

Heirs to Biblical Prophecy

The All Peoples Prayer Assembly in Solomon Islands

Jaap Timmer

ABSTRACT: The notion that forebears of Solomon Islanders might be descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel is widespread among To'abaita speakers in North Malaita, and it features in a particular way in the theology of the popular All Peoples Prayer Assembly (APPA), also known as the Deep Sea Canoe Movement. Prominent in this boast of an Israelite genealogy is a utopian fantasy of a just "Israel" grounded in the ancestral soil of the island of Malaita. This article describes the APPA worldview as an alternative modernity that is meaningful to the To'abaitans because it provides a new sense of self and a shared destiny. Although APPA's theology relates to the people's socio-economic concerns, it reveals more clearly the continuity of some key cultural models through changing global influences, local histories and cultural dynamics.

KEYWORDS: All Peoples Prayer Assembly, Deep Sea Canoe Movement, Christian modernity, To'abaita, Malaita, Solomon Islands

Over the last few decades, anthropologists have contributed much toward demonstrating that non-Western religious movements are contemporary expressions coeval with modernity in the West.¹ Challenging assumptions that relate rationality to modernity and irrationality to religious tradition, Michael Taussig, for example,

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 18, Issue 4, pages 16–34. ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480. (electronic). © 2015 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/nr.2015.18.4.16.

characterizes the way people in Venezuela see the modern state in terms of spirit possession.² In reference to Africa James Ferguson argues:

If non-Western cultures were not necessarily non-modern ones, then it would be necessary to develop a more pluralized understanding of modernity: not modernity in the singular (where the question is: Are you there yet or not?) but modernities in the plural, a variety of different *ways* of being modern: “alternative modernities.”³

The case I discuss in this article highlights the alternative modernity of religious, institutional and social distinctiveness of Christianity that has merged into indigenous To’abaita life in the northern region of Malaita, the most populous island of the nation-state of Solomon Islands in the Melanesia region of the Pacific. The general To’abaita expression of Christianity, which tends to identify To’abaitans as Israelites, has helped produce religion, custom and tradition (*kastom*) in historically and locally specific ways, showing the connection between seemingly disparate forms of religiosity and forces of globalization. I will trace the historical significance of Christianity among To’abaitans, its production of a certain awareness of the region and the world, and the emergence of religious nationalism. This will illustrate how the All Peoples Prayer Assembly (APPA), earlier called the Deep Sea Canoe Movement, which is popular among To’abaitans, provides an alternative modernity.⁴ APPA has a cosmopolitan, eclectic theology, which combines elements of local tradition, evangelical Christianity and Judaism.

Michael Maeliau, an ordained but recently expelled (see below) minister in the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC), established the movement in the early 1980s as the Deep Sea Canoe Movement. Beginning in 2007 it officially became the All Peoples Prayer Assembly. While the movement has seen steady growth among To’abaita people in North Malaita, it is difficult to determine a firm number of followers because people attend APPA services and rituals without necessarily confessing adherence. I estimate there are hundreds of active followers and thousands of sympathizers. Most followers live in North Malaita, but the movement also attracts people, mostly Malaitans, in Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, on Guadalcanal Island.

Principally a prayer movement, the All Peoples Prayer Assembly regularly organizes events with sermons and worship to evoke spiritual awakening through united prayer. These local convocations—labeled Fathers Arise, Mothers Arise, Youth Arise and Leaders Arise—may attract hundreds of people, usually dressed in white and adhering to certain purity rules, including avoidance of entering praying floors wearing flip-flops or muddy shoes. These events used to be held under temporary leaf roofs erected in the forests between villages, but a few years ago they moved to APPA’s well-built Aroma Centre, a teaching venue named

after the Spice Route,⁵ which according to Maeliau is a possible route along which Hebrews traveled in deep-sea canoes and populated the Pacific Islands and along which they may return to Jerusalem. The Aroma Centre welcomes foreign visitors and is used for prayer convocations.

APPA participants' belief in the power of prayer is strong. For example, Michael Maeliau has been engaged in a "prayer journey,"⁶ a series of prayer convocations abroad, and some groups have staged non-stop, days-long prayer sessions atop mountains where ancestor worship took place in pre-Christian times. The more globally oriented prayer convocations concern the whole Pacific—as well as all nations—to call upon the people of God's Kingdom to arise in prayer and usher in the King of Glory, in other words, the Second Coming of Christ. APPA recently has engaged in prayer meetings for "all peoples of the land." In fact, a convocation in Israel in 2012 was attended by a number of North American Indians following the first-ever APPA convocation in the United States in Pasadena, California in 2009. In addition to prayer convocations APPA organizes so-called "Jerusalem Counsels," annual meetings in Jerusalem of APPA's spiritual elders. "Counsel"⁷ in this context means consultation, both between the spiritual elders of APPA and between the elders and God. Elders are appointed by Maeliau and the group of elders comprises five or so persons who have matured to Maeliau's level of spirituality and who understand the "proper" way of praising God. Like Maeliau, they sometimes act as God's messengers.

APPA participants in the region of North Malaita typically come from the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC), the oldest and most prominent denomination on Malaita.⁸ While most participants are still SSEC members, the South Sea Evangelical Church, headquartered in Honiara, considers APPA to be a breakaway movement. In 2009 the SSEC expelled Maeliau from the church he had pastored for more than two decades on grounds of deviation from Scripture, arguing that APPA was trying to gain control over a territorial area traditionally belonging to SSEC.

Throughout the region of North Malaita, the menorah, which is the emblem of the State of Israel, and the Israeli flag are widely displayed in churches and on rooftops. People also unfold the flag during politically significant gatherings as they did at the 2003 peace ceremony in Auki, Malaita's provincial capital, which concluded a five-year conflict (*tenson* or *tension*) between factions from Malaita and Guadalcanal. The tension, partly related to poorly regulated urbanization, devastated many people's livelihoods and crippled the country's economy; it was curtailed with the arrival of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).⁹ During the 2003 ceremony, Malaitan Eagle Force commander and To'abaita speaker Jimmy "Rasta" Lusibaea was the first to give up his machine gun and a battle jacket he wore while fighting rival militias from Guadalcanal. Following Lusibaea, heavily armed militants wearing camouflage face paint, helmets and red bandanas handed over

an impressive array of military firepower for destruction by international peacekeeping officers. Lusibaea and his To'abaita fighters marched to the ceremony under the Israeli flag, which they considered the symbol of their sovereignty. It is in this environment that the alternative modernity in which many To'abaitans identify as Jews has flourished.

AN ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY

A recent example of foreign scholarship accentuating the rural/backward/religious versus urban/modern/secular divide as an explanatory tool in the analysis of a "weak state" is the book *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands* by John Braithwaite, Sinclair Dinnen, Matthew Allen, Valerie Braithwaite and Hillary Charlesworth.¹⁰ From the vantage point of political science the authors examine sources of social and political instability in Solomon Islands and the evaluations of subsequent peace- and state-building efforts. Their analysis focuses on the failures of the state before, during and after violent events during the tension and builds extensively on Western assumptions about the division between state and society, casting almost all that happens in the "shadows" of the state as irrational and backward. Such shadows, like those in Africa described by William Reno in his analysis of warlordism,¹¹ seem to result from the authors' assumptions about the lack of enlightenment in the backwaters, reflecting the methodological difficulties and limitations of a state-society dichotomy.¹²

The methodology of the *Pillars and Shadows* authors explicitly discourages inclusion of widespread local theories, ruling out "non-credible interpretations" and "imagined histories concocted by supposed combatants with grandiose visions of their self-importance to saving their nation."¹³ A close look at All Peoples Prayer Assembly, however, reveals the importance of including "imagined histories," especially when engaging the idea of the modern nation and terms and practices denigrating citizens in rural regions such as North Malaita. According to APPA's worldview, To'abaita people have a crucial role in salvaging the nation to enable the people's return to Jerusalem for the Final Restoration, the creation of a messianic kingdom ruled by Christ (see Daniel 9:25; Acts 1:6, 3:21). This alternative idea of nation as a collective people, embedded firmly in the Christian Bible, allows adherents to acquire a new sense of self, a new frame of reference, and a new agency for the future. The Bible does not simply offer solace, and it cannot be read as just a weapon of the weak, as in James C. Scott's negative terms.¹⁴ Rather, it offers the possibility of inverting the power structures of the world in a coming millennial kingdom.

People in North Malaita are overwhelmingly Christian in the sense that the majority of them have grown up with a basic acquaintance with

the Bible, Christian doctrines and hymns. The Bible is the key linguistic register shared by persons from all walks of life; hence, biblical vocabulary and narratives significantly color people's worldviews. Concepts such as Jerusalem and nation are internalized in a particular way among To'abaitans, influencing the way they construct identities as actors in sacred history by reading themselves into scriptures and taking the Bible literally.¹⁵ These identifications are made not only in relation to biblical narratives but also with other normative systems, particularly tradition and government.

Since World War II people have grown in their religious commitment to the notion of Israel and are forging links with the State of Israel while maintaining the popularity of the prayer sessions for the return of the nations (all peoples) to Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:10–12; Isaiah 56:7; Isaiah 62:10; Psalm 56:7; Acts 15:13–18). In short, rather than heterodox or backward, APPA engages synchronically with such contemporary ideas as Israel, the nation, development, global forces and global Christian groups.

The cultural dynamics among To'abaitans clearly illustrate what it means to be Christian or, for some, Hebrew, in this part of the world, and to be a Solomon Islander in the contemporary world. Some outside observers paint the APPA movement as part of the global surge of fanatical religious movements. Scott Flower imagines APPA as a Jewish religious movement and Michael Maeliau as a separatist and "an example of how charismatic individuals can use new religious movements as a platform to gain personal power and prestige, and in the process pose a risk to internal security."¹⁶ My field observations and interviews with Maeliau and many of his followers over the last decade yield a much less extreme picture: while a number of people support an independent Malaita and many contemplate the wonders of a local theocracy, the majority of APPA participants engage in religious activities to construct a path back to Jerusalem and others are keen to participate in development projects supported by Israel and the provincial government. Most do both at the same time.

To shed light on the importance of Israel in North Malaita, I will sketch some current features of APPA before tracing its historical antecedents. I then will detail the cultural continuities of the theology underpinning APPA or Deep Sea Canoe Movement. Finally, I will discuss why APPA is such a compelling and growing phenomenon and how the movement is shaping the cultural context in which it is evolving.

JOINING THE COVENANT

All Peoples Prayer Assembly has a cosmopolitan and eclectic theology that combines elements of local tradition, evangelical Christianity and Judaism. I have argued elsewhere that the importance of APPA should be seen in light of the fact that both *kastom* and Christianity are

inherently dynamic and recently have come under considerable stress,¹⁷ by and large from the ongoing deferment of development promises and growing doubts over the efficacy of mainstream Christian teachings. Engaging these challenges, Michael Maeliau reasons from two centers of spiritual power—North Malaita and Jerusalem—linked through biblical interpretation. However, the movement and its theology are not merely effects of distorted tradition and socio-economic marginalization.

In Maeliau's account of his vision in 1984, which has underpinned the Deep Sea Canoe Movement, a great flood commenced in a valley in Solomon Islands and spread like a tidal wave all over the world and eventually zoomed in on Jerusalem, where it shot into the sky. As this great pillar of water reached up into the heavens, it opened up like a mushroom and floated out into all directions until it engulfed the whole earth. Then these words came out from heaven: "And the Glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!"¹⁸ In the 1990s it dawned on Maeliau that the South Pacific was the uttermost part of the earth from Jerusalem.

Here was where the relay baton of the flame of the Gospel stopped since it left Jerusalem after the first Day of Pentecost. There was a great sense of indebtedness to the rest of the world, particularly on the part of the Melanesian Churches. The Presence of the Lord was so real it was almost tangible, giving us the feeling that He might as well have appeared physically as he did on the Mount of Olives 2000 years ago, and give us the reverse plan of the Great Commission. We sensed as if the Lord was staring us in the face and repeating those same words of the Great Commission again, except that this time he was saying, "You shall be witnesses to me from the uttermost part of the earth back to Samaria, Judea and Jerusalem."¹⁹

According to Maeliau, the Old Testament cannot be fulfilled in the Church because it predicts a glorious future for Israel to which all nations (peoples) will return. The ultimate aim of All Peoples Prayer Assembly is to ensure the restoration of Jews and gentiles to Jerusalem and for To'abaitans to play a strategic role in that process. Malaita and Israel (and all nations) have intertwined destinies. The role of To'abaitans in the final Restoration, the core belief of APPA, is rooted firmly in the belief that Malaitans are a chosen and covenanted people to establish a theocracy in which God rules as Sovereign to prepare their nation for the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom in Jerusalem. The chosenness of Malaitans is thought to be a natural state, an integral part of the authentic Malaitan self, which embodies the full legacy of age-old ancestral custom. APPA participants believe that people around them have fallen into apostasy and they are convinced of their duty to both the original customs and the laws of the Torah.

APPA thus builds on and constructs lifeworlds in which, to a large extent, the Bible informs people's engagement with the world. Thus, one should not be surprised to find that To'abaitans narrate how their ancestors long ago traveled in deep-sea canoes from the Middle East to the Pacific; claim to have found Hebrew inscriptions on stones in the mountains; are sure that the Ark of the Covenant and the lost Temple of Jerusalem are buried in the mountains of Malaita; and suggest they should be able to provide letters from Hebrew University in Jerusalem affirming that they are Jews. Moreover, they claim to be living in exile among pharaohs and recount stories of Israeli soldiers hiding in subterranean spaces on the island to ready people for a liberation struggle against agents of spiritual darkness.

To'abaitans, particularly those who participate in or appreciate APPA, tend to see their *kastom* as similar to laws set out by Moses for the Israelites. Some local theologians have noted similarities between To'abaitans' traditional sacrificial systems and that of the Torah.²⁰ APPA suggests to its adherents that Mosaic Law applies to them as a covenanted people or, according to some, a lost tribe of Israel. The idea of being a covenanted and chosen people powerfully motivates followers to believe they are subject to a divine voice. According to the rhetoric of Maeliau, theocracy in Malaita under the Mosaic covenant is a real possibility—a natural state, a paradisiacal situation that cannot be challenged.

Many To'abaitans assert that God's laws given in the Old Testament in the Pentateuch, or Torah, apply to To'abaitans as Hebrews, and that To'abaita *kastom* echoes the Old Testament way of life. As a result, many see themselves as joining a global battle against ungodliness at both worldly and celestial levels and hold to APPA's ideal of theocracy in Malaita and ultimately in Christ's kingdom in Israel. Although the notion that To'abaita people are a lost tribe is popular, for most To'abaitans their identification with Israel is not rooted in the idea of being blood descendants of Hebrews,²¹ but rather as heirs of the biblical prophecies associated with the tribes. Hence there is widespread emphasis on the role of To'abaitans in biblical narratives, particularly the fore-told Endtime.

THE REVERSE PLAN

Malaita's ends-of-the-earth distance from Jerusalem, and the fact that people feel that the world around them is falling into apostasy confirms for APPA participants their theory that Acts 1:8 refers to the Solomon Islands: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The general To'abaitan interpretation of this verse is that the geographical progress of the Christian witness from

Jerusalem includes Solomon Islands and all other Pacific nations. They assume that people in the Pacific were the last to receive the Christian message and so have a special role: to return the gift of the Gospel to the people of Israel and to fulfill Acts 1:8 by returning all nations (peoples) to Jerusalem.

The Bible, seen as the final authority, imbues people with chief roles in relation to “the ends of the earth,” evoking a sense of urgency: now that the Word of God has reached the ends of the earth, things have to turn full circle. It is not that the uttermost parts have finally learned the Word of God and derived their agency from it. The early-twentieth-century arrival of Christianity reminded To’abaitans that they have been with God from the beginning and that missionaries brought them back as people of a nation to return to Jerusalem alongside peoples of all nations. APPA participants view Acts 1:8 as inviting them to ensure region-wide commitment to a mission strategy within their providentially chosen community located at the ends of the earth, so their people (nation) may return to Jerusalem for the restoration of God’s kingdom. Maeliau has called this the reverse plan of the Great Commission²² given by the resurrected Jesus Christ to the disciples to teach and baptize “all nations” (Matt. 28:16–20), emphasizing that APPA does not simply occupy the space of “white” Christian theology but rather takes over those spaces:

Those spaces do not belong to the whites that came here as missionaries and colonizers as they have no covenant with God. People like us, Jews (laughs) or gentiles—I am not sure—who are mentioned in Acts and are straightening the world for the restoration of Israel are covenanted. We have this covenant since early history, well before the whiteman came.²³

Besides the new sense of self that comes with becoming an actor in God’s plan for the world, the way APPA presents access to modernity evokes a sense of nationalism among adherents that precedes and exceeds that fostered by the state. APPA’s ideology becomes particularly nationalistic and even hegemonic with its emphasis on the moral character of the To’abaita people (and often of Malaitans and Solomon Islanders in general) as key nation-builders in Solomon Islands and ready for Solomon Islands’ important role in the restoration of God’s kingdom in Jerusalem. Before we discuss this, it will be useful to ground APPA participants’ fascination with Israel in the history and culture of the region.

HISTORICAL FOREBEARS

The All Peoples Prayer Assembly/Deep Sea Canoe Movement belongs to a long tradition of attempts to establish congregations, rituals and nations in North Malaita, especially the anticolonial Maasina Rule

movement and the Remnant Church. The Maasina Rule movement expressed a widespread critique of foreign rule and its normative systems following World War II.²⁴ During World War II hundreds of Malaitans worked closely with the United States, supporting its military occupation of Guadalcanal by providing services at posts established on Malaita for the Pacific battle against the Japanese. On advice of African American soldiers who were appalled to see Solomon Islanders behaving subserviently to British colonial administrators, Malaitans began to organize and established Maasina (often called Marching) Rule in the mid-1940s to promote self-government. It lasted until the early 1950s when the British government denounced it as illegal.

A predecessor of the Maasina Rule, called “Chair and Rule” or the Fallowes movement on the island of Santa Ysabel, had its origins with an Anglican priest, Richard Fallowes. Later deported by the High Commissioner with the support of a conservative Anglican archbishop who found Fallowes’ version of Christianity “too revolutionary Christian,”²⁵ Fallowes played an active role in resisting British rule and in 1938 initiated an inter-island movement to establish a pan-Solomons “native Parliament.”²⁶ The idea of an inter-island indigenous parliament recurred prominently when Maasina Rule evolved, attributed by historian Hugh Laracy to the fact that leaders attended Fallowes’ meetings in the late 1930s and early 1940s.²⁷ According to anthropologist Roger Keesing, a key antecedent to Maasina Rule was the power struggle between religious and colonial authorities, which “by the 1920s created a schism within coastal communities that was to widen and split in Maasina Rule.”²⁸

In large part, Maasina Rule leaders who came to see themselves as religious were powerful people in the South Sea Evangelical Mission (predecessor of the South Sea Evangelical Church) who sought to uphold a moral authority they saw deteriorating. Drawing on a history of politico-religious cultism on Malaita, they presented an alternative—theocracy.²⁹ Other leaders, inspired by the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, organized communities and an inter-island government.³⁰ APPA draws on all these traditions but tends to put more emphasis on the Old Testament’s laws for the chosen people and the Old Testament’s status as a written text.

Many religious antecedents of APPA’s current ideas can be traced to the Remnant Church³¹ founded in the 1950s by visionaries among the Kwara’ae-speaking people living near Auki, the capital of Malaita Province. Like APPA, the Remnant Church broke away from the South Sea Evangelical Church but has never attracted many more than 100 people. Adherents trace their ancestry to certain Old Testament migrations of the tribes of Israel and they remain committed to observing Hebraic laws. In a revelation, prominent Remnant Church leader Zebulon Sisima was given a description of the flag that Beldigao, the

first ancestor, brought from Israel. The flag has twelve stars (representing twelve tribes), an eagle (symbol for Malaita), and the colors red (purity), white (righteousness), green (unity in love and prosperity), and gold (perseverance and loyalty towards God).³² APPA does not have such a flag. For recent international APPA prayer convocations, flyers announcing the events have featured graphic representations of sailing boats on world maps, symbolizing deep-sea canoes traveling the Spice Route.

As many To'abaita interviewees pointed out to me, having one's own biblical genealogy in the form of "begats" and one's own Ten Commandments is like having a "constitution." Thus the Bible is often emulated by To'abaitans in the form of law-like charters, often conceptualized and presented alongside genealogical charts. These charts, drawn out on paper, depict genealogies of sometimes more than 20 generations. At the top are figures like Gad, son of Jacob, with a straight line down to early ancestors of the local group, suggesting that the local group belongs to the tribe of Gad. The genealogical charts are ancestrally empowered "weapons," as Keesing formulates it,³³ created not by non-Christians for use against Christians, but by Christians for use in resistance against mainstream churches. In other words, these charts are ways to engage modernity by formulating theologies and family histories that position the To'abaitans in the world on their own terms, not those of the main churches, which many see as being colonial and foreign. In addition to Israel, these terms revolve around To'abaita cultural models of pathmaking and straightening.

STRAIGHTENING THE WORLD

Straightening and pathmaking are key To'abaita concepts that the vision, acts and politics of APPA express. It is instructive to compare APPA's straightening and pathmaking strategies with ethnographic studies relating to the same or similar concepts in the region. "Path" is a widely used Austronesian metaphor representing ancestry, migration and journeys toward a utopian end.³⁴ For example, in his study of ethnohistory on Belau (Republic of Palau) in the western Pacific's Micronesia region, Richard Parmentier has developed a set of models that includes paths embodied in historical accounts, artifacts, political rhetoric and realizations of people's polity through time, "a method, technique, patterns, or strategy—in short, a way of doing something."³⁵ The notion of path is synonymous with "road."³⁶ Similarly, among the Kwaio of Central Malaita, "path" refers to a "continuity through time metaphorically treated as continuity in space," and "a trajectory, a path, a destination."³⁷

In To'abaita language, "path" is *tala*, which on the one hand means "way" or "means of doing things," and on the other a "path" or "road."³⁸

The latter meaning is more modern and perhaps is best known in association with the term “cargo cult,” which has often been used to describe Melanesian movements occurring typically in the wake of contact with commercial networks of colonizing societies in which people expect the imminent arrival of ancestors or Jesus Christ bringing wealth in the form of cargo.³⁹ The To’abaita word *tala* in the sense of “path” or “road” may be applied to other activities and strategies as well, including the new religious movement described in this article. In his study of criminal gangs in Port Moresby, capital of Papua New Guinea, Michael Goddard suggests that this view of paths or roads may be labeled as a Melanesian “road theory,” with terms such as *rot bilong raskol* (rascal road), *rot bilong bisnis* (business way) and *rot bilong lotu* (church or religious way) added to Colin Filer’s list that includes *rot bilong kastom* (way of custom) and *rot bilong kaunsil* (council way).⁴⁰

The widespread concept of straightening appears related to scriptural inconsistencies, often resulting in novel interpretations in ethno-theologies.⁴¹ According to Michael Scott:

the Hebrew and Greek biblical canons both have the potential to raise for Christians the questions of how God has always been God, not only of Israel but of the gentiles also, and what God’s relationship to the gentiles was before they learned to acknowledge him. Ethno-theologies in which Christians locate their ancestral histories and tradition within a scheme of salvation history constitute, therefore, variant responses to a particular Christian problematic.⁴²

Andrew Lattas devotes a chapter on straightening the dead in his book on the culture of secrecy of the Bush Kaliai of West New Britain Province in Papua New Guinea.⁴³ According to their cargoistic logic, Bush Kaliai believe the dead want to know why the living get killed. “Those who had been murdered would hold those now residing above ground responsible for *stretim* (straightening, compensating for) the sins of their grandparents, and they would not allow the cargo to come until their grievances had been addressed.”⁴⁴

Similarly, Geoffrey White and Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo define straightening and disentangling (used synonymously) as

a metaphor for deliberate efforts at social problem-solving or moral “straightening.” [...] The image of a tangled net or a knotted line suggests blockage of purposeful activity, reminding the members of a community that the problem at hand requires attention lest it impede “normal” social life. Disentangling presumes a conception of an unmarked, background state-of-affairs in which the strands of people’s lives do not become snarled or ineffective.⁴⁵

In their chapter on Kwara’ae (To’abaitans’ southern neighbors on Malaita), Karen Watson-Gegeo and David Gegeo depart from a similar

observation, viewing straightening among the Kwara'ae as intended to “accomplish the fusing of ethos and eidos [worldview] as a *social* rather than *religious* activity.”⁴⁶ Yet Kwara'ae see that in cases of serious misfortune or illness the straightening process may need to include spiritual mediation, and “Christians privately concur with the traditional belief that ancestral spirits signal their displeasure at conflict through illness and misfortune.”⁴⁷

Traditionally in family counseling, the ancestors were rarely mentioned; today in Christian families, God may be invoked but if so, only as another argument for changing behavior. *Fa'amanata'anga* [counseling in which conflict resolution occurs] deals with everyday needs and problems—with “this life,” “this world,” and “our cultural behavior,” as the counselor often phrases it. Rather than on the vertical relationship of human being to ancestral spirit/Christian God, then, the emphasis is on horizontal relationships among human beings.⁴⁸

Straightening in APPA resembles the understanding of straightening held by the Kwaio as described by Roger Keesing. Both are engaged in ongoing attempts to record genealogies and histories of lands and shrines. This, Keesing writes, “provides the foundation for their struggle to hold their homeland against invasion by plantation . . . interests.” There is fear that plantations, mining companies and government projects will take people's land. Another reason for straightening custom, among both the Kwaio and the To'abaita, is that it results in a written account emulating the Bible's sacred charters. Keesing argues that for the Kwaio as resilient traditionalists, this aspect of straightening is a “militant defense of the ancestral ways against Christian invasion.”⁴⁹

For To'abaitans, straightening is strongly defined in relation to Acts 1:8, which sets the foundation for straightening the path back to Jerusalem. In the following section, I will show how the cultural model of straightening and the idea of returning to Jerusalem create a mode of engagement with modernity that stimulates people to forge concrete links with the State of Israel.

JOURNEYS TO JERUSALEM AND ISRAEL IN MALAITA

Michael Maeliau stresses the need for APPA to engage with Jerusalem,⁵⁰ and he frequently travels to Jerusalem to straighten the path back to Jerusalem from the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Before APPA began to organize Jerusalem Counsels, Maeliau often joined convocations of the Jerusalem House of Prayer for All Nations founded and pastored by Tom Hess, host of the All Nations Convocation Jerusalem and President of Progressive Vision Publishing. The Jerusalem House of Prayer for All Nations maintains a “24/7 Watch”

in which church and prayer leaders bring groups of “watchmen” (Isaiah 62:6–7) from their nations to pray in Jerusalem. The House of Prayer also encourages development of these watches in Israel, the Arab Middle East and all nations to pray for Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6), Israel and all nations (Isaiah 56:7).⁵¹ Over the last few years Maeliau has organized his own Jerusalem Counsel gatherings and tours attracting people from the Pacific, Australia and North America to pray for the return of the nations (peoples) to Jerusalem. In recent years APPA has expanded its network into New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Hawai’i by regularly hosting prayer convocations in these countries as well as in Israel.

Maeliau’s involvement in global prayer movements and his world-encompassing vision promote a distinct geographical sensibility among people in North Malaita. Additionally, the religious impulse towards Jerusalem evokes an aspiration for Judaism. Many To’abaitans dress in white robes and women wear white headscarves when attending prayer gatherings, or when their villages are visited by officials with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relation to the Malaita provincial government’s Malaita Economic Stimulus Package. Israel’s development assistance is provided by invitation through the Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV) of Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first regional conference concerning this initiative attracted some 50 people in November 2010 and was reported in *Haaretz*:

Support for Israel runs deep in the predominantly Christian Malaita. Many islanders believe that “those who bless Israel are themselves blessed,” in keeping with the Hebrew Bible. Some even believe that Israelites originally settled in the islands, thousands of years ago. People wear Star of David necklaces on the streets of Auki, and local residents assert that they “believe in Israel.” Israeli videos were screened over and over during the conference. When [Yoel] Siegel and [Eran] Brokovich [two consultants from Israel] were taken on an outing, they traveled through jungles and saw villages decked out in blue and white with Israeli flags flying. In the welcoming ceremonies, children sang in Hebrew.⁵²

During the conference’s closing ceremony a massive round of applause broke out when Malaita Premier Richard Irosaea spoke about the ties between Israel and Malaita. “Our partnership with the State of Israel is no accident,” he concluded. “It is something that must be.”⁵³

During a long interview with Irosaea in 2011 about Israel-Malaita connections, he told me that he was working on getting Judaism recognized as a religion in Malaita and hoped that through MASHAV’s assistance Judaism would inform the state’s school curricula. “The Israelis will send teachers and teaching materials to show us the right path.” A bit embarrassed, he sketched this scene:

You see we are so ignorant of our identity that some even requested assistance for piggeries during discussions with the Israeli representatives of MASHAV in 2010. Fortunately, the Israelis responded constructively by saying that they realize that local initiatives are important to support but that they prefer to start with fish farming and cash crop production. Once we get proper education about Judaism people will learn the ways of Judaism. Only then can we straighten this place and get closer to Israel. Israel is only now realizing that we exist and once we as a lost tribe gain full acknowledgement we will have reached what I have always dreamed about. Once we establish a nation following Moses' laws then we can be certain that all will be good. This is what we all, all people in the world will have to do.⁵⁴

Israel's honorary consul in Solomon Islands, Liliana Firisua (a To'abaita speaker), told me in 2012 that he and MASHAV were keen to expand development plans to other provinces in the Solomon Islands, partly to defuse criticism that collaboration with Israel was solely a Malaitan affair, but also to create a national alternative to faltering secular government development.⁵⁵ So Malaita's connection with Israel is no longer just religious but expands into the economy along the path of development collaboration. For example, the Malaita Chazon (Hebrew, "Vision") Development Authority, the business arm of the Malaita provincial government, is selling solar panels, solar-powered motorcycles and farm utilities from Israel.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

Among To'abaitans the idea of Jerusalem and movements such as the All Peoples Prayer Assembly, also known as the Deep Sea Canoe Movement, evolve in symbiosis with the state and the wider world and are tightly bound up with questions of inequality and rank in an "imagined world."⁵⁷ The imagined world among To'abaitans is heavily informed by the Bible, with Jerusalem at the center, and focuses on active engagement with contemporary Israel. The alternative modernity offered by APPA and the Malaita Chazon Development Authority take on meaning within local and global contexts of stark social and economic differences.

According to APPA theology the straightened Christian nation stands for homogeneity, unity, order, discipline and stasis; forces such as the Honiaran central government of Solomon Islands are threatening because they are in flux, corrupt, disruptive and without a proper biblical foundation. To fulfill God's Word and their leader's prophecy, APPA adherents have to live according to their *kastom*/Mosaic law and unite in straightening unbelievers and sinners along the path to Israel.

The causal explanation that religious movements emerge in response to the failure of the state to deliver services and access to justice only partly explains APPA. While much of its theology can be analyzed as a reaction against ongoing deferment of development, the APPA movement and wider cultural ideas in Malaita about Israel are not merely effects of distorted tradition or primordial culture. They are produced within current interactions with modern Solomon Islands, global Christian traditions and global meanings about Israel.

As All Peoples Prayer Assembly is a breakaway from an older, more firmly institutionalized denomination, it appears to be a separate religious practice harboring millenarian hopes similar to many movements in marginalized, uprooted or tribal societies brought into contact with elements of Western, modern, capitalist and industrial societies. Leaving the analysis at that, however, would be to situate the APPA movement too narrowly, over-stressing marginalization and local-global frictions, thus missing much of its character and importance as a distinct religion. APPA's refusal of religion as practiced by the mainline church from which it broke away shapes its theology and praxis to such an extent that it seems to rebuff any ordinary or recognizable pattern of religious organization. But because APPA leaders and followers see their beliefs and practices as religious and APPA as a genuine religion, it would be best to call it, in their terms, a new religion that has arisen out of a Christian prayer movement but is not (yet) a new or independent church. Such thinking about the past is novel to outside observers who see the All Peoples Prayer Assembly as yet another new religious movement, but in the imagining of APPA adherents, it is mysteriously (albeit historically) connected to the ancient Hebrews.

I thank the people of North Malaita, in particular Richard Irosaea, Robert Kauga, Edwin Subaea, Liliana Firisua, Michael Maeliau, Peter Kwanairara, Frank Daifa, and David Suata and family, as well as James Delemani and his family for their assistance with my research; Terry Brown for fruitful discussion and generous sharing of materials; and Chris Houston, Michael Scott and Garry Trompf for their helpful criticism. All errors are my own.

ENDNOTES

¹ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

² Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

³ James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 31.

⁴ For more studies on the Deep Sea Canoe Movement, see Jaap Timmer, "Kastom and Theocracy: A Reflection on Governance from North Malaita,

Solomon Islands,” in *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*, ed. Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (Canberra: Australian National University E Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2008); Jaap Timmer, “Straightening the Path from the Ends of the Earth: The Deep Sea Canoe Movement in Solomon Islands,” in *Flows of Faith: Religious Reach and Community in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Lenore Manderson, Wendy Smith, and Matt Tomlinson (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2012), 201–14; and Jaap Timmer, “Visualizing the Lost Temple and Mapping a Straightening World in Solomon Islands: Two Cultural Products of the Deep Sea Canoe Movement,” in *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production*, ed. Carole M. Cusack and Alex Norman (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 737–52.

⁵ The sea trade route between historic civilizations in Asia, northeast Africa and Europe, in which cinnamon, cassia, cardamom, ginger and turmeric were known and used for commerce.

⁶ Michael Maeliau, ed., *Uluru: The Heart of Australia: The Battle for Australia* (Honiara, Guadalcanal: Michael Maeliau, 2006), 12. Maeliau calls this “Celestial Warfare” and narrates the involvement of Solomon Islands as an intercessor in Australia to prepare it for its journey back to Jerusalem.

⁷ Despite the presence of a couple of blogs on the Internet that term the meetings “Jerusalem Councils,” Maeliau insists that they be spelled “Jerusalem Counsels,” as evidenced in his document, “4th APPA Jerusalem Counsel – 12.12.12,” in the author’s possession.

⁸ For its long-term background in the Queensland Kanaka Mission (1886–1904) and the South Sea Evangelical Mission (1904–1964), see Clive Moore, *Florence Young and the Queensland Kanaka Mission, 1886–1906: Beginnings of an Indigenous Pacific Church*, Occasional Paper 2, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics (Honiara, Guadalcanal: Solomon Islands National Museum, 2010); Judith A. Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago, 1800–1978* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1987), 21–44; Alison Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands! The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Solomons* (Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 1977).

⁹ See Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998–2004* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2004); Jon Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004); and Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth, ed., *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2008).

¹⁰ John Braithwaite, Sinclair Dinnen, Matthew Allen, Valerie Braithwaite, and Hilary Charlesworth, *Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2010).

¹¹ William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

¹² Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 16.

¹³ Braithwaite, Dinnen, Allen, Braithwaite, Charlesworth, *Pillars and Shadows*, 19.

¹⁴ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ Cf. Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Scott Flower, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Papua New Guinea," *Journal of Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* 23, no. 2 (2012): 201–17.

¹⁷ Timmer, "Kastom and Theocracy."

¹⁸ Michael Maeliau, *The Deep Sea Canoe Movement: An Account of the Prayer Movement in the Pacific Islands over the Last Twenty Years* (Canberra: B & M Publishing, 2006), 19.

¹⁹ Maeliau, *Deep Sea Canoe Movement*, 22. For biblical background, see Matthew 28:19–20, and discussion in the text of Acts 1:8.

²⁰ Penuel Ben Idusulia, "Viewing His Sacrifice through Melanesian Eyes"; and Festus F. Suruma, "Toabaita Traditional Beliefs and Worship of Ancestral Spirits and God's Word," each being a Bachelor of Theology thesis, Christian Leadership College, Banz, Papua New Guinea, 1979.

²¹ Cf. Alison Dundon, "DNA, Israel and the Ancestors: Substantiating Connections through Christianity in Papua New Guinea," *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (2011): 29–43; and Courtney Handman, "Israelite Genealogies and Christian Commitment: The Limits of Language Ideologies in Guhu-Samane Christianity," *Anthropological Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2011): 665–77.

²² Maeliau, *Deep Sea Canoe Movement*, 22.

²³ Michael Maeliau, interview with author, Auki, Malaita, 29 August 2011.

²⁴ See Roger M. Keesing, "Politico-Religious Movements and Anticolonialism on Malaita: Maasina Rule in Historical Perspective," *Oceania* 48, no. 4 (1978): 241–61; Hugh Laracy, ed., *Pacific Protest: The Maasina Rule Movement, Solomon Islands, 1944–1952* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1983); and Ben Burt, *Tradition and Christianity: The Colonial Transformation of a Solomon Islands Society* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994).

²⁵ Roger M. Keesing, *Custom and Confrontation: The Kwaio Struggle for Cultural Autonomy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 90n.12.

²⁶ Geoffrey M. White, "Social Images and Social Change in a Melanesian Society," *American Ethnologist* 7, no. 2 (1980): 352–70, see page 355.

²⁷ Laracy, *Pacific Protest*, 18.

²⁸ Keesing, "Politico-Religious Movements," 251.

²⁹ Keesing, "Politico-Religious Movements," 251.

³⁰ Laracy, *Pacific Protest*, 30.

³¹ For descriptions of this group, see Ben Burt, "The Remnant Church: A Christian Sect of the Solomon Islands," *Oceania* 53, no. 4 (1983): 334–46; Mesach Maetoloa, "The Remnant Church: Two Studies," in *New Religious Movements in Melanesia*, ed. Carl Loeliger and Garry Trompf (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific and University of Papua New Guinea), 120–48.

³² Maetoloa, "The Remnant Church," 144.

³³ Keesing, *Custom and Confrontation*, 196.

³⁴ James J. Fox, "Austronesian Societies and Their Transformations," in *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Peter Bellwood, James J. Fox and Darrell Tryon (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2006), 236.

³⁵ Richard J. Parmentier, *The Sacred Remains: Myth, History, and Polity in Belau* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), 109.

³⁶ A wide body of literature engages the concepts of paths, roads and ways, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article. Prominent pieces include Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 85, on bark cloth as the path of God; Christina Toren, "Implications of the Concept of Development for the Symbolic Construction of 'the Fijian Way,'" in *The Effects of Development on Traditional Pacific Islands Cultures*, ed. Christian Clerk (London: Royal Commonwealth Society, 1984), 39–52, on the self-seeking individualist "path of money" and Fijian traditions; Richard Katz, *A Straight Path: A Story of Healing and Transformation in Fiji* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1993) on healing and straight paths in Fiji; and Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*, 227–330, on fidelity among Urapmin as "walking straight on the path" and following Jesus' road to become a straight man.

³⁷ Keesing, *Custom and Confrontation*, 217–18.

³⁸ Frantisek Lichtenberk, *A Dictionary of Toqabaqita (Solomon Islands)* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, Australian National University, 2008), 293–94, 592.

³⁹ See Ton Otto, "What Happened to Cargo Cults? Material Religions in Melanesia and the West," in *Contemporary Religiosities: Emergent Socialities and the Post-Nation-State*, ed. Bruce Kapferer, Kari Telle and Annelin Eriksen (New York: Berghahn Books), 82–201. See also Garry W. Trompf, "New Religious Movements in Oceania," in this issue of *Nova Religio*. In this article and in "Pacific Millennial Movements" in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 435–53, and in his other publications, Trompf stresses that not all cargo cults are millennial movements.

⁴⁰ Michael Goddard, "The Rascal Road: Crime, Prestige, and Development in Papua New Guinea," *The Contemporary Pacific* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 55–80; Colin Filer, "The Bougainville Rebellion, the Mining Industry and the Process of Social Disintegration in Papua New Guinea," in *The Bougainville Crisis*, ed. Ron J. May and Matthew Spriggs (Bathurst, New South Wales: Crawford House Press, 1990), 85n.87.

⁴¹ See for example Burt, "Remnant Church"; Michael W. Scott, "I Was Like Abraham": Notes on the Anthropology of Christianity from the Solomon Islands," *Ethnos* 70, no. 1 (2005): 334–46; and David Akin, "Ancestral Vigilance and the Corrective Conscience in Kwaio: Kastom as Culture in a Melanesian Society," in *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia: Humiliation, Transformation and the Nature of Cultural Change*, ed. Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2005).

⁴² Scott, "I Was Like Abraham," 119.

⁴³ Andrew Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy: Reinventing Race in Bush Kaliai Cargo Cults* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy*, 134.

⁴⁵ Geoffrey M. White and Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo, "Disentangling Discourse," in *Disentangling: Conflict Discourse in Pacific Societies*, ed. Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo and Geoffrey M. White (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 35–36n.1.

⁴⁶ Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo and David Welchman Gegeo, “Shaping the Mind and Straightening Out Conflicts: The Discourse of Kwara’ae Family Counseling,” in White and Watson-Gegeo, *Disentangling*, 161.

⁴⁷ Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo, “Shaping the Mind and Straightening Out Conflicts,” 171.

⁴⁸ Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo, “Shaping the Mind and Straightening Out Conflicts,” 199.

⁴⁹ Keesing, *Custom and Confrontation*, 124, 125.

⁵⁰ Maeliau, *Deep Sea Canoe Movement*.

⁵¹ Tom Hess and Kate Hess, *House of Prayer for all Nations, The World Wide Watch: A Watchman’s Arsenal to Pray for All Nations*, 2d and rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Progressive Vision Publishing, 2012), 7.

⁵² Charles Prestidge-King, “Pacific Overtures,” *Haaretz*, 10 December 2010, at www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/pacific-overtures-1.329872.

⁵³ Prestidge-King, “Pacific Overtures.”

⁵⁴ Richard Irosaea, interview with the author, Auki, Malaita, 19 January 2011. Note also that the Seventh-day Adventists, who have been present on Malaita since 1924, have their own special honoring of Old Testament legal requirements.

⁵⁵ Liliana Firisua, interview with the author, Honiara, Guadalcanal, 14 January 2012.

⁵⁶ *Solomon Star*, 23 July 2012, 6.

⁵⁷ Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 19.