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# *Wok* ('work') as a Melanesian Cultural Keyword: Exploring Semantic Insights from an Indigenous Tok Pisin[1] Play

**Abstract:** This paper offers a preliminary cultural semantic exploration of a key social concept of the Melanesian worldview advanced in the anthropological literature of the area. It is argued that the cultural meaning of this notion can be accessed by focusing on the relevant contextual and semantic properties of the corresponding Tok Pisin lexical unit *wok*(*im*) ('work') examined in a noteworthy cultural text approached as a source of linguistic evidence.

**Keywords:** Tok Pisin, creole, cultural keyword, cultural semantics, Melanesia, worldview

## 1. Introduction: between English words and Melanesian values

While the word *Melanesia* itself is not of Melanesian origin (see Lawson 2013 for a critical history of the idea), attempts have been made at identifying a significant group of 'Melanesian Values' meant to pinpoint salient cultural commitments of Melanesian peoples. In fact, observing unity in the considerable diversity of local languages and cultural practices has been one of the enduring concerns of Melanesian ethnography, leading to the emergence of the notion of the Melanesian worldview. Following this line of thought, early British ethnographers of Melanesia came up with lists of cultural values, practices, prominent native words, and symbolic items which aimed to capture many – if not all – distinctive characteristics shared by Melanesian societies. For example, one of the early illustrative works of that genre, Francis Edgar Williams' (1932) Anthropology Report No.12 *Sentiments and Leading Ideas in Native Society* contained a brief description of twelve 'leading ideas' of Melanesian societies, spelt out as follows:

(1) 'Native Conservatism: The Attachment to Tradition', (2) 'Corporate Self-Regard: Pride in Culture', (3) 'Individual Self-Regard: Self-Display', (4) 'Loyalty to Group: Clannishness', (5) 'Intra-Group Sentiment: The Sympathetic Sanction', (6) 'The Sense of Shame', (7) 'Sentiment toward Relatives by Marriage', (8) 'Respect for Seniority', (9) 'Sentiments toward the Dead', (10) 'Tribal Secrets: The Mysteries', (11) 'The Economic Balance: Reciprocity', (12) 'Pride in Food Production: The Cult of Food'.

When looking at the content and wording of Williams' list from a cultural semantic point of view (see Wierzbicka 2016), however, one cannot but observe that it was only in number (6) 'The Sense of Shame' that Williams went on to associate some actual indigenous words with that particular 'leading idea' (1932,1). In order to clarify his observation, Williams further noted that "the word 'shame' is thoroughly embedded in pidgin-English" (cf. its contemporary Tok Pisin sound-alike *sem* (with its original meaning of 'male or female genital organs'), while "we have *hemarai* as its counterpart in pidgin-Motuan". Other than that, he surmised that "It is probable that in every native language in the Territory we should find a roughly corresponding term and concept (Orokaiva, *meh*; Elema, *maioka*; etc.)" (Williams 1932, 1).

The relative paucity of linguistic evidence notwithstanding, it appears that a salient feature of the hypothesis of the Melanesian worldview presented in such early anthropological writings, was its marked attention to the local notional factors, clearly conveyed in the title of Williams' essay, which specified two related groups of target concepts, namely 'sentiments and leading ideas'. In particular, the reality of a worldview conceived along such lines was ostensibly connected to the nature of Melanesian symbolic constructs and interpretive routines.

In more recent times, however, the postulate of approaching Melanesia as a cultural area has been intertwined with an acknowledgement of the constitutive role of Melanesian Pidgin (cf. Lynch 1998, 221–232; note 1) in sustaining the emergent Melanesian cultural identity. Consequently, the task of identifying Melanesian values became tied to the language which furnished the common lexical and conceptual currency of the area, namely Melanesian Pidgin. Several scholars – both Melanesians and outsiders – routinely pointed to some common cultural priorities clearly favoured by Melanesian societies. For example, as claimed by Vallance, "Melanesian ontology will be grounded in relationships. These relationships will be primarily communal" (2007, 7). Indeed, it appears that this proposal has been shared by both past and present scholars of Melanesian societies, such as Hukula (2017) and Narokobi (1983), who refer to kin-like relatedness as one of the key cultural features of Melanesian societies. It merits attention that the idea of common cultural identity spans many aspects of individual Pacific societies. For instance, as argued by Vallance (2007, 5), it is "Melanesians' sense of unity within many divisions of languages, geography and levels of socio-economic development, particularly low levels of adult literacy (…)", which, in their turn "uniquely stamp

the Melanesian world view". Thus, it seems plausible to maintain that the thesis of the Melanesian worldview is hardly controversial anymore, while its precise scope and conceptual content remain relatively flexible if not fully fleshed-out.

## 2. Melanesian values in Melanesian words: Franklin's (2007) contribution

A valuable contribution to anthropological research on Melanesian leading ideas has been an attempt at capturing their unique significance with specific Melanesian lexical items stemming from Melanesian Pidgin, rather than simply affixing their indigenous cultural meanings with common (and culture-specific) English words. In recent years, the eminent scholar of Melanesian languages and cultures Karl J. Franklin put forward a group of ten values targeted to delineate the Melanesian worldview. His notable paper titled "Framework for a Melanesian World View" (2007) offered a lexically detailed statement of the hypothesised content of Melanesian cultural ideology, encompassing a list of "Some Key Terms When Discussing Values in Tok Pisin" (2007, 42–47). His full list of "Key Terms" includes more than seventy Tok Pisin words and expressions grouped around the following broad values which constitute the conceptual scaffolding of the Melanesian worldview identified by Franklin:

1. The value of land (*graun* or *wara*)
2. The value of the clan (*lain* or *wantok*)
3. The value of reciprocity (*bekim, bekim bek*)
4. The value of food (*kaikai, mumu*)
5. The value of ancestors (*tumbuna, tambaran*)
6. The value of ritual (*tambu, singsing, lotu*)
7. The value of leadership (*hetman*)
8. The value of education (*skul*)
9. The value of compensation (*peibek, bekim, birua*)
10. The value of work (*wok*)

However, one can hardly overlook that the ten core Melanesian values pinpointed by Franklin with English words, subsumed a score of Tok Pisin lexical items, an observation which inevitably leads one to consider an interpretive issue of the actual semantic relationship between English words and indigenous cultural concepts expressed in Tok Pisin. While the formal side (spelling and pronunciation) of an English-lexified creole language may superficially remind one of English, it actually (and misleadingly – for native speakers of the lexifier language) bears a complex semantic relationship with its chief lexical donor language, as amply demonstrated by recent studies on the semantics of pidgin and creole languages, both from descriptive-typological and anthropological linguistic perspectives (see,

e.g. Huttar 2008; Hollington 2015) Consequently, in order to access the relevant usage of creole words, their meanings need to be unravelled in their informative cultural context. In the case of this paper, such a context is assumed to be found in a piece of indigenous literature written in Tok Pisin and originally intended to depict the realities of life and the communicative universe of its users, captured in a historically memorable cross-cultural incident.

## 3. From Tok Pisin literary discourse to Melanesian cultural semantics

Writing about the emergence of literary production in Tok Pisin, Laycock (1985, 504) distinguished three "separate strands of literature" created in this language:

1. folk literature: songs, stories, and speeches of indigenous Tok Pisin speakers, transmitted orally.
2. writings in Tok Pisin by Europeans, for the most part translations.
3. deliberate 'literary' creations in Tok Pisin by indigenous writers and published over their own names.

As pointed out by Laycock, "self-conscious creative writing in Tok Pisin by local-born authors is a comparatively new phenomenon; outlets for publication in this field have been available only since 1969" (1985, 504). Adding to Laycock's division, one might note that during the debates about the social role of Tok Pisin during the pre-independence period of Papua New Guinea, some scholars took up the issue of Tok Pisin's considerable relevance in the development of local literary discourse. For instance, Roger Boschman, the editor of the literary journal *Papua New Guinea Writing*, addressed its readers in his essay, headed by a pertinent question: "Pidgin for literature?"

> There has been much discussion over the years as to the importance of the lingua franca, Neo-Melanesian Pidgin English, to the future of Papua New Guinea. In many minds Pidgin contests heavily with English as the future official national language of Papua New Guinea. (…) What about Pidgin as a language of literature? (Boschman 1973, 1)

A potentially distinct national identity-building role of the chief local contact language has also been noted by other scholars studying sociolinguistic aspects of nationhood building in the late pre-independence period of Papua New Guinea (i.e. shortly before 1975). For example, Romaine (1995, 95), writing about pre-statehood debates which centred around the envisaged political and social status of Tok Pisin in the emerging state of Papua New Guinea, pointed to a simultaneous rise in the use of Tok Pisin as the language of nascent Papua New Guinean literature,

broadly conceived as the expression of "nationalist sentiment". Significantly, Tok Pisin came to be used in several prominent novels and plays written at that time (Romaine 1995, 95), one of which was Rabbie Namaliu's "semi-historical" play *Maski Kaunsil* published in 1975. Romaine (1995, 95), who translates the title of Namaliu's play as *Never Mind Council*, emphasizes the historical context of Tok Pisin literary output of that time, underscoring its significance in the climate of pre-independence Papua New Guinea:

> In the period leading up to self-government many felt that they were using literature to express nationalist sentiment and to help create a national identity. Many playwrights became politicians.

Romaine's observation appears to be particularly apt with respect to the person of Rabbie Namaliu (Sir Rabbie Langanai Namaliu), a former prime minister of Papua New Guinea (1988–1992) and the author of two plays written in Tok Pisin: *The Good Woman of Konedobu* (1970) and *Maski Kaunsil* (1975) The second work has been classified as a "semi-historical" play which is concerned with "village and administrative conflicts" (Goetzfridt 1995, 22). More specifically, the key elements of the depicted conflict were originally fuelled by transitioning from an earlier *luluai* (Tolai[3] 'chief, leader in war') village administrative system introduced by Germans, towards the development of *kivung na baramana* ( Tolai 'young men's council or assembly') and then to the system of local native government councils ( *kaunsil*) aimed to "pave the way for fuller participation in government and politics at the territorial level" (see Epstein 1969, 251-252). The play was inspired by an actual event which took place in East New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea, towards the end of 1951. As recounted by Epstein (1969, 251-252), John Keith McCarthy, District Commissioner of Rabaul, visited the village of Raluana to persuade the Tolai people there to accept a new form of local (native) government council – called *kaunsil* in Tok Pisin – as a beneficial form of administration. Yet, the inhabitants remained adamant, and the meeting quickly developed into a brawl, during which McCarthy was struck over his head with a crutch. Subsequently, the villagers who took part in the brawl got arrested and sentenced to a six-month prison sentence.

Before embarking on the actual analysis of the relevant fragment of that text, however, a few clarifying remarks about the use of native literature as evidence in ethnolinguistic research deserve to be presented. Mining an indigenous literary text for insights into links between the cultural meanings of local words and communicative practices of their users is not new in the field of ethnolinguistic studies. For example, the idea of using dramatic scripts as anthropological evidence in linguistic and cultural research on pidgin and creole languages has been pursued by Worman (2006, 35), who pointed to some hard-to-neglect advantages of using certain kinds of indigenous literary production as data for linguistic inquiry:

> Staged speech represents the variety of speech that is written to be spoken and may come closest to "ordinary" spoken speech. Not only does staged speech represent the variety "written to be spoken," but modern drama is in some sense thought to be superior to a corpus based on spoken language since the latter may be less thoughtfully conceived and expressed and thus poorer in reflecting the prototypical tendencies in a language. (Dirven et al. 1982, 6-7)

It is worth emphasizing that the idea of approaching indigenous literature as a source of evidence in studies of languages and cultures has been upheld not only by anthropological linguists, but also by cultural psychologists, such as Murray Thomas (2001, 22), who argued that "communicative and creative products of a culture often mirror important elements of society's folk psychology". Taking cue from the preceding recommendation, the present paper seeks to offer a cultural semantic reading of a fragment of one indigenous text, representative of the third group of Tok Pisin literary creations, focusing on one significant lexical item which runs through the verbal exchanges of participants.

## 4. *Work* and *wok* as respective cultural keywords of Anglo and Melanesian cultures

Williams (1985, 266–268), who counted *work* as one of the cultural keywords of the Anglo English-speaking world, observed that "as our most general word for doing something, and for something done, its range of applications has of course been enormous. What is now most interesting is its predominant specialization to regular paid employment". While the idea that the word *work* constitutes an example of a culturally prominent lexical and discursive construct in English is by no means surprising (see Goddard and Ye 2015, 69 for another account), it seems interesting to uncover what happened to this culturally salient word, when it was 'recycled' – as per Iteanu's (2015) felicitous phrase[2] – as *wok* in Melanesian cultural environment, which offered a different linguistic and social picture in this regard.

According to Franklin (2007, 36–38), research on Melanesian languages pointed to a lack of a general translational equivalent of a common English verb *to work*. Characteristically, an indigenous language such as Kewa (studied and described by Franklin) provided a variety of forms depending upon the exact nature of the task, relating them to specific functions within culture, and not to time or payment (Franklin 2007, 37). With the advent of that new meaning contained in the English word *work*, the multiplicity of native words received the salient super-ordinate Tok Pisin term *wok*, which placed them in an altogether new conceptual order. As Franklin explained, "(…) once "work" was imported into the culture by the government and missionaries, a broader descriptive label was necessary

to refer to the kinds of work that had specific time and wage constraints" (2007, 37). Arguably, one of the valuable anthropological insights afforded by Namaliu's play is that it furnishes a native literary rendering of an instance of a cross-cultural encounter where the two culturally pregnant Tok Pisin words *wok* (n) and *wokim* (vt) were brought into the communicative focus of village-level activities of collective debating and decision making. As expected, such activities engaged both the local Melanesian people (speaking Tok Pisin and Tolai[3]) and a prominent Australian administrative officer (speaking Tok Pisin and English) and his party.

Before examining the use of *wok* in a fragment of connected discourse, brief information about the chief linguistic properties of this Tok Pisin lexical item is necessary, as the descriptive linguistic categorisation of *wok* is quite complex. Todd (1984, 191) classifies this lexical element as a multifunctional transitive adjective verb: *wok*(*im*) AVTM <Eng. 'work + 'em'>, which she glosses as 'build, work, be busy'. Another broad set of glosses given by Baing and Volker (2008, 121-122) includes nominal and verbal English equivalents grouped as (1) 'work, task, occupation' and (2) 'to work, process, produce, grow'. Linguistic reflections of that characteristic cultural scheme identified by Franklin (2007, 37), namely, finer gradations and specifications of 'work' which followed the spread of Melanesian Pidgin as the chief tool of intercultural communication in Melanesian societies – are present in a productive nominal compound pattern of *wok* + N(oun), such as e.g. *wok bisnis* ('business activities'), *wok kamda* ('woodworking', work + camden), or *wok mani* (work + money, 'work for a wage', paid employment'), etc. At the same time, the formative *wok* also became a part of Tok Pisin's tense-modality-aspect (TMA) system. Dutton and Thomas (2002, 104-105) point to the '*wok long* + verb' structure, which, they say "is a very common structure that is used for to be busy doing something; to work at doing something". Significantly, however, this construction does not entail any exertion on the part of a volitional human being at all, the meaning which they illustrate with the following dialogue:

Man: *Ya. Olsem na mi raun i stap bilong painim* ***wok****. Tasol ol i no gat* ***wok****.*
Yes. And so, I'm going around looking for work. But no one has any.
Isaia: *Nau yu* ***wokim*** *wanem i stap?*
What are you wanting to do now?
Man: *Mi* ***wok long*** *sindaun nating tasol na wetim* ***wok*** *bai i kamap.*
I'm busy sitting down doing nothing waiting for jobs to come up.

While this one, and numerous similar examples adduced by Dutton and Thomas (2002, 104-105) demonstrate that the words *wok* (n) and *wokim* (vt) are part and parcel of colloquial Tok Pisin, their cultural significance merits investigation. As emphasized by Franklin, the concept of *wok* originally surfaced as a 'recycled' English notion in specific social settings, i.e. bound to governmental, administrative, and missionary activities. As such, it became welded both to the native concepts

and practices of social administrative power (such as *kivung* – 'village meeting'), as well as to the new means of redistributing wealth, such as *moni* ('money') and *takis* ('taxes') introduced by the colonial administration. For example, economic changes brought about in the area represented in Namaliu's play resulted in the introduction of such novel economic practices and concepts as those of 'work for wages', 'contract work', and 'taxes' (see Epstein 1969, 57–65). In order to facilitate such social changes, the then Australian administration proceeded to introduce a new type of native governing bodies, referred to as local administrative councils, which, however, ended up in conflict with the original *kivung*, which opposed the paying of taxes (Epstein 1969, 57–65).

## 5. Bringing *kaunsil, wok* and *takis* to Raluana: creole words and misread social intentions

Rabbie Namaliu's play *Maski Kaunsil* (1975) takes four acts to recount the full progress of the memorable 1951 encounter between the inhabitants of Raluana village and John Keith McCarthy, an experienced Australian local administrative officer. The purpose of this section, however, is to offer a translation and a cultural linguistic commentary of a short fragment from Scene Two of the play (1975:17–21), which consists of thirteen adjacent utterances of McCarthy and several villagers, who come to a strong disagreement about the newly proposed type of representative body (named *kaunsil* in Tok Pisin) supposedly connected with various kinds of beneficial *wok* ('work') which the introduction of the *kaunsil*-based representative system should enable. However, the villagers of Raluana remain unwilling to accept that new administrative concept (rightly expecting unwelcome shifts in local politics), accuse McCarthy of 'cheating/tricking' (*giamanim*) them, arguing instead, that their native *kivung* ('village meeting/assembly') serves their needs better.

The translation below follows Duranti's (1997,156-157) Format II, which consists of original text and parallel free translation. Whenever necessary, additional types of glossing are used as well. All instances of the key Tok Pisin word ***wok*** (n) and ***wokim*** (vt) are in bold, while other contextually relevant Tok Pisin words (e.g. *kaunsil*) are italicized in both the original and the translated texts.

The scene was preceded by an announcement that the current *kivung* (village assembly) has been summoned to announce an important meeting with the local area's *kiap* (government officer in pre-independence Papua New Guinea) intended to instruct villagers about their *wok* ('work') following the gathering. The village crowd has assembled on the grounds of their local primary school.

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| (1) Scene Two, p.18: Makati<br><br>Mi bin kam hia bipo long toktok long dispela samting *kaunsil*. Nau gen mi wantaim ol man hia, yupela ken lukim long painimaut sapos yupela senisim tingting bilong yupela long dispela samting kaunsil. Yupela harim pinis ol bilong Nangananga na Toma. Nason ToKabait em i stap wantaim yumi nau. Ating yupela olgeta i save long em. Olsem wanem yupela strong yet long yupela i no laik kirapim kaunsil, o yupela orait long en. Mi laik tokim yupela gen long dispela samting, sapos yupela kirapim wanpela kaunsil olsem ol ples hia mi tokim yupela long ol, bambai yupela yet inap long ronim sampela samting long ples bilong yupela. Bambai yupela yet inap long kisim takis olsem mani, na bambai yupela yet inap toktok long wanem ***wok*** yupela laikim lusim dispela mani long en. Bambai yupela ken nap long ***wokim*** dispela mani long en. Bambai yupela ken nap long ***wokim*** nupela haus. long skul bilong yupela, long kapa na palang na simen. Olsem tu. bambai yupela inap long stretim ol liklik trabel long ples bilong yupela yet long Raluana. Gavman bambai i givim planti helpim mo long ples bilong yupela | McCarthy –<br><br>I came here before to talk about this thing, kaunsil. Now, as for me and other men here, you can find out if you changed your mind about this thing, kaunsil. You have heard about (the villages of) Nangananga and Toma. Nason ToKabait is with us now. Perhaps, you know about him. Why are you so hard set against setting up a kaunsil, or are you alright with it? I want to talk to you again about this thing, if you set up a kaunsil, like the villages I'm telling you about you will be able to run some things in your village. Soon, you will receive tax money, and soon you yourselves will be able to discuss what ***wok*** you would like to spend your tax money on. Soon you will be able to ***wokim*** (use) that money on it. Soon you will be able to ***wokim*** (build) a new house for your school, with roofing iron, sawn timber, and cement. Thus, you will be able to settle your small problems in your village of Raluana.<br><br>Government will give you much more help in your village. |
| (2) Scene 2, p.18: Kepas<br><br>Tenkyu tru Makati long toktok bilong yu. (He turns to the crowd and continues) Yumi harim pinis toktok bilong nambawan kiap bilong yumi. Olsem wanem long tingting bilong yupela long dispela samting, kaunsil? Yumi harim pinis ol gutpela samting yumi nap ***wokim*** long takis mani. Olsem tu ol bilong Vunamami na Reimber, na Nangananga, ol kirapim pinis kaunsil bilong ol. Nason em i stap wantaim yumi nau, na mi ting em bambai toktok bihain long dispela samting. I gat toktok long yupela long dispela samting? | Kepas –<br><br>Thank you, McCarthy for your speech. (…) We have heard the speech of our most important kiap. What do you think about this something, kaunsil, then? We have heard about the good things we can ***wokim*** with tax money. Also, the villages of Vunamimi and Reimber, and Nangananga, they have set up their own kaunsil. Nason is here with us now, and I think he will speak about this later. Is there anything you want to say about it? |
| (3) Scene Two, p.18: Tuvi (addressing the crowd and Makati and his party on behalf of the people)<br><br>Tenkyu tru Mr Makati long toktok bilong yu. Kaunsil em i gutpela samting na i bikpela samting, tasol mipela i no redi long en yet. Yu gutpela pren bilong mipela yet long Raluana, tasol mipela i no ting mipela inap yet long en. Olsem mipela i no laik kirapim wanpela kaunsil yet long ples bilong mipela nau. Ating long bihaintaim, sapos mipela redi pinis orait bambai mipela tokim yu. | Tuvi –<br><br>Thank you, Mr McCarthy for your speech. Kaunsil is something good and something big, but we are not ready yet. You are a good friend of us here, in Raluana, but we think we are not up to it yet. That's why we don't want to set up a kaunsil in our village yet.<br><br>Maybe later, when we are ready, we will tell you. |

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| (4) Scene Two, p.18: Makati<br><br>Mi no ting em i tru. Yupela gat tisa pinis olsem yu Tuvi, na yupela gat planti man tu ol ***wok*** long taun na long sampela hap long Papua na Nu Gini. Yupela gat bikpela save pinis long inap kirapim wanpela kaunsil. Wanem kain save yupela laikim? Mi laikim yupela tok save mo long wanem tru yupela i no laikim kaunsil. | McCarthy –<br><br>I don't think this is true. You all have already had a teacher, like you, Tuvi, and you have also had many men who ***wok*** in towns and other places in Papua and New Guinea. You have had sufficient experience/ knowledge to assemble a kaunsil. What kind of knowledge do you want? I want you to tell me more, why really you don't want kaunsil. |
| (5) Scene Two, p.18: Kepas<br>(attempting to calm the crowd)<br><br>Em i no samting long tok kros long en, em samting long stretim. Mi laikim bambai yumi tok stret long ol. Mi laikim bambai Tuvi i toksave long ol tingting bilong yumi olgeta. | Kepas –<br><br>This isn't something to speak angrily about, this is something to settle straight. I want us (incl.) to speak straight with everybody. I want Tuvi to explain our thinking to everybody. |
| (6) Scene Two, p.18: Tuvi (getting up and addressing Makati and his party)<br><br>Mr Makati, mipela i laikim kaunsil tumas, tasol mipela i nogat save long ronim kaunsil. Mipela i no gat mani long baim takis. Yu save mipela gat kivung pinis. Dispela samting mipela ting em bilong ol pikinini bilong mipela long bihain. Long taim ol i gat planti mani na bikpela save, bambai ol i ken toksave long yu long gavman long kirapim wanpela kaunsil. | Tuvi –<br><br>Mr McCarthy, we really want a kaunsil, but we don't have knowledge to run a kaunsil. We don't have money to pay taxes. I know, we just have a kivung. This thing is something for our children in the future. When they have a lot of money and a lot of knowledge, then they can inform you in the government to set up a kaunsil. |

As observed by Franklin (2007), Tok Pisin words *wok* (n) and *wokim* (vt) characteristically emerged in the administrative discourse of colonial Melanesia. The first utterance of McCarthy (Makati) contains all contextual hallmarks described by Franklin – nouns *takis* ('tax') and *mani* ('money') appear in discourse as linked to the new concept of *wok*. All kinds and materials of work which are described by McCarthy in his introductory words are indicated as clearly conducive to the welfare of the villagers of Raluana (1), who are going to be better off thanks to the availability of modern building materials (sawn timber, roofing iron, etc.) and a possible surplus of money. However, the two villagers Kepas (2) and Tuvi (3) try to tone down and postpone the introduction of the administrative *kaunsil* which might herald such impressive changes, appealing to their own feigned ignorance (Tuvi, 3 and 6) Yet, McCarthy (Makati) refuses to believe the explanations he received, appealing to Tuvi's experience as a teacher, as well as to the fact that many men from Raluana already *wok* ('work') in a number of towns in Papua New Guinea (4) A stand-off ensues, as both McCarthy and the villagers realise that their arguments do not really work as they had expected (8, below).

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| (7) Scene Two, p.19: Tuvi<br>(talking to Kepas and Penias)<br><br>Makati i strong yet hia. Yumi no ken pret tumas long tok strong. Yumi mas tok strong long yumi i no laikim *kaunsil*. | Tuvi –<br><br>McCarthy is strong here. We mustn’t be afraid to oppose (him). We must argue that we don’t want a *kaunsil*. |
| (8) Scene Two, p.19: Makati<br><br>Tenkyu tru, mipela harim pinis sampela toktok bilong yupela, tasol mipela tu i no save tru long wanem yupela i no laikim *kaunsil*. | McCarthy –<br><br>Thank you, we have listened to some of your words, but we don’t really know why you don’t want a *kaunsil*. |
| (9) Scene Two, p.19: Tuvi<br><br>Mr Makati, mipela i no gat mo toktok long dispela samting. Mipela tokim yu pinis long olget tingting bilong mipela, i mobeta sapos yumi larim dispela samting. | Tuvi –<br><br>Mr McCarthy, we have nothing more to say about this thing. We have told you everything that we think, it’ll be better if we let go of this thing. |

As McCarthy senses that his words achieve no effect, he moves to threaten Tuvi, just like the latter expected (7). Predictably, he threatens to remove Tuvi from his *wok* (‘work’) conveying that Tuvi is by no means as poor and ignorant as he claims to be (10). At this moment, another local man cuts in, verbally attacking McCarthy (11) and accusing him of trying to trick and confuse (*giamanim*) them with their concept of *kaunsil*, just like the White people (*ol masta*) used to do before, when they appropriated their land for metal tools and stick tobacco (*tabak*).

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| (10) Scene Two, p.19: Makati<br><br>Tuvi, sapos yu tok gen olsem bambai nau tasol mi rausim yu long wok bilong yu. Yu harim? Husat i tok yupela i nogat mani, husat i tok yupela i nogat bikpela save, husat i save *giamanim* yupela long ol dispela kain toktok? Husat i . . . | McCarthy –<br><br>Tuvi, if you speak like this again, I will throw you out of your *wok*. Do you hear? Who says you (pl) don’t have money, who says you (pl) don’t have much knowledge, who tricks you (pl) with this kind of talk? Who … |

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| (11) Scene Two, p.19: Third Man (getting up and talking angrily)<br><br>Orait Makati, yu ken givim toktok long mipela long wanem samting yu laik. Tasol mipela les pinis long harim *kaunsil*, *kaunsil*, *kaunsil*. Em wanem samting? I nogat arapela samting long toktok long en? Ol taim yupela ol masta i laik kam na giamanim mipela long kirapim kaunsil. Long wanem yupela i no save laik long toktok wantaim mipela liklik long giraun bipo yupela kam stilim long mipela long akis, tabak, na ol hap aen hia? (He shows them a knife)<br><br>Samting ol tumbuna bilong mipela i nogat save long en, na yupela kam *giamanim* ol long en. | Third Man (a villager) –<br><br>Alright McCarthy, you can speak to us about anything you want. But we are fed up with hearing *kaunsil*, *kaunsil*, *kaunsil*. What is it? Isn't there anything else to talk about? You white people (*ol masta*, 'masters') always come and trick (*giamanim*) us into setting up a *kaunsil*.<br>That's because you didn't use to talk about the land you stole from us in exchange for axes, tobacco, and other iron things (like this knife) here?<br><br>Things that our ancestors didn't know about, you came and tricked (*giamanim*) everyone with them. |

As of this moment, the second man joins in attacking McCarthy with more accusations of cheating and tricking (*giamanim*), while Kepas encapsulates the definitive conclusion for McCarthy (13), clearly asserting that his people have no need of the institution which McCarthy attempts to impose on them (or more precisely, to lure them into), as their local *kivung* is fully sufficient as far as their current needs are concerned.

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| (12) Scene Two, p.19: Second Man<br><br>Em pasin bilong ol masta tasol hia ol laik kam giamanim yumi ol taim | Second Man –<br><br>This is the way of the white people, they always come and trick us /cheat us |
| (13) Scene Two, p.19: Kepas<br><br>Orait, inap Makati harim pinis ol toktok long pipal bilong mi. Mipela i no laikim *kaunsil* long wanem mipela i gat *kivung* pinis. Mipela ting dispela samting orait long mipela nau. | Kepas –<br><br>Alright, that's enough, McCarthy has listened to my people. We don't want a *kaunsil* because we have a *kivung*. We think this is something which is alright for us now. |

## 6. Concluding remarks

It has been argued that the communicative events evoked in the studied fragment of Namaliu's play can be construed as evidence in favour of Franklin's (2007, 37) statement linking the emergence of the Tok Pisin (and more broadly, Melanesian) concept of *wok* to colonial administrative settings. Consequently, in order to form a more accurate picture of cultural and contextual significance of this word within Namaliu's work, one should observe that it is prominently juxtaposed with a

novel English-derived administrative term *kaunsil* – which unlike the supposedly equivalent Tolai word *kivung* – remains unclear and contested to the Melanesian inhabitants of the village. Moreover, a prominent linguistic factor which seems to contribute to the notional complexity of the cross-cultural encounter reconstructed in the play appears to be the opaque nature of the concept of *kaunsil* (derived from English) vis-à-vis that of *kivung* (derived from Tolai), attributable to a common Tok Pisin phenomenon of imperfect synonym pairs, characteristic of communication across lectal boundaries (see Mühlhäusler 1985). Consequently, a conspicuous feature of the communicative encounter reconstructed in Namaliu's work appears to be an aura of reluctance surrounding the attempted introduction of a new administrative body, referred to as *kaunsil* in Tok Pisin. Instead, the Tok Pisin and Tolai-speaking villagers of Raluana prefer to stick to their familiar practice of *kivung*, while at the same time it is a clearly perceived lack of equivalence of the social practice of *kaunsil* vs. that of *kivung* that is at stake, as the power balance shifts within the village debate represented in the studied fragment of the play.

On the level of semantic meaning, however, Franklin's (2007, 37) research indicated that the lexical item *wok* surfaced in Tok Pisin as a superordinate term which imposed new temporal and economic constraints on how a continuum of people's activity could be conceptualised and managed. A possible symptom of introducing such a novel notional and cultural perspective might understandably culminate in contradictory evaluations of that activity. For example, within the context of the studied fragment of Namaliu's play, *wok* is described as a kind of activity which results in tangible material benefits (as in example (1) – Makati's opening speech), but at the same time the practice of *wok* can be viewed as yielding to the controlling power of dominant others who can terminate one's activity (*wok*) apparently on a whim. Such potentially confusing and disruptive understanding of human activity anchored in the two English-derived concepts of *wok* and *kaunsil* is highlighted in examples (10) and (11) (Scene Two), where Makati (McCarthy) upbraids a local villager (Tuvi, a schoolteacher), threatening 'to throw him out of his work' (*mi rausim yu long* wok *bilong yu*), only to be confronted by another villager (Third Man) who retorts with a barrage of accusations ostensibly directed at White people (*ol masta)* in general, who apparently come only with an intention of confusing/tricking (*giamanim*) and robbing (*stilim*) the local people of their land, offering iron tools and tobacco in return.

A well-known Papua New Guinean politician and philosopher Bernard Narokobi (1983, 9) commented on the nature of Melanesian society as follows: "Giving and taking is an integral part of Melanesian society. Co-operation and mutual support, especially in times of need and crisis are a part of our living experience. Confrontation and competition are kept to a minimum". While a certain idealism seems to run through Narokobi's writings (cf. Franklin 2007, 27), the cultural concept of *wok* has clearly become a part of common Melanesian conceptual currency embedded in local networks of kinship and relatedness recounted in Namaliu's play.

## Notes

1 Tok Pisin (also known as Neomelanesian, New Guinea Pidgin English, Melanesian Pidgin) and English are the national languages of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, a multi-ethnic and multilingual Pacific state with the population of approximately 7 million people speaking at least 836 individual languages, spread over 600 islands (see Lewis ed. 2013). This extremely complex sociolinguistic situation is further complicated by the fact that several provinces of the country do not rely on Tok Pisin as a language of wider communication and use Hiri Motu (an Austronesian-based contact language) or English instead. Further information about the names given to Tok Pisin (both exonyms and endonyms) can be found in Verhaar (1995, 1–4). The designation Melanesian Pidgin is also used by some linguists "as the cover term for the three languages/dialects known as Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, Pijin in Solomon Islands, and Bislama in Vanuatu, spoken in all by perhaps three million people" (Lynch 1998, 220).

2 This helpful idea was clarified by Iteanu (2015, 138) in the context of Melanesian cultures and cross-cultural contact with the following words: "By "recycling of values," I refer to the usage made by a society of ideas, qualities, and objects formerly associated with some secondary value, in order to understand and appropriate a new value that would otherwise be difficult to grasp because of its very novelty".

3 While the Tolai (Austronesian) word *kivung* used in the Tok Pisin of the Eastern part of Papua New Guinea refers to 'village assembly', the same word also refers to some local varieties of cargo cults practiced in the western parts of PNG (see Jebens 2004, 157–159 for an anthropological account). A staunch defence of their local *kivung* by the villagers of Raluana depicted in Namaliu's play might nevertheless be a reflex of their perception that the overwhelming abundance of Western material goods is amenable to a supernatural account only, and not really to the institution of *kaunsil*, or practice of *wok*. For an in-depth study of historical and linguistic contacts between Tolai and Tok Pisin, see Mosel (1983).

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