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"GOD HAS GIVEN HIS TALK":

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AMONG THE GEBUSI OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

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2009

The Thesis of Janel Kozlowski Fink is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

"GOD HAS GIVEN HIS TALK":
MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AMONG THE GEBUSI OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

by

Janel Kozlowski Fink

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Joel Robbins, Chair

The Gebusi of Papua New Guinea are recent converts to Christianity. Conversion has reshaped and transformed aspects of traditional life while introducing new belief systems and 'modern' ways of life across Papua New Guinea. In the early 1980's direct exchange, sorcery attribution and retribution, and a rich cosmological belief system are the center of the Gebusi's collective way of life. However, conversion to Christianity reshaped and transformed many of these areas of Gebusi life, while also introducing new

concepts and systems. An area that has been significantly reshaped is that of morality. Morality is not only the following of collectively sanctioned rules but also a conscious domain of choice. Using Evans-Pritchard, Gluckman, and Robbins' models on morality, I aim to demonstrate that in the transition from traditional life to Christianity and modernity, the value system of the Gebusi changed, effectively shifting morality from a collective responsibility to an individual responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

> *Now that we know God's word, we need to accept it…God has given his talk, and there is none of that [sorcery accusations are finished]. All the stealing and fighting and bad things are washed away for us when we are wiped clean with the good water [when we are baptized].*
>
> -Selected from a homily at Nomad Catholic Church, 1998 (Knauft 2002: 140)

The Gebusi, a community living in the lowlands of Papua New Guinea, recently converted to Christianity. In Papua New Guinea, conversion to Christianity often introduces new concepts that reshape, transform, and alter traditional ways of life. Introduced to the Gebusi in the early 90s, Christianity quickly transformed traditional social, cultural, and spiritual systems in ways the Gebusi believed to be modern. Before conversion to Christianity, Gebusi society emphasized "intergroup harmony and unity" and valued decisions and actions that worked towards a harmonious society (Dernbach 2005:328). To be moral was to operate within the "collectively sanctioned rules, beliefs, and opinions" that constituted this desired harmonious society (Laidlaw 2002:312). All members of Gebusi society were held accountable to this system; making the Gebusi community focused and intent on avoiding individuality at all costs.

In conversion, the notion of Christian individualism was introduced. This was the understanding that a relationship with God is intensely personal and individualistic. Gebusi collective life disappeared after conversion, and to be moral in this new system was to operate within rules that allowed for an individual to work on oneself to be a good Christian. This new individualism created a scope in which Gebusi could view and

monitor their personal moral standing, leaving behind a traditional notion of collectively working towards harmony and unity. With this new understanding of morality the Gebusi were able to look back upon their traditional past and qualify it in newly moral terms, and were able to make choices that separated themselves from what is thought to be traditional. Examining morality in terms of responsibility provides a window to view how Gebusi culture transformed in the shift to Christianity. With these shifts in mind, I argue that in the conversion to Christianity, Gebusi morality shifted from a collective responsibility to an individual responsibility. I will apply a theory of value to specific cultural elements of Gebusi life to illuminate morality in both pre-Christian life in 1982 and post-Christian life in 1998.

The anthropology of morality has gained popularity in recent years, with notable works by John Barker (2007), Jarrett Zigon (2007, 2008), and Joel Robbins (2004, 2007). These works offer a variety of models that can be applied to the realm of Gebusi moral responsibility. Morality, once understood simply as the rules and obligations that societies live by, has widened into a much broader and more encompassing level of theory. In this paper I will review some of the background of the anthropology of morality, focusing on the classic works of Edward Evans-Pritchard (Douglas 1980) and Max Gluckman (1972a, 1972b), and the more recent works of Joel Robbins and Jarrett Zigon.

I will also draw ethnographic examples about the Gebusi from the work of Bruce Knauft. Over a span of 20 years, Knauft has written two full-length ethnographies,

numerous articles, and book chapters that document the Gebusi in both pre-conversion and post-conversion times.[1] While Knauft's first ethnography, *Good Company and Violence: Sorcery and Social Action in a Lowland New Guinea Society,* describes the concept of "good company" in relation to sorcery accusations and violence in the years 1980-1982, Knauft's second ethnography, *Exchanging the Past: A Rainforest World of Before and After*, focuses directly on the changes that occurred among the Gebusi from his first fieldwork to his second fieldwork experience in 1998. These works capture a clear picture of Gebusi society before and after Christian conversion. I will draw from Knauft's work to survey Gebusi societal transformation as a method for analyzing moral responsibility among the Gebusi.

[1] See references for partial list of Knauft's publications.

MODELS OF MORALITY

ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY & MORAL CRISIS

The anthropological study of morality is built upon the work of Edward Evans-Pritchard who is often hailed as the first person to bring morality into anthropological study with his work on the Azande in Africa. He and his student Max Gluckman were mainly concerned with systems of accountability, and they explored how societies, as institutions, assigned responsibility for misfortune. Gluckman notes that Evans-Pritchard's original objective was to explain "how, in various types of groups, individuals are held responsible for the injuries and misfortunes which befall the group and its members" (Gluckman 1972a:ix). I will first explore Evans-Pritchard and Gluckman's theories on the allocation of responsibility and morality and will then explore current theories of morality that build upon Evans-Pritchard's original thoughts.

Evans-Pritchard believed that Azande witchcraft ideas functioned as a way to explain misfortunes that were otherwise unexplainable (Stewart & Strathern 2004:2). Local logic was utilized to explain misfortune, and through the assigning of responsibility for misfortune, social tension in the Azande community was dissipated (Stewart and Strathern 2004:8). It was thought that misfortune fell upon those that had done something wrong or upon those who have been wronged by someone else. Misfortune could also happen because the entire community was in the wrong or had been wronged. In regards to this reasoning, Gluckman notes: "Here, there is a theory of morality. Hence misfortune is ascribed to the ill-feeling of one's enemies against one. Good fortune is enjoyed when there is an absence of witchcraft" (1972a:xiii). To be moral then is to operate within a

certain set of rules that warrant this good fortune. With this understanding of morality, Evans-Pritchard saw witchcraft as central to the "moral value system of the Azande" (Zigon 2008:4). I will show that the Gebusi of 1982 also expressed morality through the idiom of sorcery, much like the Azande.

During his fieldwork among the Azande, Evans-Pritchard largely paid attention to "problems of responsibility and moral regulation among persons other than relatives" because the Azande only held non-familial members accountable for misfortune (Werbner 1972:228). This concept of social accountability creates a certain kind of moral environment (Douglas 1980:71) in which people are able to regulate the morality of the community, believing that "persons bear high responsibility to their fellows" while also holding themselves accountable (Gluckman 1972b:8). Of this accountability, Douglas notes: "Naturally each Azande was more specifically interested in the possibilities of holding other people accountable than in being held in account" (1980:58). In the Azande moral environment, courtesy to others was highly valued because it deflected accusations of witchcraft as witches were seen as unhappy and mean. Courtesy was also an attempt to not wrong others and attract an attack (Douglas 1980:49, 50). As we will see, the Gebusi adhered to a similar system of accountability in pre-conversion times.

Building on Evans-Pritchard's work, Max Gluckman offers us the concept of moral crisis. Moral crises "…arise in situations where a person is moved by different social rules and values to opposed courses of action, so that no clear solution is available" (Gluckman 1972b: 2). Following Evans-Pritchard, Gluckman held that the misfortune that created a moral crisis signified that there was something wrong within the moral state of a relationship or society as a whole (Gluckman 1972b:4). Gluckman says:

> For a misfortune is regarded as a break in the orderly course of events, a break which results from a disturbance in the moral relationships between the sufferer and his fellows. The breach may be by either the victim; or someone connected with him, or by an alleged wrongdoer. The moral disturbance either prompts a fellow to harm with witchcraft or sorcery, or provokes ancestral sprits or other occult beings to send ill fortune. (1972b:17)

The moral crisis occurred in the moment when it was unclear who should be held responsible for misfortune. In this situation, the Azande knew what to do when a moral breach occurred and they knew what the intended outcome was, but the entity responsible for the misfortune was not immediately obvious to them. Gluckman argues that in these situations traditional cosmological beliefs provide resolutions, but sometimes it takes time to find these resolutions. In such a situation, a non-familial community member would be accused of witchcraft and held responsible for the breach. Azande witchcraft accusations could be understood as "…the outcome of profound moral crises in relationships within the group" (Gluckman 1972b:10). Often, once responsibility was assigned for the misfortune, the moral crisis was resolved. I will show later in this paper that Gebusi sorcery accusations in pre-conversion times follow a similar pattern of moral crisis, accusation, and resolution.

Gluckman believes "…that one of the essential elements in a set of beliefs that ascribe a person's misfortunes to the witchcraft or sorcery of another is that individuals are made responsible, or at least can be held liable, for the welfare of their fellows…" (Gluckman 1975b:3). In this light, witchcraft is very individualistic—in practicing witchcraft, individuals are understood as taking an action that harms other community members, and they are thus held accountable as individuals for the welfare of other community members. This aspect of individuality in the system of assigning

responsibility is an important piece in the shift from collective responsibility to individual responsibility among the Gebusi.

CHANGE AND VALUE

While Laidlaw writes in 2002 that the anthropology of morality has "no sustained field of enquiry and debate" (Laidlaw 2002:312), this field has drawn more attention from scholars in recent years. Many useful models in which to address the issue of morality have been developed; these models are quite different than the model developed by Evans-Pritchard and Gluckman. They examined the allocation of responsibility as a way to view morality within a society, current models approach morality differently. The new models examine morality as conscious and unconscious actions according to the value given to certain elements of culture. I will highlight two models of morality here but will follow the theoretical work of Joel Robbins in my analysis.

John Barker (2007) offers some valuable points on the anthropology of morality in Melanesia. Until recently, morality in Melanesia was taken as a rather simple notion; Barker quotes L.L. Langness as saying in a 1973 article on ritual and power in New Guinea, "there is no relationship between moral rules and supernatural sanctions" in Melanesia (2007:6). Moral codes were seen as arbitrary customs and practical elements that simply kept harmony within a group (Barker 2007:6). Recent work has proven this assertion to be misguided; it is now understood that in many cases morality and religious beliefs and practices go hand in hand, and current models approach morality with this understanding. This is possible because the conceptions of morality and religion have both been widened within the study of anthropology in recent years, allowing scholars to

look more closely at how these concepts overlap within a culture. Examining this overlap makes "visible central moral [and cosmological] assumptions that are otherwise secreted in daily routines and commonsense notions of right and wrong" (Barker 2007:1). Zigon also claims: "Thus, one of the primary ways in which religion influences morality is by providing a conceptual framework within which moral experience makes sense" (Zigon 2007:52). In light of both Barker and Zigon's comments, I aim to make the moral and cosmological assumptions visible for the traditional Gebusi of 1982 and the modern, Christian Gebusi of 1998.

An influential figure in the anthropology of Christianity, Joel Robbins works among the Urapmin, a Papua New Guinean society that is marked by a conflict between traditional life and Christian life. His model of morality gives us a lens in which we can observe moral responsibility as a meaningful and valuable aspect of Gebusi society. Robbins asserts that:

> …the moral domain—as the domain of conscious choice—is a place where change comes to consciousness. For those caught living between a traditional cultural system and one they have newly adopted, morality is likely to provide the window through which they can see the contradictions with which they have to live. (Robbins 2004:14)

Drawing on Laidlaw, Robbins discusses how Durkheim's understanding of the social realm equaling the moral realm does not adequately address the role that the moral domain plays in the social. He says:

> To counteract the conflation of the moral and the cultural or social, [Laidlaw] notes how thoroughly Durkheim's engagement with Kant neglects the latter's emphasis on freedom and choice as essential criteria for determining what belongs in the moral domain. Laidlaw makes this point…in order to point out that everything people do is not undertaken as

> a moral action, but only those things they do with a reflective consciousness of having chosen to act in the way they have. (2007:294)

Moral rules only govern situations and behaviors in which humans have some freedom to make choices (Robbins 2004:183). Robbins cautions, however, that too much focus on freedom will render morality invisible (2007:295).

Robbins then offers a theory of value, drawn from Dumont, that can "…help us specify why cultures allow choice in particular domains or situations, and how such choices are felt to be moral ones by cultural actors" (2007:296). He uses Dumont's theory of value in order to view the difference between moments of moral reproduction—where morality is played out in everyday life without consciousness—and moments of moral choice where individuals have the freedom to consciously choose to be moral in times of change. In Dumont's theory of value, elements of culture are accorded different values depending on importance, therefore creating a sort of hierarchy of valued elements. Fittingly, the more valued elements are much more worked out than lower valued elements, reflecting different levels of value. Robbins also notes that, "values can be understood, then, as those elements of culture that structure the relations between other elements" (2007:297). Additionally, Dumont argues that one paramount value structures the relationships between all other values, allowing for coherence between higher and lower values. By examining where certain elements of culture fall within this hierarchy of value, one can determine what is important in a society.

Robbins' theory on the morality of reproduction allows us to see morality in everyday life. Everyday morality is easy to figure out for individuals or communities without being conscious of their choices; they understand exactly what action is required

to achieve an intended outcome. In this moral reproduction, morality can be momentarily challenged when individuals or communities know what is valued and what the intended outcome should be but need to figure out how to achieve the outcome. Regardless of this challenge, it is still easy to make the choices that allow for morality.

Robbins' theory of value then can help us view cultural change and form a better understanding of where moral choices are made as elements of culture are given different values. Conflicts arise during times of change, as old values compete with new values to be paramount values causing individuals or whole societies to experience a moral crisis. In such conflicts it is not clear what the outcome should be and people must make conscious decisions about which value to follow, making each decision "a site of moral concern" (Robbins 2007:310). It is when individuals have to make choices between competing values that they are "consciously aware of choosing their own fate" and "come to see their decision-making process as one engaged with moral issues" (Robbins 2007:300). Eventually a new structure of paramount values arises and becomes the norm, alleviating the moral crisis.

Jarrett Zigon has built upon Robbins' model of morality to develop a model that he sees as adequately addressing both conscious and unconscious aspects of morality. Like many other anthropologists studying morality, Zigon relies on Durkheim's model as a jumping off point for his own model. He sees Durkheim's concept of morality as "socially constituted, and differs across time and place according to the very structures of each society…" (Zigon 2007:132). Individual members of society follow moral rules because the collective society as a whole pressures them to do so (Zigon 2007:132; see also Dernbach 2005, Laidlaw 2002). Like Laidlaw and Robbins, Zigon finds faults with

Durkheim's model: "For when morality is equated with society (or culture), it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to analytically separate a moral realm for study" (Zigon 2007:132).

While Zigon views Robbins' approach to morality as appropriate for study of the Urapmin, he also believes that this approach limits the moral domain because he sees individuals as being moral regardless of their consciousness of it. Morality for Zigon is the "unreflective and unreflexive disposition of everyday social life." It is not preformed but "simply done" (Zigon 2008:17). Zigon claims that the need for a conscious decision in the moral domain occurs outside everyday events. He calls this moment—the moment where a person is forced to make a conscious moral choice—the moral breakdown. Zigon sees Robbins' approach based on reasoning and choice as missing a focus on these moments of moral breakdown "when one must find ways…to return to the unreflective state of being moral" (Zigon 2007:133). Here Zigon brings in the concept of ethics and claims that moral breakdown is also an ethical moment because it "is the moment in which ethics must be performed" (Zigon 2007:137). He sees ethics as the process of returning to the unreflective moral state that must be responded to in order to move past the moral breakdown.

Both Robbins and Zigon address cultural change in their models of morality, each offering powerful analysis of what is moral in cultural change. I see Robbins' models of morality of reproduction and morality of choice as appropriately addressing the issues of moral responsibility in pre-Christian and post-Christian times in Gebusi society. Later in my analysis of Gebusi cultural transformation, I will use Robbins' theory of value to demonstrate that the Gebusi of 1982 practiced a morality of reproduction while the

Gebusi of 1998 practiced a morality of choice. I will also discuss the role that value has in the shift from collective moral responsibility to individual moral responsibility.

THE GEBUSI: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

THE GEBUSI OF 1980-1982

The Gebusi are a small community in the Strickland-Bosavi area of Western Province, Papua New Guinea. In 1980, Knauft recorded a Gebusi population of 450. The Gebusi were first contacted by Westerners in 1940 by an exploratory patrol and another 20 years went by before the Gebusi were contacted again when the Australian government set up a patrol station and airstrip–known as the Nomad Patrol Post–a half-day walk from most Gebusi residence sites. This station was set up primarily so that patrol officers could pacify the aggressive and violent Bedamini, neighbors to the east and northeast of the Gebusi (Knauft 1987:8). Prior to the colonial government's interference, the Bedamini had violently raided and attacked the Gebusi, but once they were under the colonial administration's control, the violent raids stopped. Because Bedamini pacification took so much effort, patrol officers visited the Gebusi only once a year to take a census and to lecture about village cleanliness and social harmony (Knauft 2005:13). Without the interference of the Bedamini or patrol officers, the Gebusi had freedom to further develop their cosmological belief system and continue their traditional customs of sorcery accusation and execution. Conversely, outside contact also instilled a fear of being imprisoned by police for "punishable offences," such as murder. This ultimately had the effect of reducing the number of sorcery related killings even when Gebusi traditional customs flourished due to isolation[2] (Knauft 1985:15).

At the time of Knauft's fieldwork in 1980-1982, the Gebusi had seventeen main residence sites with a communal longhouse at the center of each site. These longhouses were the center of community life "at which all social and ceremonial functions [were] performed" (Knauft 1985:22). During feasts most longhouses could accommodate 100 people, but on most nights only 10-12 residents slept in the longhouse. Most residents spent two nights a week sleeping in a garden and one night a week visiting kin at other residential sites (Knauft 1985:26). The colonial administration pressured the Gebusi into moving to permanent villages because it was easier for them to patrol permanent settlements. To get around this, Gebusi constructed a central residence and told patrol officers they permanently lived at the site, but continued to move about the community each night.

Central to the Gebusi communal way of life in pre-conversion time was the concept of *kogwayay* or "good company." Knauft says of *kogwayay:* "While Gebusi do not themselves explain kogwayay, its ineffability is belied by its three morphemic components: *kog-* or 'togetherness,' *wa-* or 'talk,' and *ya-* 'yell/joke'" (Knauft 1985:63). In this term there is an understanding of communality, friendship, and similarity, where Gebusi place a high value on collective activity and communication among friends. For example, participating in reciprocal food exchanges during feasts–in which food was mutually exchanged or shared in a "tone of casual generosity and open friendship"–was seen as a manifestation of good company and was a valued element of Gebusi life (Knauft 1985:17).

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[2] Gebusi sorcery accusation and killings will be discussed in detail later in this paper.

The Gebusi community also placed value on publicly voicing opinions and collectively coming to decisions. This allowed decisions to be malleable and reformulated over time if needed (Knauft 1985:66). Knauft remarks, “The importance of Gebusi collective life is highlighted by their fear of being alone and, more generally, a marked reluctance to acknowledge individuality” (Knauft 1985:64). The Gebusi of 1982 were rarely alone, had an open door policy, and didn’t keep secrets from one another. In a community where collectivity was a core value, avoiding individuality was vital to the overall health of the community. As I will show in the next section, many of the core aspects of Gebusi culture in 1982 had greatly changed by 1998.

THE GEBUSI OF 1998

During the sixteen years between Knauft’s fieldwork trips, the Gebusi retained many traditional aspects of life but also incorporated aspects of modernity into their lives, transforming various cultural and social aspects significantly. Knauft writes, “I am fully convinced that if I had studied the Gebusi only in 1998 there is little way I could have reconstructed the depth and character of indigenous culture that was present just sixteen years earlier. Conversely, there is no way I could have extrapolated the extent or character of change based on my understandings of 1980-82, however accurate these were at the time” (Knauft 2002:23). In 1998, the desire for trade goods that was originally influenced by the patrol officers only heightened as years past, and most of the small amounts of money Gebusi obtained was spent on obtaining goods they deemed modern.

The most obvious physical change was that of residence patterns. In 1998, Gebusi

population had swelled to over 600 people. The Gebusi were no longer spread out among different residence sites but had instead moved to what became known as "Gasumi Corners," a residence site that was within a scant 25 minutes walk of Nomad Police Station[3]. This resident site had the best of both worlds for the Gebusi: they easily had access to the airstrip, churches, market, sports fields, health clinic, and government office while being able to just as easily retreat into the rainforest if desired (Knauft 2002:22). Unlike the communal longhouse that Knauft found to be the center of resident sites in the early 80's Gasumi Corners boasted separate houses for each nuclear family. These houses were considered private and personal spaces, closed off from the prying eyes of other community members (Knauft 2002:144).

The area around Nomad Station attracted many ethnic groups besides the Gebusi–Bedamini, Kubor, Samo, Pa, Honibo, Oybae, and Kabasi–creating a much busier, developed, and diverse community (Knauft 2002:34). Also new to the community were Catholic, Evangelical Protestant and Seventh Day Adventist churches which 84% of the Gebusi population attended. Children attended school five days a week and learned in Tok Pisin, the primary lingua franca of rural Papua New Guinea, instead of their local language. A local market occurred twice weekly where Gebusi women and some men tried to sell produce and goods to the few government workers that lived in the Nomad area. Many Gebusi males gathered together on weekends to play organized sports with nearby ethnic groups.

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[3] Nomad Station was handed from Australian patrol officers to the Papua New Guinea police in the late 80's. Knauft does not specify a year (Knauft 2002: 72).

The new activities that Gebusi participated in allowed individuals to create a personal identity, effectively creating a separate identity from the collective group that was so representative of the traditional past (Knauft 2002:164). In regards to this change, Knauft writes, "As a consequence, the traditional sense of good company–the togetherness, talk, and whooping/joking of Gebusi *kogwayay*–was greatly muted" (Knauft 2005:100). Togetherness and collective activity still occurred and were "…pleasant but not central to social life" (Knauft 2002:32). The diminished value of good company was evident in the choices that Gebusi made about which church to attend; each person was completely free to choose the Christian denomination of his liking, and there was no longer a model of togetherness that would influence people to participate collectively in such an activity (Knauft 2002:171). The concept of a personal identity was tied to directly the concept of Christian individualism-–the core of Gebusi conversion-–as I will show in the next section.

GEBUSI CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

In *Good Company and Violence*, Knauft points out that the Gebusi are "one of the least acculturated societies in Papua New Guinea." He also remarks, "It is an open question how long Gebusi will remain outside the purview of Western religious and economic influence" (Knauft 1985:15). As we have seen, Gebusi society changed dramatically in the sixteen years between Knauft's fieldwork periods, and conversion to Christianity most certainly played a role in the various social, cultural, and spiritual changes that occurred among the Gebusi. Knauft points out that "…the progress of Christianity and becoming modern are practically one and the same" (2002:172). In the

Gebusi pursuit of modernity they came to see Christianity as offering elements of modernity they desired. How then did Christianity become such an essential part of Gebusi life in light of the fact they traditionally perceived a richly complex cosmological belief system?

Christianity began to have a significant impact among the Gebusi within five years of Knauft leaving the area. The Catholic Church gained popularity between 1988 and 1990 and by Knauft's second fieldwork period in 1998, 59 percent of the Gebusi adult and teenage populations were members of the Catholic Church. 22 percent of Gebusi belonged to the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea and a mere three percent belonged to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The remaining 16 percent were not church members (Knauft 2002:159). The Catholic denomination was considered to be the most lenient because it had the least amount of rules to follow. The Seventh Day Adventist church was considered to be the most restrictive and the Evangelical church was considered to be the most celebratory. (Knauft 2002:160, 165). No church had more prestige over another, suggesting that church membership numbers are reflective of the level of leniency. Church services for all three denominations followed a similar pattern: "many hymns and a few prayers, a scripture reading or two, an offering collection…and the main pastoral message, followed by prayer and a concluding period of community announcements or 'tok save'" (Knauft 2002:143).The pastoral message was spoken in a mix of English and Tok Pisin with immediate translation into Gebusi. These messages were intended to "…convey the teachings and beliefs required for baptism." It was understood that three years of faithfully attending church was sufficient enough time to internalize and understand the teachings well enough to qualify for baptism (Knauft

2002:142).

The link between Christianity and modernity is a key aspect in understanding the transformation of collective moral responsibility to individual moral responsibility. Knauft states: “As a cultural symbol of Gebusi aspirations, church is important: it is associated with development and the future, and it combines spiritual process with the image of economic betterment and of a more modern style of life” (2002:157). In the Gebusi’s small corner of the world, Christianity represents what they understand to be modern and thus it is very appealing. Christianity connects them to a larger world outside Nomad and, more significantly, outside Papua New Guinea, making aspects of modern life more valuable. Church going and belief in God “provides a way to emulate a more modern style of life” (Knauft 2002:172). This modern lifestyle includes wearing Western clothes to church, having an understanding of weekly time, having knowledge of the outside world, and placing value on money, manufactured goods, and education. In this modern lifestyle, associated with Christianity and church, God is understood as having a “universal authority…which is represented by educated leaders who have power and agency at Nomad” (Knauft 2002:172).

Gebusi Christian conversion was also marked by the demise of their complex traditional cosmological beliefs. As the Gebusi accepted Christianity, the old and traditional aspects of these beliefs became irrelevant in a new and modern Gebusi society. Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins write: “…conversion is understood as a point of rupture from a pre-Christian past and a new orientation to a brighter future in which they will participate in a modern and global religious order” (2008:144). Gebusi are comfortable with Christian commitment in this rupture and are not angst ridden about giving up

traditional beliefs and values (Knauft 2002:169). In fact, as Barker claims, the Gebusi seemed eager to surrender their traditional culture in exchange for a new modern culture (2007:14). Regardless of this eagerness, the Gebusi held on to certain aspects of their culture and found themselves caught between competing values as they gave up traditional elements for modern elements of culture.

Knauft argues that after conversion, the Gebusi considered God to be a "modern super-spirit." As God came to be understood as a more powerful spirit than traditional spirits, the "spirits of old" ceased to exist in Gebusi cosmology. God, as the ultimate authority, held the power to pass judgment. Knauft writes, "In contrast to the traditional spirit medium, God exercises absolute knowledge and power…" (Knauft 2002:132). The collective Gebusi community no longer held the power to pass judgment on fellow community members; with God as super-spirit, spirit mediums were no longer needed. Spirit medium initiations ended, and remaining spirit mediums eventually converted to Christianity or died. With the absence of spirit mediums in the community, the link connecting the Gebusi to the traditional spirit world was effectively severed (Knauft 2005:110). More significantly, there was no way to conduct sorcery inquests, which led to a change in how sorcery attributions were handled.[4]

Christianity also introduced the concept of individualism to the Gebusi. Robbins notes, "…Christianity is unrelentingly individualist" because of its "…insistence on the individual as the sole unit of divine judgment (Robbins 2004:293). The Gebusi internalized this notion of individualism and began to place more value in it. Christian

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[4] This will be discussed in detail later in the paper.

individualism was a marked step towards the modern lifestyle the Gebusi greatly desired, but it also valued very different aspects of Gebusi life than good company (Bialecki, et al. 2008:1141). While good company stood for communality, friendship, and similarity, placing value on collective social life, Christian individualism emphasized the individual as the sole unit of value. With this understanding of individuality, the value that Gebusi had once placed on collective activity and communication among friends was severely diminished. Commenting on this relatively frequent occurrence in Christian conversion, Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins remark,

> This happens because Christian conversion shifts the primary locus of obligation away from lateral social bonds among consociates toward dyadic bonds between an individual and a divine alter. Once this shift takes place, relationships with both human peers and superiors become less important than an individual's relationship with God, and are therefore subjected to the tenets of Christianity over against the obligations of social relationships. (2008:1148)

As I lay out features of Christian individuality in the next section it will become visible that the transfer of value from the collective to the individual also had the effect of transferring moral responsibility from the collective to the individual.

EXAMINING MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

To contextualize and understand moral responsibility in ways that make sense to the Gebusi we must look at specific cultural elements of Gebusi life upon which they place value. Examining cultural elements in which the community and individuals "seek to operate the rules" of morality is also beneficial to contextualizing and understanding moral responsibility. Examining such elements allows us to better understand how the shift to Christianity and modernity reshaped morality (Gluckman 1972a:xxvi) as well as allowing us to make visible the "central moral assumptions" of everyday life (Barker 2007:1). With this in mind, we will look at distinct elements of Gebusi life from 1982 that can be considered traditional and characteristic of pre-Christian conversion Gebusi life as well as elements from 1998 that can be considered "locally modern" and characteristic of post-Christian conversion Gebusi life. First, I will explore the transformation from direct exchange based society to a hierarchical society. Second, I examine the transformation of sorcery accusation and violence retribution into a personal relationship with God. I aim to show that as paramount values shifted in conversion and modernity, understandings about morality changed, resulting in a shift from collective moral responsibility to an individual responsibility for the moral domain.

EXAMINING MORAL RESPONSIBILITY: FROM RECIPROCITY TO HIERARCHY

Reciprocity and Exchange

The Gebusi of 1982 greatly valued direct reciprocity, a system of "communal give-and-take" that helped to create a sense of equality among society members. This model of exchange was "encompassed by and subordinated" to the Gebusi's paramount value of good company (Knauft 1985:78). Exchange allowed the Gebusi to collectively participate in all the components of good company: communality, friendship, and similarity. The Gebusi did not recognize reciprocity as a "public demand or an explicit expectation" but rather "as a private hope, an unstated and often unacknowledged desire" (Knauft 1985:78). They gave and received in the spirit of good company, striving to exchange goods, food, and women between clans and lineages, with the understanding that the reciprocities would balance over time (Knauft 2002:14; Knauft 1985:17). Because reciprocity was encompassed within good company, the Gebusi felt no rivalry or competition within the system of exchange. Instead they desired to give generously, shying away from situations in which exact exchange was forced.

Using Robbins' model of morality of reproduction and theory of value, we can see that while the Gebusi were not conscious of their choices, they are in fact moral when participating in this system of reciprocity. Good company and reciprocity, as paramount values, were so highly valued that it was easy for the Gebusi to make choices to operate within this system of rules. In this system, individuals had a high level of responsibility to their fellow community members. To be moral was to participate collectively, and not only to participate, but to do so willingly, with the desire to exchange with others. This desire is what made this morality easy to reproduce among the Gebusi, without them

having to consciously seek out morality. At times this system was challenged, as in the case of sorcery accusation which will be discussed soon. I will now examine how as values changed for the Gebusi, their understanding of what is moral and who is responsibility for morality changed.

One of the defining features of Gebusi society in 1982 was the lack of secular authority (Knauft 1985:2). The notion of good company created equality between members of Gebusi society and all members were expected to weigh in on community decisions, eliminating the need for the leadership of a big man or manager. Men, in particular, shared a strong sense of cooperation and an egalitarian ethic (Knauft 1985:33). While spirit mediums had absolute authority in the spiritual realm, this authority did not spill out into secular life. This type of leadership is in drastic contrast to the type of leadership found among the Gebusi in 1998.

Hierarchy and Individualism

In the desire to gain "the wealth, knowledge, and lifestyle of" modern outsiders, the Gebusi accepted Christianity, internalized the notion of Christian individualism, began to value money and trade goods, and, most significantly, became passive followers in the hierarchy that was representative of modern life. Over time, good company and exchange became less valued whereas hierarchal authority and individualism became paramount values. In this new social structure, morality came to be understood in individual terms. I will illuminate how this came about in Gebusi society.

Prominent leaders of the local churches became role models to many of the Gebusi (Knauft 2002:43). Knauft notes, "…all of the newer roles—church leader, school

leader, storekeeper, sportsman, marketer, and so on—engage values of progress and distinctions of hierarchy that emanate from beyond the local community" (Knauft 2002:35). As Nomad Station was built up in the late 80's and early 90's, hierarchal authority was introduced to the Gebusi in the form of "pastors, teachers, aid post workers, and government officials." These authority figures came to represent the outside world that the Gebusi viewed as modern. In contrast to Gebusi society that once had no leadership, the Gebusi of 1998 believed that working under an authoritative boss was "distinctly modern" (Knauft 2002:145). In the same way, they also became a "religiously obedient flock" (Knauft 2002:137), following the directions of Christian pastors and working to follow the tenets of morality laid out by the church. Knauft characterizes this change well:

> Now, God commands the pastor, the pastor commands the parishioners, and the parishioners should command their children. Reciprocally, adults are childlike before God—subordinate, irresponsible, and ripe for judgment. In this Christian world, social interaction based on equivalence and direct reciprocity is replaced by a hierarchy of authority granted through the recessive agency of obedient recipients. (Knauft 2002: 146)

In accepting modernity, Knauft writes, "What easily results is passivity and recessive agency rather than self-assertion" (Knauft 2002:173). This passivity comes from the belief that outsiders (including God) have knowledge, power, and authority. Knauft argues that there is a gap in the agency of the Gebusi and this, ironically, separates villagers from the perceived modern outsiders (Knauft 2002:186). While this may be true for some Gebusi, I argue that the modern, Christian Gebusi had more agency than described by Knauft. To explore this issue, I will discuss Christian individualism in

relation to passivity and agency.

Christian individualism can be understood as "…a cultural focus on the construction above all else of saved individuals who owe their salvation to no one but themselves and God" (Bialecki, et al. 2008:1147). Once converted, Gebusi individuals entered into a personal relationship with God. Although the Gebusi went to church together, the collective group and traditional cosmology had no part in the new personal relationship with God (Knauft 2002:158). This is quite in contrast to the former belief of 1982 that aloneness would invite a sorcery attack and that individuality was an undesirable characteristic. The Gebusi of 1998 saw a personal relationship with God as the only way to avoid eternal damnation and ensure salvation. In an effort to cement their personal relationship with God, most Gebusi desired to be baptized. Baptism was also placed in individual terms—individuals were only eligible for baptism based on their personal church attendance record and commitment to God in their own heart.

As much as individuality among the Gebusi of 1982 was disdained, it was highly valued among the Gebusi of 1998. There are two reasons for this drastic shift in the understanding of individuality. First, Gebusi Christians internalized the notion of Christian individualism and understood their relationship to God only in individual terms. The relationship between individual and God became a highly valued element in Gebusi culture. The shift in the moral domain from being a collective responsibility to an individual responsibility mirrored the shift from being members of a collective to individuals within authoritarian hierarchy. The communal group did not have the authority to control what goes on in an individual's heart and could not save an individual from damnation. Essentially, the mentality of the Gebusi was: 'your heart, your

responsibility'. The Christian individual is the only one "responsible for his or her belief" (Robbins 2004:295), thus making the moral domain a critical part of an individual's responsibility.

For the Gebusi, the problem with understanding the relationship to God in only individual terms was that as a new paramount value, it was not always worked out as well as the value of good company was. In this case, it wasn't always clear what should be desired, worked for, or what the outcome should be. Values also competed with one another and the Gebusi found themselves caught between them. In this rupture, choice became conscious and the contradiction between values was illuminated. Individuals had to work to bridge this gap between values, and consciously had to make choices that fell within the new moral code. In this situation, the Gebusi had to navigate the system alone, bringing the domain of the moral individual into focus.

Second, the Gebusi came to understand themselves as being individuals within a structured hierarchy of authority. I argue that because the Gebusi came to understand themselves to be individuals within a hierarchy, they were able to express agency and self-assertion in many ways. The Gebusi sought the power and authority that accompanied the modern cultural elements that they willingly adopted into their lives. In this light, the Gebusi consciously choose to be at the bottom of a hierarchy because it is what they came to understand as modern. Being an individual within this modern hierarchy of authority also mirrors the relationship with God: God is all powerful and individual must be subordinate to God's authority. While still a member of the Gebusi community, individuals came to have their own personal identity based on personal activities and choices. These collective activities enabled the Gebusi individuals to

enhance themselves in ways that they thought were modern and appropriate within a personal relationship with God. Moments of passivity, listening, and quietness then can be seen as moments where the Gebusi believed they were acting appropriately moral and taking individual responsibility for their moral state. In choosing to be subordinate and passive, the Gebusi were in fact, exerting power as an individual and establishing a new paramount value in the new social structure of authoritative hierarchy.

EXAMINING MORAL RESPONSIBILITY: FROM SORCERY TO COMMITMENT TO GOD

Sorcery Accusation and Retribution

During Knauft's first fieldwork period from 1980 to 1982, he noted that accusations of sorcery during times of sickness resulted in one of the highest murder rates ever recorded in a human society (Knauft 2002:13). Much of collective life focused on keeping good company and avoiding situations that would not allow for the participation in communality, friendship, and similarity. Sadness and sorrow would be felt if a person was so sick they could not participate actively in good company. If the person did not get well immediately, the initial rationale for the sickness was "an inadvertent failure to observe customs of proper etiquette and good company" (Knauft 1985:85). The spirit of a dead person was thought to have been angered and causing the sickness (Knauft 1985:83). Often a simple spell would cure the person and they would get better.

Long-term and fatal illnesses, however, were thought to be caused by sorcery. Both *bap* and *ogowii* (also known as "assault") sorcery caused chronic and severe afflictions but were rarely fatal. Séances were held by spirit mediums to find out who performed the sickness inducing sorcery but formal accusations and collective action

were often not taken in *bap* and *ogowii* sorcery cases (Knauft 1985:94). The most common, most potent, and most revenged type of sorcery was *bogay*, or parcel sorcery. *Bogay* means "knot" in the Gebusi language and it was believed that affliction was caused by a sorcerer who tied up a victim's excrement into a leaf. If the knotted leaf was kept secret, the victim stayed sick but if the sorcerer burned the leaf, the victim died (Knauft 1985:96). Spirit mediums held séances to ask the spirits where the knot was hidden because if the knot was found the victim had a better chance at living. The knot was also taken as tangible evidence that the person named as the sorcerer was guilty. The alleged sorcerer then was publicly confronted, accused of sickness inducing sorcery, and urged to repent by the community. The goal of this process was to save the sick person before the sorcerer was able to burn the knot and kill the victim and thereby avoid any necessary retributive conflict. A collective consensus about an accusation was absolutely necessary for any decisive action to take place, particularly if the victim died (Knauft 1985:97). Knauft poignantly states:

> …violence retribution becomes a communal duty. Sorcerers are a lethal threat to the community…the sense of communal good company is so strong that a continuing threat to it is almost unthinkable. Faced with the potential ongoing conflict, the only perceived alternative is to excise the accepted root of the problem—the sorcerer. The sorcerer must be killed. (1985:112)

The Gebusi did not see reaccepting the responsible sorcerer into community or exiling the responsible sorcerer from the community as acceptable methods of dealing with sources of sorcery. Death was the only acceptable method of eradicating sorcery (Knauft 1985:101). Sickness-death from supernatural forces was understood as murder, requiring compensation for such an action (Knauft 2002:14). This was because the

Gebusi "…use[d] a person-for-person model of exchange and [did] not use compensation payments to resolve disputes" (Knauft 1985:101). According to Knauft, 60 percent of all sickness-deaths resulted "in either accusation of or violence against an alleged sorcerer" (Knauft 1985:126). However, even in times of social uncertainty, good company was maintained as a paramount value and the desire to reestablish social harmony was high.

Holding sorcerers accountable through accusation and retributive death ensured that Gebusi society returned to social harmony. While violence seems to go against the values of good company, Knauft claims, "In such a context [of person for person exchange] violence is not seen as a threat to good company, but as a means of reaffirming it—by excising a lethal sickness-sender from the midst of the community" (Knauft 1985:79). In this way, Gebusi collective society holds sorcerers accountable for their amoral actions. Accountability for the society thus falls on the shoulders of all members of the Gebusi community. I argue that Gebusi sorcery accusations were a part of a morality of reproduction in which the value system was momentarily challenged. The Gebusi of 1982 highly valued good company and unconsciously worked towards maintaining social harmony, reproducing the desired moral environment through everyday activities. However, when a person got sick, the Gebusi value system was challenged by a sorcerer and they found themselves in moral crisis. Sorcery was seen as exemplifying the opposite from what is desired in good company. It is very individualistic, as Gluckman argues, and seen as a threat to the welfare of other community members. The Gebusi then had to figure out how to achieve the intended outcome; to eradicate the evil sorcerer from the community and return to a harmonious state of being. Accusations and retributive death are the result of this challenge and the

only resolution the Gebusi viewed as appropriately eradicating sorcery.

Personal Commitment to God

In 1998, this system of sickness explanation and sorcery accusation drastically changed. Sorcery accusations occurred less frequently and the type of sorcery attributed to sickness was easily dismissed without having to do a séance or take retributive action (Knauft 2002:130). In the time between 1982 and 1998, Knauft found a six-fold reduction in homicides of alleged sorcerers. There were many explanations for this dramatic drop in sorcery related killings including police intervention and government coercion (Knauft 2002:64). Knauft claims, however, that "The largest single factor in the decline of Gebusi revenge against sorcerers [was] the demise of spirit mediumship" in the conversion to Christianity and the adoption of modern cultural elements (2002:123). This demise was linked to the idea that God was the only spirit to be worshiped and that only he had the authority to punish sorcerers. Pastors outlawed violence, and, over time, spirit mediumship and sorcery accusation was seen as "the epitome of unchristian and sinful behavior" and spiritual backwardness (Knauft 2002:125). In 1998 there was still a belief in sorcery, but inquests, accusations, and retribution against alleged sorcerers became nearly unheard of. In cases where sorcery was suspected, the collective consensus that was necessary for retributive action was no longer available to back an accuser. Knauft claims this was "increasingly stigmatized as an affront to the Christian propriety, civility, and well-being of the village" (Knauft 2002:128).

The Gebusi system of sorcery accusations quickly gave way to modern methods of policing and governance and more notably a personal relationship with God as I have

laid out elsewhere in this paper. I will, however, discuss the connection between this new relationship and sorcery and the shift in moral responsibility. The Gebusi of 1982 relied on the collective group to maintain morality in a way that allowed them to live harmoniously. This involved punishing and eradicating any perceived threat. The notion of God as super spirit dramatically changed this. While sorcery still existed, it was no longer a perceived threat because God held the ultimate retributive power. This alleviated the Gebusi of collective responsibility and action and allowed them to focus on only their personal hearts and minds. They were responsible in their relationship to God to work on themselves in ways that kept their commitment to God a paramount value. The Gebusi of 1998 were then faced with the morality of choice. Morality was no longer unconscious and unreflective. They were consciously aware of the choices they made because each choice became a site of moral concern—they had to make the correct choices and be accountable to God on judgment day (Knauft 2002:158). These choices "are themselves individual ones: deciding to go to church, praying, reading the bible" (Knauft 2002:158). Christian individuals had to make daily choices to do the things they believed to be Christian, modern and right in the eyes of God. These choices were understood as separating themselves from their past lives of traditional sorcery accusation and retribution in an attempt to resolve the contradiction they felt between traditional and Christian lives.

CONCLUSION

Knauft's ethnographic works give a privileged view of the transformation Gebusi society has experienced over a twenty year period. During this time, the Gebusi transformed from a traditional society with a collective focus to a modern, Christian society with an individual focus. Morality, as a feature of Gebusi society in both 1982 and 1998, serves to contextualize how Christianity changed Gebusi society. Through the examination of particular cultural elements, I have demonstrated the ways in which the Gebusi were moral in 1982 and 1998 and how this morality transformed within the societal transformation the Gebusi experienced between those years. Robbins' theory of value illuminates what aspects of life were important to the Gebusi: good company and reciprocity in 1982 and modernity and Christianity in 1998. Through an understanding of Gebusi value hierarchy, we were able to view how certain choices fell into the moral domain. Evans-Pritchard and Gluckman's theories on assigning responsibility for misfortune allowed us to see sorcery accusation as a system that was part of a certain kind of moral environment created by the Gebusi. This environment was based on the paramount value of good company and was so desired that the Gebusi did not have to consciously make choices to be moral within this system. However, in times of long-term or fatal sickness, the Gebusi momentarily faced a moral crisis within this morality of reproduction. Through the use of spirit mediums and their cosmological beliefs, the Gebusi community assigned responsibility and eradicated any threat to their moral environment, resolving the moral crisis. The collective group was thus responsible for maintaining morality.

This moral environment dramatically transformed when modernity and Christianity were introduced to the Gebusi. Modern ways of life became more valuable and authoritarian hierarchy and Christian individualism became paramount values. The personal and individual relationship to God was contrary to the traditional paramount value of good company. Robbins' model of moralities of choice illuminated, as a new paramount value, Christian individualism as required for the Gebusi to make conscious choices to be moral. These choices included choosing to participate in authoritarian hierarchy and being passive in an effort to work on oneself within this hierarchy. The individual then, was solely responsible for their personal morality.

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