as a real place overseas and as a portable ideal of a 'just nation' that can rightly be situated on Malaita. By recasting *kastom* as Christianity, and Mosaic law as *kastom*, they again fuse nationalism with vernacular, Christian-inspired notions of Jews and Hebrews.

It is common to contrast traditional regimes of Melanesian epistemology, which attribute power to oblique metaphor, concealment, and partial disclosure, with Western and Christian formations that vest authority in direct speech, revelation, and the accumulation of knowledge (*e.g.*, Barth 1990; Weiner 2001). In Alison Dundon's paper, for example, we learn that a revival in the 1960s among Gogodala students of Western Province in PNG revealed the inclusion of an apical ancestor, Bani, among the biblical tribe of Benjamin. Although drawing on different epistemologies, the encounter between local mythology and global Christianity is not one of coexistence or some 'clash of civilisation'. Rather, two systems are opposed *and* fused into a single framework that seemingly tidies up all the loose ends of post-colonial social life. If anything, the essays in this collection speak against any singular 'reading' of contemporary Melanesian identity much as they speak to the complex, nuanced ways that Melanesians 'read' the Bible through various modes of translation, literacy, and intertextuality.

Throughout Melanesia, a classic political plot is to differentiate one's group genealogically from social rivals in order to affirm primacy, often by staking originary claims to land. In these case studies, however, the local landscape and local genealogies now appear global in scope, encompassing 'Jews' both ancient or modern as a form of agency. These imagined

biblical topographies and identities also express and calm anxieties over land alienation, resource extraction, global warming, pollution, and other entailments of 'development'. By identifying with Jews, however locally configured, Melanesians now often incorporate a diasporic dimension into their identities even as they insist on autochthony. This collection, then, lends new perspectives to studies of Pacific Island diasporas (*e.g.*, Spickard 2002) as well as to broader theories of post-colonial diasporas that specifically address Jews (*e.g.*, Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; see also Clifford 1997a). I return to this point later.

Timmer also argues that the APPA seeks to forge a covenantal community, rooted in Mosaic Law, that will transcend geographic borders, places, and 'lineage-based ontologies' and thus represents an alternative, 'mono-ontological' and placeless form of nation-making with 'emotional borders'. Similarly, Boyarin and Boyarin (1995) argue that the practices of circumcision (*brit milah*) and wearing *yarmulkes* allow male religious Jews to resist certain claims of the state by defining Jews as native to 'tradition' rather than 'nation'. Maggio's essay makes much the same point concerning 'Kingdom tok' in Honiara, a political discourse that challenges normative notions of state and church as well as European values and institutions. Melanesian claims to Jewishness are thus dialogical, in Bakhtin's (1984) sense of the term, both acceding to yet resisting various dimensions of modernity.

Why do so many Pacific Islanders now find 'Jews', Israelites, and the biblical era so compelling? The answer is partly the persuasive force of the prophetic tradition, and partly the parallels, as noted earlier, between the Old Testament and traditional Melanesia. Local people, too, often connect worldly riches to Scripture or otherworldly salvation. Additionally, Judaised Melanesians build on the traditional outlook that moral action must conform to the topographic and numinous traces left by the ancestral spirits who created the world, thus folding space and time. In this framework, Jerusalem and Malaita, for example, or biblical and modern, coalesce into a single 'chronotope' (Bakhtin 1981) or grand narrative plot.

Many of the papers in the collection report on a high degree of splitting among Melanesian evangelical groups. This process also takes root in traditional regional politics. Rodolfo Maggio argues that autonomy and self-determination are key issues for Pentecostal Christian and 'Jewish' groups in Honiara. But these are quintessentially Melanesian desires that dialogically argue against reciprocity and social dependence even as Melanesian society so fundamentally revolves around gift-exchange (*e.g.*, Silverman 2001b). Likewise, Melanesians align with Jews, Israelites, and Israelis in order to enter the Kingdom of God *on their own terms*, Maggio continues, without relying on Western rules and institutions. Here, again, we see a contrary or doubled outlook, to invoke Bakhtin, on the relationship between autochthony and importation.

In one way or another, all the papers show that Melanesians identify with Jews – as they often do with Christianity (*e.g.*, Tomlinson and McDougall 2012) – to advance claims on or against the post-colonial state. Marx notwithstanding, worship here doubles for political, social, and economic agency. But the linkage between Scripture and affluence was never fully revealed by missionaries and other Westerners. The key to the prosperity gospel remains, in classic Melanesian fashion, concealed. All the papers, then, offer us glimpses into Melanesian exegetical strategies that both resist yet continue the project of missionisation. Melanesians read Jewishness, we might say, between the lines.

For me, a key question that repeatedly arises from this collection is, Who are Jews? Is Jewishness self-defined or socially constructed? Is it inherited, somatic, or essentialised? The interdisciplinary literature on contemporary Jewish identity is substantial (*e.g.*, Aviv and Shneer 2005). Many now speak about 'open source Judaism', a sort of Jewish-is-as-Jewish-does approach that values fluidity, porous boundaries, iconoclasm, and distrust of authoritative 'gatekeepers' (see Silverman 2013a, Chapter Nine). Young Jews especially delight in embrac-

ing what Clifford (1997b:176, 182) calls ‘cultural hybridity’ and ‘inventive impurity’ – as do, we learn from the papers in this collection, Melanesians who also wish to claim membership in the covenantal community.

The Gogodala, tells Dundon, profoundly identify with ‘Jews’ to feel special and chosen. Christianity is a universalising religion, of course; Judaism, far more particularistic. By claiming a ‘chosen’ status, the Gogodala join the wider Christian community while also standing apart as uniquely favoured. One gains recognition through appeals to both sameness and primacy. Ironically, Jews throughout European history also garnered considerable recognition, but not preeminence. Just the opposite: Jews were despised as outsiders, the ordinary Others who impeded the universalising message of Christianity through their stiff-necked, stubborn perseverance, to invoke God in Exodus 29, never mind from the crime of deicide (see Boyarin 1994). Melanesians who claim affinities with Jews want neither to practise normative rabbinic Judaism nor to occupy the theological slot long filled by European Jewry. Rather, Melanesians want a share of the covenantal promise.

In some instances, as Dundon discusses, Melanesians claim this portion through a bodily connection to Jews. Gogodala villagers even enlisted Tudor Parfitt, then at the University of London, to vouchsafe this kinship through DNA. A splinter group, called the Congregation of Evangelical Fellowship, now attends Saturday or Shabbat prayer services, greets acquaintances with ‘Shalom’, dress in blue and white, study Hebrew, carry small Israeli flags, and recite the *Shema* prayer I discussed earlier. They yearn to relocate to Israel, in a settlement laden with all the technological appurtenances they now lack. They are, to their understanding, legitimate Jews – and practise the full calendric repertoire of Jewish holidays, all assisted by Olim Aid International, a Queensland-based evangelical organisation promoting premillennial dispensationalism.

For Melanesians, I have suggested, the ‘Jews’ form an ambiguous, protean category: Otherly and self; post-colonial and biblical; local yet distant; real and imaginary; past, present, and future. Modern ‘Israelis’, shows John Cox, form another Jewish category of shifting boundaries that will hopefully redress the absence of ‘development’. Cox juxtaposes the allure of Israel against local people’s perceptions in PNG of ‘whitemen’, Asians, and themselves. Each of the latter three groups lacks one element of the triumvirate – culture, development, or proper ethics – that promises prosperity. Only Israel, a modern country blessed with ancient virtue and cutting-edge technology, united with God, possesses all three qualities. Thus only Jews can deliver the nation from moral and material impoverishment.

Surely no early missionary predicted that their Melanesian flock would someday advance a quasi-Jewish identity as the key to prosperity. The essays here speak not to the spread of a single form of worldwide subjectivity, or the ‘strong’ thesis of globalisation, but to the ‘weak’ view in which ‘people make themselves, but under circumstances not entirely of their own choosing’ (Foster 2008:8). Even the prophets did not see the rise of Melanesian Jews. Or anthropologists.

BUT IS IT GOOD FOR MELANESIANS . . . AND GOOD FOR JEWS?

The ‘Jew’ to the Melanesians discussed in these papers is not the execrable fiend who betrayed Christ and must therefore suffer damnation unless he submits to the purifying waters of baptism. The Jew is not the circumcised, circumcising monster who ravages Christendom through blasphemy, host desecration, ritual murder, coin clipping, and usury (Silverman 2006, Chapter Eight). Rather, the Jew is beloved – perhaps wayward, but basically an exemplar of sorts. If the Jew suffers, it is not because he is evil. It is because he is lost. But he enables Melanesians to be ‘found’, and thus to achieve global, if not cosmic, validation.

The androcentric focus in the previous paragraph intends to highlight the still-understudied role of gender in Melanesian Jewish Christianities. In what ways do claimed affinities with Jews, Israelites, and Israelis, (re)shape what Strathern (1988) called same-sex and cross-sex relations? Or do these new religious movements call for a new paradigm of gender altogether? How do these discourses intersect with changing notions of the family, childhood, parenting, domesticity, and sexuality? Is the imagined 'Jew' male or female? Do men and women 'read' and 'hear' the Bible differently? There is much more to be said on gender.

For most (non-Melanesian) Jews, contemporary philosemitism, especially in evangelical America, is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, these parishioners are resoundingly, often unconditionally supportive of the state of Israel – far more so than many liberal Jews. But when born-again Christians enthusiastically gush 'I love Judaism' – and I speak from honest experience – the response is often far from gleeful. After all, this adoration is rooted in an eschatology that pivots not only on the ingathering of the Jewish diaspora in Jerusalem and the Second Coming, but also in an ultimate decision by Jews to either accept Christ or suffer the hellish consequences. Either way, Judaism is terminated. Both antisemitism and philosemitism, however different, often position Jews at the centre of a purposeful divine history that culminates in the End Times. Such a history, of course, is not of Jewish making. And neither are the images of Jews, Israelites, and Israelis in modern Melanesia.

Melanesian Christians enthralled with Judaism, I am proposing, seek to escape their historical legacy as colonial subjects by unwittingly reproducing the theological and rhetorical colonisation of Judaism. How ironic. When Melanesians identify as Jews, regardless of their intent, does the outcome further position both groups at the periphery – or reposition Melanesians and Jews in new configurations? There is no easy logic at play that governs this complex chessboard of identity. The essays in this collection pose multiple, multi-sited, and sometimes troubling questions, at least to this American Jewish reader.

The papers raise fascinating questions about the boundaries around Judaism, Christianity, and even Melanesia. Admittedly, some may argue that Melanesian claimants to Jewishness are really Christians, not Jews, and thus the discourse encourages no rethinking of Jewish self-definitions. And, to be sure, most Melanesians who draw on 'Jewish' themes self-identify as Christians, not Jews, and seek connections to ancient Israel, not modern Judaism. Nonetheless, I want, as I indicated, to push on these boundaries even as several authors in the collection disagree somewhat with this tack. For one, essentialised definitions of Jewishness tend to fail. For another, Jews themselves have debated the borders and content of the covenantal community for centuries, especially after the rise of the reform movement in the 19th century. Indeed, Judaism is often defined by non-Jews in terms of what it is *not*, namely, a community that does not 'believe' in Christ. Of course, Messianic Jews (e.g., 'Jews for Jesus') and many Melanesians, as we learn from these papers, reject this definition by advocating for a porous boundary around Judaism.

Judaism is tribal. Membership is mainly based on descent. Most people who claim Jewishness make a statement about birth, not about a well-defined set of rites and beliefs. But the bodily inheritance of Jewish identity is contested. Orthodox, Haredi, and Conservative Jews all approach religious law in vastly different ways, but uniformly affirm matrilineality. Karaites, a minute sect unknown to most Jews, adhere to patrilineality. And the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, which agree on few points of theology and ritual, both recognise as fully Jewish anyone born to a Jewish mother or father. None of these groups would welcome Melanesian 'Jews'. Nor would modern Israel, where the legal construct of the 'right of return' would extend only tourist visas, not citizenship, to our pseudo-Jews. It is also unlikely that any Melanesian 'Jew' arriving in Boston or Sydney for Shabbat morning services would receive the honour known as an *aliyah*, that is, the privilege of reciting the benediction

before the chanting of a portion of Torah. But in a broader context, I see no *a priori* reason why these Melanesians cannot be included as legitimate interlocutors in the open-ended conversation over Jewish identity. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to define, outside Orthodox circles, *any* precept or practice as *essential* to Jewishness. The fluid, contested boundaries of Jewishness now seem all the more slippery after reading this collection. Does Judaism now include Melanesia? And does Melanesia now include Jews?

Some readers of these essays may find the invocation of Jewishness by indigenous Pacific Islanders problematic. If one views Melanesian ‘Israelites’ as categorically non-Jewish, then local people engage not in scriptural reinterpretation, but in religious appropriation. The same issue arises in regard to biblical components of Rastafarianism (*e.g.*, Murrell and Williams 1998; Thompson 2012). But this begs the question: Who owns Jewish rituals, prayers, and symbols? What is the minority status of the Jew in post-colonial Melanesia? Is the Melanesian display of Jewish images equivalent to white Australians and Americans using, say, the didgeridoo? Many strands of Christianity have long challenged the covenantal validity of people who affirm a Jewish identity on the basis of genealogy alone. Are Pacific Islanders unwitting contributors to these historical efforts to erase Jewishness? Are Melanesians thus post-colonial colonizers? It is easy to dismiss Melanesian claims to Jewishness as farfetched and silly, a misplaced understanding of Christianity or missionary teachings. I suggest that we take these claims of Jewishness seriously, probe the resulting implications, and raise the profound questions.

Melanesians identify as Jews so their lives will then unfold on a stage of cosmic proportions, set by the Heavenly Father, scripted by the Word. I am reminded of the *Left Behind* series of novels, with sales exceeding 63 million titles worldwide, never mind associated movies, video games, music, and other paraphernalia. According to Frykholm (2007), this pop culture phenomenon addresses anxieties that we also see in Melanesian affirmations of Judaism: offering ‘a means to an ordered world’ amid the moral chaos of modernity, and providing a ‘narrative drama’ that offers individuals ‘a specific and exciting role in human history’ (Frykholm 2007:99). I am not suggesting that Melanesians have read these novels (although surely some have done so). Rather, both the *Left Behind* series and Melanesian Judaisms lend people divine validation. Your path is clear; your ethical compass unerring; your future assured.

The study of Melanesian Christianity and missionisation is now a well-established subfield of anthropology (*e.g.*, Barker 1992, Huber and Lutkehaus 1999). But few anthropologists ask moral questions. Do Melanesian affirmations of Jewishness benefit Melanesians? How about Jews? Christian-derived notions of sin, forgiveness, reconciliation, and expiation often locate the cause of under-development *within* the local community (*e.g.*, Robbins 2004), not in the structure of the capitalist world system. In 2010, one of my village brothers, still mourning the loss of two children and bemoaning the fact that the village seemed to be ‘going backwards’, asked me earnestly, ‘What are we doing wrong such that we live this way?’ Frankly, I answered, nothing. But villagers are torn when assigning blame, at once accusing missionaries and Australians of ‘blocking the road’ to material plenitude while simultaneously believing, as the local catechist preaches, that prosperity will come when the village ‘raises up its spiritual side with Jesus’ (Silverman 2013b). Needless to say, my own faith in Jesus or Jewishness to pave the path to modernity is rather more equivocal. But my Iatmul friends disagree. Indeed, they themselves have recently asked aloud if their own ancestry does not intersect with the Ancient Israelites. And as I stated at the onset of this Conclusion, these questions *only* surfaced in the community within the past few years, and much to my surprise. Like classic ‘cargo cult’ ideation (see Silverman 2013b), I had long concluded that such notions were characteristic of other regions of Melanesia, *not* the middle Sepik. I was wrong.

Eastern Iatmul today openly discusses the possibility of genealogical connections to the Ancient Israelites on the basis of several parallels between indigenous and biblical traditions. Some perceive a crucifix in the shape of wooden house ladders, the beams lashed to house posts, and the tall stakes that support yam shoots. Others equate the low earthen mounds that flank cult houses with the ancient hills of Jerusalem or the mountains from which the Israelites prayed to God to destroy their enemies. The female figure that supports the roof of the men's house, called Vendigarlagwa, is likened to an angel. The periodic slaughter of a dog or pig to redress disputes or appease spirits recalls biblical sacrifices. And several mythic culture heroes resemble biblical figures, such as Moim, the 'father of all humans'. With his long birdlike nose, Moim seduced many women, and so was murdered. Jesus, too, attracted many female followers, and was also killed. Moim, together with his son and bird-spirit, formed a holy trinity. Last, several biblical commandments and regulations, such as the bans on adultery and 'touching your father's bed', resemble ancestral law. These convergences suggest, as one man in 2014 said, 'we are the blood of Israel'.

Melanesians, I learned in 2014, originally crossed the sea from a place called 'Shalom', near Germany. The original language was Iatmul until God toppled the 'Tower of Babylon' and 'turned' the original tongue of humanity into all the different vernaculars today. Humanity was then ferried around the world in the ancestral canoe of the Shui Aimasa patriclan, called Tumtummeli, which eventually put ashore at Tambunum with local people as well as Jesus in the guise of Moim, who built the first church. For proof, my interlocutors referred to the 'angel' of Vendigarlagwa, as I specified earlier, and the eagle finial perched atop cult houses, another such celestial being mentioned in the Bible. They also pointed to the Southern Cross constellation as yet further confirmation of their Israelite identity.

Some readers may marvel at the seemingly boundless capacity of Melanesians for cultural creativity. I suspect that many Anthropology 101 instructors have responded to students' claims about 'human nature' with the words 'Yes, but in Melanesia. . .' Other readers will find rich empirical data in these essay on which to hone their analytic tools. But surely, any such intellectual glee must be tempered by the question of ethics. With the exception of the urban elite, the vast majority of Melanesians, at least in my experience, remain mired in dire poverty and seem either deeply pessimistic about their future, or overly optimistic through a temporary cargoistic endeavour. How, then, should we – Western intellectuals and anthropologists – morally respond?

Starting in the mid-19th century, most Jews in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States acculturated in order to be modern. Melanesians now do the same, only by turning towards religious Judaism. In all the accounts in this issue, Jews ancient and modern are *real* ancestors. But the 'Jew' to Melanesians is also a sign that mediates post-colonial contradictions. The Israelite serves as a ready-made cipher for the oppressed. But when Bob Marley, African-Americans, and Melanesians draw on Psalm 137 and weep by the rivers of Babylon, are Jews included in this collective yearning for Zion? Or are Jews, in a fascinating but troublesome twist, identified as Nebuchadnezzar? (Indeed, it would be interesting to pursue the racial image of the Jew and Israelite in contemporary Melanesia.) When Melanesians claim Jewishness, in other words, where does that leave the Jews? There is, then, a complex embedding of contrary discourses in these essays between colonial and post-colonial, oppressor and oppressed, Jew and Melanesian. For while these essays concern Melanesia, they also touch on the unstable imagery of the Jew in contemporary multicultural society (see Gilman 2006, Guttman 2013, Mufti 2007). For this reason, it would be a shame if this issue was read only by Melanesianists and anthropologists of Christianity.

Do Melanesians gain from being Jewish? Do Jews? I suppose time will tell. But readers from many disciplines will benefit from this collection. The great value of this collection of compelling essays is not confined to what they tell us about the shifting identities of *Christian*

Melanesians who seek as *Jews* to negotiate varying paths to success through the world system. These essays also raise critical issues about representation and marginality – about who can claim what sorts of identities – in a global world where rabbis now travel to Melanesia to see if Melanesians once travelled from the Holy Land. Melanesians draw on unstable images of Jews, Israelites, and Israelis – on notions of ‘home’ and ‘diaspora’ – to try to anchor their historical experiences, contemporary plight, and future aspirations to a grand plan that will offer some solace amid dashed expectations, extraordinary upheavals, and relentless reminders that, as far as the rest of the world seems concerned, to be Melanesian is to not matter at all. The papers in this issue contribute keen insights to wider regional, scholarly, and global dialogues on how to imagine both Self and Other in a way that validates everybody as an authentic member of the global system.

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NOTES

1. For a copy of the covenant, see The Masalai Blog (2013).
2. Liberty Productions on Malaita has produced a documentary, ‘The Lost Temple Discovery!’ See Timmer (2011).
3. The Hebrew word *Tanach* derives from the first letter of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), or *Torah* (Five Books of Moses), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings).

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