



Can There Be Justice Here?

Indigenous Perspectives from the West Papuan Oil Palm Frontier

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Abstract

This article examines the intersecting forms of social and environmental injustice shaping the lifeworld of Indigenous Marind communities and their more-than-human ecologies in the Indonesian-controlled province of West Papua. Over the last decade, large-scale deforestation and monocrop oil palm expansion have radically undermined Marinds' intimate and ancestral kinships with sentient forest plants and animals, as well as the moral principles that undergird interspecies relations. These transformations are exacerbated by conservation practices that are undertaken in the name of corporate sustainability but that are problematically premised upon an assumed divide between humans and the environment. The exclusion of Marind from natures both exploited and preserved sits in turn within a long-standing and ongoing history of violence and discrimination perpetrated against West Papuans under Indonesian rule. Drawing from Marind philosophies, practices, and protocols of more-than-human relationality, I examine how Marind conceive and contest the possibility of justice now and in the future—for themselves, forest organisms, and oil palm—amidst multiple, overlapping, and intersecting injustices provoked by capitalism, conservation, and colonialism. I invite an expansion of the scope and subjects of justice beyond the human that remains nonetheless acutely attentive to the persistence of capital-colonial regimes systematically positioning Indigenous peoples as killable before the law.

Keywords: multispecies justice, colonialism, capitalism, conservation, Marind, West Papua

In late May 2016, Petrus, a three-year-old Indigenous Marind boy from the Indonesian-controlled region of West Papua, died of dysentery after drinking river water contaminated with pesticides from a nearby oil palm plantation.¹ Petrus's grieving parents, Marina and Bernardus, carried their child to the headquarters of the company some twenty kilometres away by foot. They asked that the infant be buried in their clan's ancestral graveyard, located within the newly established oil palm concession. The company refused. The land was now their property. Burying the child within the plantation would attract insects, fungi, and other pests that would harm the oil palm trees. Bernardus and Marina then pleaded for Petrus to be buried in the concession's conservation zone—a 10-by-20-meter patch of sago palm grove amidst a sea of monocrop oil palms—so the child could rest with his plant and animal kin. This request, too, was denied. In the interests of protecting local flora and fauna, access to the conservation zone was strictly prohibited to non-company personnel.

Finally, Bernardus and Marina buried their child a few miles outside their village and plantation, by the side of the Trans-Irian Highway, a national development project initiated by the Indonesian government to enhance regional economic connectivity across West Papua. Since then, the couple told me, their nights have been haunted by nightmares of Petrus's frail body being trampled by trucks overloaded with palm oil fruit and by bulldozers clearing the forest to make way for oil palm. The parents wept as they described how isolated and frightened Petrus appeared in their dreams, alone by the dusty highway, severed from the forest he was born in, never able to find rest. "Since oil palm arrived," Marina explained, "we Marind people have been robbed of our forest. The oil palm companies cut the forest. They also protect some

forest. But now, all of the forest belongs to the companies. The law sides with the companies and the government—not the people, the trees, or the animals. Now, we Marind and our plant and animal siblings (amai) have no place to live or die in peace.”²

Petrus and his family are one of many in the Upper Bian area of Merauke—a district of the Indonesian-controlled province of West Papua—who have become victims of the violence of oil palm—an introduced plant that is proliferating across the lands, swamps, and forests of Indigenous Marind in the guise of monocrop plantations.³ Since 2008, agro-industrial expansion of oil palm in the region has accelerated following the implementation of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, a government-endorsed agribusiness mega-scheme intended to enhance Indonesia’s self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs and make the country a net food exporter (Chao, 2022). Today, Agustinus and Marina’s’ home village of Bayau, along with a dozen others along the upper reaches of the Bian River, are encircled by oil palm monocrops covering several hundred thousand hectares of former forest and extending north into the neighboring district of Boven Digul. In the last decade, vast swaths of forest have been felled or burned and several rivers diverted to irrigate the newly established concessions.⁴ With dozens of national and foreign companies being granted additional business permits as of June 2021, agribusiness continues to expand relentlessly across the region.

Drawing from long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted on the West Papuan oil palm frontier, this article examines the intersecting forms of social and environmental injustice shaping the lifeworld of Indigenous Marind communities and their more-than-human ecologies.⁵ I begin by examining how processes of mass deforestation and agro-industrial plantation expansion radically undermine Marinds’ intimate and ancestral kinships with sentient forest plants and animals, as well as the moral principles that undergird interspecies relations. I explore how these transformations are exacerbated by conservation practices that are undertaken in the name of corporate sustainability but that are problematically premised upon an assumed divide between humans and the environment. I then situate the exclusion of Marind from natures both exploited and preserved within a long-standing and ongoing history of violence and discrimination perpetrated against West Papuans under

Indonesian rule. Drawing from Marind philosophies, practices, and protocols of more-than-human relationality, the article analyzes how Marind conceive and contest the possibility of justice now and in the future—for themselves, forest organisms, and oil palm—amidst multiple, overlapping, and intersecting injustices provoked by capitalism, conservation, and colonialism. Such philosophies, I argue, call for an expansion of the scope and subjects of justice beyond the human that remains nonetheless acutely attentive to the violence of capital-colonial regimes on Indigenous peoples themselves as subjects of entrenched and emergent racializing assemblages and top-down developmental projects.

In exploring Indigenous experiences and visions of justice in the West Papuan oil palm nexus, this article seeks to make empirical and conceptual contributions to a budding, interdisciplinary body of scholarship on the theme of “multispecies justice” (Celermajer, Chatterjee, et al., 2020; Celermajer, Schlosberg, et al., 2020; Chao, Kirksey and Bolender, 2022). First coined by feminist Science and Technology Studies scholar Donna Haraway (2008), “multispecies justice” seeks to decolonize justice from dominant Western epistemologies that have traditionally restricted the subject of justice to the human and to the individual. Instead, multispecies justice aims to develop more capacious, inclusive, and expansive concepts and practices of justice that recognize other-than-human beings as legitimate subjects of the law and objects of harm—from animals and plants, to ecosystems and landscapes (Card, 2004; Tschakert et al., 2020). As Indigenous scholars have noted, such concepts and practices of relational and more-than-human justice have long served as the moral and cultural foundations of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies of “nature” (TallBear, 2011; Todd, 2015; Winter in Celermajer, Schlosberg, et al., 2020). Within Indigenous lifeworlds, plants, animals, elements, and ecosystems are often considered as sentient or otherwise animate, kindred beings who thereby deserve to be treated with respect, fairness, and dignity (Stewart-Harawira, 2012; Winter, 2019). Within this ethos, the wellbeing of humans is understood as being intrinsically linked to that of the diverse entities that humans become-with across place, time, and species.

In West Papua, intensifying processes of capitalist incursion and historically entrenched forms of settler-colonization are undermining conditions of just

livability for Indigenous communities and their more-than-human ecologies. These local processes sit with a broader epoch of planetary unraveling, when anthropogenic activities are threatening global ecosystems and their diverse human and other-than-human dwellers at an unprecedented scale and speed. Grounding my analysis in the experiences and discourses of rural Marind communities inhabiting the “shadow places” (Plumwood, 2008) of agro-industrialism, this article asks: How are Indigenous ways of being and becoming with other-than-human beings transforming as a result of injustices wrought by capitalism, conservationism, and colonialism in West Papua? How does (in)justice manifest in the context of organisms like native plants and animals that are threatened by the forces of techno-capitalism, but also in the context of organisms like industrial oil palm that thrive at the very heart of the agro-industrial nexus? And how can we reconcile justice for more-than-human beings with justice for marginalized Indigenous communities who themselves continue to be treated as sub-human, disposable, and killable before the law?

Plantation proliferation

Marind of the Upper Bian, who number approximately 600 households, depend primarily on hunting, fishing, and gathering for their subsistence. The customary lands and forests they rely on for their subsistence, however,



Figure 1. “We Marind have no place to live or die in peace.” Segment of the Trans-Irian Highway running through an oil palm plantation where Petrus is buried.

Credits: Sophie Chao.

represent far more than purely a source of food and livelihoods. Rather, the forest and land are considered animate and sentient entities, populated by myriad other-than-human organisms who together render place ‘alive’ (*hidup*) (Chao, 2017). Each Marind clan (*bawan*) entertains a particular relationship to groups of

species and elements whom they call their grandparents (amai) or siblings (namek) and with whom they share common descent from dema, or ancestral creator spirits (van Baal, 1966). At the beginning of time, as Marind stories describe, dema drew the clans and their other-than-human kin out of deep fissures in the earth and molded their bodies of the same clay, drawn from the muddy depths of the Bian River. Today, still, Marind clan names take the form of their primarily kindred plant or animal amai followed by ‘-ze’ meaning ‘children of’. For instance, the Mahuze clan are ‘children of the dog’ and the Balagaize clan are ‘children of the crocodile’.

Marind’s other-than-human siblings, as Bernardus and Marina explained to me, include grasslands, river floodplains, and dense swamp forests. They encompass serpentine rivers, monsoonal rains, and vast wetlands. The liveliness of the landscape arises also from the presence, movements, and interactions between various animals—from migratory birds, waterfowl, and waders, to cassowaries, tree kangaroos, possums, and crocodiles. Plants, too, participate in the eco-cosmology of the forest through their respective patterns of propagation and senescence—tall sedge grasses, low-swamp grasses, *Melaleuca* swamp forests, *nypa* palm clusters, and dense sago palm groves. Each of these entities is considered by Marind to be sentient, conscious, autonomous, and agentic. Each partakes alongside humans in shaping the landscape through its movements, relations, and interactions.

The sentience and autonomy of other-than-human beings constitute a primary reason for Marind’s reluctance to domesticate crops or livestock, as domestication is seen as an act of violent injustice that deprives creatures of their freedom and dignity (Chao, 2019b). Rather, Marind minimally manipulate the forest environment to support species’ autonomous flourishing—for instance, by clearing pathways for wild boars to travel to waterholes, avoiding hunting mammals during gestational or mating periods, and leaving behind seeds, nuts, and sago flour for birds and insects to feed on during foraging and hunting expedition. These practices of restrained care towards amai are deemed central to achieving just and reciprocal relations across species lines.⁶ Amai grow to support humans by providing them with food and other resources. In return, humans must exercise respect and perform rituals as they encounter amai in the forest, recall their stories, hunt, gather, and consume

them. Together, sentient human and other-than-human lifeforms produce the landscape as a living repository of relations past and present—a realm of life distributed across species lines, or what Eduardo Kohn (2013, p. 16) calls an ‘ecology of selves’.

Reciprocal acts of exchange and care between humans and *amai* are what enable them to ‘share skin and wetness’, a Marind expression that refers to the exchange of life-sustaining bodily fluids achieved through shared physical activities in the forest. For instance, as they hunt, forage, fish, process sago, and consume forest foods, Marind take in the skin and wetness of the diverse organisms in the form of grease, blood, flesh, water, sap, mud, and pith, and impart their own bodily wetness to those with whom they undertake these activities. Those who eat sago take in the moisture of the sago palm, the wetness of the rivers, soils, and organisms that sustained sago’s growth, and the sweat of the people with whom they rasp, leach, and consume sago pith. Those who eat meat absorb the sweat, blood, and fat of the game captured, along with that of its hunters. These exchanges of flesh and fluid enable humans and their plant and animal kin to participate as inter-agentive members of a shared community of life within the eco-cosmology of the forest.



Figure 2. A group of Marind women and children harvest sago in the grove. Credits: Sophie Chao.

Over the last decade, the arrival of monocrops into Merauke has radically undermined the intimate and ancestral relations binding Marind to their plant and animal siblings. Oil palm monocrops established by the government and corporations are often heavily guarded and located in close proximity to army garrisons and police headquarters. Villagers who attempt to enter these privatized zones face intimidation and harassment from military patrols hired by the corporations to guard their properties. But it is not only Marind who are adversely affected by plantation proliferation. Few native organisms can survive in industrial oil palm ecologies and their low canopies, unstable microclimates, sparse undergrowth, high temperatures, and toxic mélange of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Conserved forest fragments within plantations and plantation boundaries are vulnerable to edge effects whereby forest quality deteriorates over time, causing species communities to shift to a simpler composition dominated by a handful of common types (see Obidzinski *et al.*, 2012; Savilaakso *et al.*, 2014; Petrenko, Paltseva and Searle, 2016). Robbed of their water, nutrients, and symbiotes, plants and animals that once thrived in the forest, now wilt, and starve. Those who find refuge in Marind settlements forget how to hunt and forage independently in the forest. They can no longer reproduce with their own kin and eventually die alone, severed from their families (Chao, 2019b).

Meanwhile, sites where meaningful encounters with plants and animals once occurred, and that are commemorated by Marind in intergenerationally transmitted myths, lore, stories, and songs, are replaced by a homogeneous landscape devoid of referential markers, where everything looks exactly the same no matter how far one walks, or in which direction. An uncanny silence presides, punctured only by the sounds of destruction—trucks, bulldozers, chainsaws, and fume-chugging mills. The skin of the landscape becomes flaky, dry, and wizened, and the wetness of watercourses is contaminated with toxic chemicals used as pesticides and herbicides in oil palm plantations. One is paraquat, a quick-acting, non-selective herbicide banned in many countries due to its toxic effects (Maksuk *et al.*, 2016). Another is glyphosate, a highly carcinogenic broad-spectrum herbicide and crop desiccant (Watts *et al.*, 2016). These noxious secretions bleed deep into the soil and rivers, silently entering the bodies of those exposed to them and provoking nosebleeds,

cataracts, abdominal ulcers, cancers, and sometimes death. But toxins do not end their lethal trajectories in the flesh of human and other-than-human individuals. Rather, they continue to contaminate and kill those who touch or consume them—through the milk of child-bearing mothers, the sweaty palms of hunters, the blood and grease of captured game, the meat and scales of riverine fish, and the starch pith of felled sago palms. Chemically mediated injustices proliferate across kin and kind, but also across time and place, as toxins spread uncontrollably and invisibly across the landscape, condemning the bodies of beings to come to illness and pain through their latent and lethal effects.

The ontology of oil palm itself matters to the story of plantation injustice. Oil palm was often described by my interlocutors as a ‘colonizer’, ‘intruder’, or ‘occupier’ that has no place within Marind’s more-than-human socialities. Its arrival signals the obliteration of the ecologies necessary for Marind’s other-than-human kin to survive and thrive. In contrast to forest beings, who have entertained relations of reciprocal and restrained care with their human counterparts since time immemorial, oil palm—a recently introduced species in West Papua—is widely characterized by Marind as a destructive, voracious, and greedy being who does not know how to share place with others (Chao, 2018). Whereas forest organisms sustain each other’s existence through everyday and ritualized exchanges of skin and wetness, oil palm refuses to co-exist with other lifeforms. Marina Balagaize, a young woman from Khalaoyam, for instance, affirmed that ‘oil palm does not know how to live well with others’ and ‘prefers to live on its own’. Similarly, Selly, a middle-aged widow from Bayau, often spoke of oil palm as a self-interested plant that ‘does not know how to make friends with the forest’ and that ‘refuses to share space with others’. The seemingly relentless proliferation of oil palm is also associated by some Marind with insatiable and unsustainable greed. ‘Oil palm is always hungry for more land and more water,’ Selly continued, ‘it devours everything in its path—the trees, the cassowaries, the rivers. It does not think about what amai need to thrive. It does not care about the wellbeing of others—the plants, the animals, or us Marind.’

In many concessions in Merauke, oil palm has only recently been planted and remains in the early stages of growth. And yet for Marind, the plant’s

threatening presence is already viscerally tangible in the meaningful absences and obstructions it creates within the landscape—the vast stretches of decimated vegetation, the greasy waters of the Bian river, the poisoned fish stranded in the shallows, and the choking smoke clouds produced by land-clearing fires. Operating negatively towards all that does not sustain it, oil palm replaces the moral and affective topography of the sentient forest with an ‘ecology of fear’ (Das, 2007, p. 9) that pervades the everyday life of the human and other-than-human beings displaced and dispossessed by its proliferation. Bayau elder Kosmas captured this violent transformation poignantly in concluding, “In the forest, there was justice for Marind and for our amai. The laws of the forest ensured that everyone knew how to live well together by feeding each other, caring for each other, and respecting each other. In the plantation, there is only injustice for Marind and for our amai. Now, oil palm decides the fate of everyone by harming the land, eating the soil, and killing our future.”

Corporate conservation

The injustices committed against Marind and their more-than-human kin as a result of plantation expansion are compounded by injustices stemming from emergent conservation initiatives in Merauke. In tandem to monocrop development, a range of environmental conservation projects have been implemented by agribusiness corporations in the last decade—often with the support of environmental NGOs—as part of their commitment to responsible palm oil production under international certification standards such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. These standards require that companies identify, demarcate, monitor, and enhance, areas classified as ‘High Conservation Value’, such as forests with high concentrations of rare, threatened, or endangered species and forest areas that provide critical ecological services in the form of watershed protection and soil erosion control (see Chao, 2019c).

Despite their purportedly beneficial value in protecting forest biodiversity, conservation zones are a source of widespread consternation, frustration, and sorrow for many Marind. For starters, what distinguishes a high from a low conservation value zone is unclear. Plant and animal amai, my interlocutors emphasized, depend upon diverse ecologies that are all equally important to

their subsistence, reproduction, and growth—swamps, marshlands, mangroves, savannah, forest, and more. When only certain ecosystems are deemed ‘valuable’, those that fall outside this category become ‘sacrifice zones’, or areas that are by default assumed to be available for exploitation. Meanwhile, the absence of ecological corridors connecting conservation patches limits the capacity of organisms to travel the landscape in search of food, water, and mates.

While plants and animals are restricted to bounded zones of livability, Marind now find themselves excluded from areas where they once hunted, foraged, and fished, as these zones are now strictly out-of-bounds to all except company personnel, conservation scientists, and environmental sustainability auditors. Reciprocal relations of care between diverse organisms are thwarted by a stratification-cum-dissection of space and species that runs counter to Marinds’ characterization of the forest as a realm enlivened by the sympoietic interactions of human and other-than-human lifeforms. In the process, the unjust exclusion of Indigenous communities from the ecologies that nourish and sustain them goes hand in hand with the unjust severance of sentient ecologies themselves from the humans who care for and maintain them.

Species severed from their relations to humans in the name of environmental conservation are a source of great sorrow for Marind. Most notable among these is the sago palm, a plant of central significance in Marind myth and culture, and the source of their staple starch, sago pith (Chao, 2021a). Sago palms thrive along riverbanks, swamps, and mangroves—environments associated by Marind with abundant wetness and fertility. This wetness is absorbed by the body of the palm and in turn invigorates those of the humans who process and consume its starch. Often described as ‘a tree of many lives’, sago thrives with myriad organisms—pollinating insects and birds, subterranean microbial communities, and kangaroos and wild pigs, whose droppings help fertilize the forest soil (Chao, 2020). Humans, too, sustain the sago palm through a range of direct and indirect actions. For instance, villagers help parent palms and their suckers access nutrients and sunlight by pruning stems and stands, clearing dead or senescing fronds, weeds, and epiphytes, ring-barking branches, thinning the canopy, and burning excess vegetation. Transplanting helps suckers grow by enhancing their access to water and light

and allows parent palms to regain regenerative capacity. Felling palms prior to flowering also prevents the palm from reproducing sexually, or by seed which, in hapaxanthic plants, results in the death of the parent palm. Instead, it encourages the growth of suckers, or 'sago children' (dakh izmi), that flourish in dense clusters and perpetuate the life of the parent palm through their own fleshy bodies. These suckers are often given the name of the individual who transplanted them, such that, in elder Pius' words, 'suckers and humans remember each other and share the same story.' Felling palms thus constitutes a generative form of destruction that sustains the collective and inter-generational continuity and memory of both plants and humans.

In contrast, sago palms that grow in conservation zones are an object of great pity among many Marind, who see their seclusion from human interference as deeply unjust—both for the people who find themselves deprived of sago's company and nourishment and for the sago palms who find themselves deprived of the human actions that enable them to survive and thrive. In conservation zones, Marind cannot care for sago children, enhance their access to sunlight and nutrients, or make their environment more conducive to healthy growth. As selective felling and transplanting cannot take place, palms reproduce sexually rather than vegetatively. This ends the life cycle of the parent palm whose seeds disperse across great distances and germinate far away from their sago kin. Seedlings also tend to differ morphologically from their vegetal kin, unlike suckers, that form clonal colonies of similar genetic makeup to their parent. They also exhibit a slower and less regular rate of growth. Severed from each other, seeds and parents, become 'dry', 'lonely' and 'sad'. Meanwhile, the segregation of palms to conservation zones negates the possibility of creating shared memories and relations between people and palms. As Pius Gebze explained, 'when sago and humans grow apart, they suffer because they can no longer share skin. They can no longer share wetness. They can no longer make stories together.'

Conservation practices in the agribusiness sector are predicated on the belief that biodiversity protection is best achieved by isolating ecosystems from humans as sources of disturbance. This model, which perpetuates the colonial paradigm of 'fortress conservation', is anchored in an assumed divide between humans/culture and the environment/nature (Brockington, 2002). It

dispossesses and excludes local communities by conjuring natures worth preserving as pristine and untouched zones of 'wilderness', while simultaneously displacing and erasing Indigenous place-based histories (see Cronon, 1996; Schmitt, 2017). It is designed and implemented by scientific 'experts' who originate from outside Merauke and who rarely consult Marind when planning, surveying, and implementing conservation projects (see Baptista, 2018). It ignores the fact that human interactions with forest ecosystems may enhance biological diversity while also fulfilling the needs of Marind themselves (see Rival, 2002). In sum, then, conservation practices produce injustice because they fail to acknowledge the intrinsic engagement of humans with their environment and the encompassment of other-than-human lifeforms within the multispecies society that constitutes 'nature' itself.

In his critique of contemporary conservation ideologies, Paul Driessen (2010) deploys the term 'eco-imperialism' to describe the imposition of Euro-American conservation paradigms on non-Western societies who have historically been subjected to colonial violence and who continue to be denied the most basic of human rights (see also Nixon, 2011). In rural Merauke, eco-imperialism comes in two shades of green: the 'green eden' of conservation on the one hand and the 'green desert' of monocrop plantations on the other. Both are experienced by Marind as injustices imposed and dictated by foreign others. Both operate through a process of 'accumulation through (double) dispossession' (Harvey, 2003) that deprives local communities of their customary lands and forest-based livelihoods. Both dissect and delimit the landscape into bounded zones of production and preservation, from which Marind are equally excluded (Li, Hall and Hirsch, 2011). And both undermine the relations that render the landscape lively and livable across species lines through the imposition of mutually reinforcing 'neo-natures' (Oliveira and Hecht, 2016). It come as little surprise, then, that many Marind consider protected areas and agribusiness projects to be two sides of the same coin. As Yosefus Mahuze, an elder from Bayau, explained:

For oil palm companies, conservation areas are just bits of land—like so many red dots on a map. But areas that are worthy of protection are not just a red dot on a map, or even a hundred or a thousand red dots. The whole landscape is of high conservation value to Marind and our amai. The forest cannot be broken

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down into pieces, just like a flower, if you remove all its petals, is no longer a flower. Think about this through your own body: which part of it is 'High Conservation Value'? Would you not say all your body was of value? Now, what if I wring off your arm, singe your hair, cut off your fingers, and gouge out your eyes. Now, which part of your body is a 'High Conservation Value'? Would you not say that it was all still of great value to you—even when so much of it has been destroyed without your consent? This is what I think of conservation. Conservation, capitalism...It's the same thing. It's the same injustice.



Figure 3. Sago conservation zones established by an oil palm corporation are strictly out of bounds to non-company personnel, including Marind communities.

Credits: Sophie Chao.

Histories of colonial and racial violence

Questions of justice in Indigenous lifeworlds cannot be dissociated from the violent histories and afterlives of colonialism and imperialism. As Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte (2017) reminds us, it is difficult for Indigenous peoples to imagine "new" futures when climate injustice and its social impacts represent not a novelty but rather an intensification, or *déjà-vu*, of pre-existing imperial-capitalist regimes (see also Simpson, 2016; Tuck and Yang, 2016). Similarly, injustices committed today against Marind and their forest kin in the name of both capitalist profit and environmental preservation accrue heightened significance in light of the entrenched processes of political

colonization, ecological degradation, and ethnic domination that have profoundly shaped the modern history of West Papua (see Budiardjo and Liem, 1998; King, 2004; Singh, 2008).

First colonized by the Dutch in 1882, the western half of the island of New Guinea came under the informal control of Indonesia following the country's independence in 1949. From thence on, West Papuans were subjected to systemic acculturation, or *Indonesianisasi*, a government-endorsed process aimed to strengthen national unity by incorporating West Papuans through formal education, national media, economic development, and settler transmigration (Arndt, 1986; Gietzelt, 1988).⁸ The incorporation of West Papua into Indonesia was formalized through the controversial Act of Free Choice of 1969, when 1,025 Papuan men and women were handpicked by the Indonesian military and forced to vote in favor of Indonesian control (Drooglever, 2009). Meanwhile, Indonesian and foreign corporations plundered natural resources in West Papua in the form of large-scale pulp and paper plantations, timber plantations, and copper and gold mines (Monbiot, 1989; Leith, 2003).⁹ Today, bureaucratic red tape and corruption, the oppressive force of the state-military corporate troika, and the widespread criminalization of Indigenous individuals suspected of separatist aspirations, continue to restrict the capacity of Papuans to seek recognition and remedy for the violation of their right to customary lands, traditional livelihoods, food security, and cultural continuity (Moiwend and Barber, 2011; Ginting and Pye, 2013; Ito, Rachman and Savitri, 2014). The violence of the state perdures in the form of forced incarceration, physical and psychological harassment, torture, sexual violence against women, and brutal military responses to Indigenous political actions, notably during the yearly commemorative raising of the Papuan Morning Star flag on 1 December (Hernawan, 2011; Karma, 2014; ELSHAM PAPUA *et al.*, 2015).

Against this backdrop, contemporary agribusiness expansion in Merauke represents one of many manifestations of the collective history of suffering experienced by West Papuans under Indonesian rule (see Hernawan and van den Broek, 1999). On the one hand, state and corporate rhetoric on the benefits of oil palm expansion casts the forest-based livelihoods of Marind in a negative light as primitive and backward. At an awareness-raising meeting I

attended, for instance, government and industry representatives described oil palm as 'the key to the future of Papua's isolated tribes'. Its arrival would free Marind from poverty in the forest and enable them to join the world of 'progress'. Yet at the same time, palm oil undermines the local food security of Upper Bian residents, as the availability of forest game and plants becomes increasingly limited. Marind are also routinely denied employment opportunities in the palm oil sector because they are said to be 'lazy', 'uneducated', and 'dirty'. These opportunities tend to be given instead to non-Papuan settlers, who are said by Indonesian plantation operators to be more 'civilized', 'hard-working', and 'hygienic'. Such forms of economic and racial injustice exacerbate pre-existing ethnic and religious tensions that exist in the Upper Bian between the predominantly Catholic and Protestant Marind local population and the primarily Muslim non-Papuan settler population.

Many of my interlocutors described being looked down upon by Muslim settlers—who originate primarily from Java, the political heart of Indonesia—because of their dark skin color, curly hair, and forest-based mode of subsistence. Perpetua Samkakai, a mother of three from Bayau, for instance, told me of her children being derided at school because of their black skin and for foraging and hunting in the forest, 'like wild creatures'. Pius Gebze, a young man from Khalaoyam, described being refused entry to a kiosk owned by settlers because they feared his blackness would frighten their young children. Barnabus Samkakai, an elder from Mirav, meanwhile, reported how local jeep drivers regularly refused him on board because his skin 'smelled bad' and he might make fellow passengers sick if he touched or addressed them. The association of West Papuans with sexually transmitted diseases further exacerbates the perception of Marind as carriers of contamination (Butt, 2005, 2015). Several women in the villages, for instance, had been refused consultations at government clinics because the nurses took their thinness and palor—a result of malnutrition provoked by plantation expansion and the disappearance of forest foods— as signs of the much stigmatized 'four-letter disease', or AIDS. Other Marind described settlers quickly donning gloves and facemasks when interacting with them in public places including the market, school, and village hall.

With Indigenous Papuans now representing less than forty percent of Merauke's population (Ananta, Utami and Handayani, 2016), many Marind believe that the growing presence of migrants is an intentional strategy adopted by the Indonesian government to drive West Papuans to literal extinction (Ondawame, 2006; Banivanua Mar, 2008). Such beliefs in a "slow-motion genocide" (Elmslie and Webb-Gannon, 2013) are further reinforced by widespread rumors among Marind of the forced sterilization of Indigenous women in Merauke and other parts of West Papua. These women were reported to have visited the hospital for minor ailments, received injections or transfusions for minor ailments, and then found themselves unable to bear children. These rumored forms of intergenerational and reproductive injustice speak powerfully to the sense of disposability that many Papuans experience as vulnerable and oppressed citizens of a colonizing state that perceives them as lives better not born and therefore ungrievable (see Butler, 2010; Murphy, 2017). As Elisabeth, a young woman from Bayau, concluded, 'No one needs the people of Papua, or the women, or the children. All Indonesia needs is our land. The land is what matters. But Papuan people? We are like waste. We are like animals. We are black. We are disposable.'¹⁰

Much like West Papuans are deprived of the right to determine their political futures, agribusiness projects in Merauke are largely designed and implemented without the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous landowners, and purportedly in the interests of their economic and social advancement into the world of modernity and progress (Zakaria, Kleden and Franky, 2011; see Awas MIFEE, 2012). Consultations, when undertaken, present projects as a *fait accompli* and offer limited information on the potential risks of these projects for local food security, land rights, and livelihoods (see Chao, 2019a). Many Marind have been forced to surrender their lands in the name of 'national interest' and in exchange for derisory compensation. Meanwhile, promises of social welfare projects, such as educational and medical facilities, are rarely fulfilled.

Human rights violations prompted by oil palm development have led to three consecutive submissions from civil society organisations to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination under its Urgent Action and Early Warning Procedures and two formal communiqués to the Special Rapporteur on the

Right to Food and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹¹ To date, however, justice or remedy have yet to be delivered to Marind communities on the ground. The Indonesian government has not responded to concerns over human, land, and food rights violations raised directly with them by the CERD Committee in 2011 and 2013, or to the Special Rapporteurs' joint statement of 2012 regarding the potentially adverse effects of MIFEE on the food security of some 50,000 people (Kemal, 2011; de Schutter and Anaya, 2012; Avtonomov, 2013). Many Marind have experienced pressure from companies and security forces for participating in land rights advocacy movements and have become reluctant to voice their views for fear of reprisal. Indeed, struggles for social and environmental justice come at a high cost for rural Marind. As of June 2021, over a dozen community members had been extra-judicially incarcerated for opposing agribusiness expansion. Twenty-two local activists had died under mysterious circumstances after receiving anonymous death threats. Many villagers continue to face systematic intimidation and harassment from the police and military as a result of their attempts to protect what little remains of their forest lifeworld.

Contemporary oil palm expansion thus constitutes the vegetal arm of a long-standing process of colonization in which the exploitation of nature goes hand in hand with the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. In this regard, contemporary plantation expansion in West Papua speaks powerfully to the historical imbrication of plantation logic with racialized forms of violence, injustice, enslavement, and expropriation that are in turn rooted in, and further, colonial hierarchies of humanness (Benítez-Rojo, 1996; Mbembe, 2003; McKittrick, 2013). Far from solely an economic production system, the plantation, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2006, p. 16) puts it, is also a 'race-making institution'. In Merauke, oil palm participates in the region's ongoing domination as the state's 'biological ally', Alfred Crosby's term (2003, p. 52) for species that thrived as they traveled alongside human colonizers across invaded territories. Like the state, settlers, soldiers, taking over Marind lands, oil palm is understood by Marind to be foreign, invasive, and destructive. It perpetuates the condition of 'entrenched inhumanity' (Elmslie, 2014) that Marind and other West Papuans continue to be subject to as reluctant citizens of the Indonesian nation.

Envisioning justice for and beyond the human

Amidst entrenched and emergent regimes of colonialism, capitalism, and conservationism, what possibilities of justice exist for Marind and their other-than-human kin? For some Marind, justice takes the form of tangible goods and services that they are owed yet denied. For instance, local communities should receive from the corporations profiting from their land adequate monetary compensation, decent salaries, education opportunities, health facilities, and free access to areas now designated as conservation areas. For others, justice is about due process. Companies should seek the free, prior, and informed consent of landowners before designing and implementing their projects. Communities should be fully informed of the risks and benefits of the proposed development. Their customary and collective land tenure systems be acknowledged, as well their right to choose their own representatives in land-related negotiations, and their moral and practical duties of care for the wellbeing of kindred plants and animals. Most importantly, the right of communities to say 'no' to oil palm should, at all times, be respected. Other Marind call for justice in restorative and retributive terms. Lands lost under duress or deception should be returned to their owners, along with the crops and structures established upon them. Forest-based modes of subsistence undermined by monocrop conversion should be remedied in the form of alternative livelihoods and access to local and urban markets. Fines should be imposed on corporations that fail to implement social welfare projects, undermine communities' food and water security, and illegally burn forest to plant oil palm.

Yet different forms of justice come with different conundrums. For some, material goods and restorative measures for affected communities cannot adequately compensate for sentient environments already radically degraded, vegetation decimated, bodies contaminated, and species driven to the brink of extinction. Rather, justice demands a genuine acknowledgement of the deleterious effects of plantation expansion on native forest plants, animals, and ecosystems—as actors, relations, and kin—through the performance of customary rituals of commemoration, mourning, forgiveness, and redemption towards non-human organisms, as they are encountered and remembered through stories, songs, and myths. In tandem, multispecies justice calls for a

structural move away from top-down environmental practices and their substitution with community-led forms of restoration, management, and conservation that are anchored in traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous science. For some Marind, such forms of grassroots environmental justice are inherently incompatible with the large-scale, extractive model of the agro-industrial monocrop. For other Marind, however, rejecting oil palm projects makes little sense when few alternative opportunities for economic advancement exist in rural Merauke. The return of lands to local hands, these individuals argue, also comes with the risk of conflict and competition among clans because the plants, natural markers, and structures that once demarcated the boundaries of their respective territories have disappeared. These and other dilemmas over the form and possibility of justice give rise to tensions between Marind who are attracted by the opportunities offered by the oil palm sector and those who are staunchly opposed to it. These factions are referred to locally as *pro* and *kontra*, but they are neither stable nor bounded. As people struggle to navigate their presents into more livable futures, they shift from one standpoint to another and back. As elder Pius Basik-Basik put it, 'No one knows for certain what justice might be. No one has the key. Everyone is looking for the right path.'

The conflicted pursuit for the 'right path to justice', in Pius' words, is compounded by a morally fraught ambivalence among Marind over the cause of the violence they have endured historically and in the present. Some individuals explain their plight as a punishment meted upon them by ancestral spirits, or *dema*, for failing to protect the forest and its sentient beings from destruction and for succumbing to the lure of capitalist modernity (Chao, 2019d). This aligns with the prevalent interpretation among Marind—and other Melanesian peoples—of natural disasters and illness as supernatural retribution for social and moral wrongs committed between humans and towards plant and animal lifeforms. Other Marind attribute their suffering to the hegemonic domination of the Indonesian state, the national and international corporations working in collusion with the government, and the global community of consumers driving the demand for palm oil. As Gerfacius Mahuze, a young man from Bayau, put it, 'fifty years ago, the whole world watched as we lost our freedom to Indonesia. Now, the whole world watches as we lose our lands

and futures to oil palm.'

In contrast, some Marind describe their fate in the language of martyrdom by positioning themselves as necessary victims in achieving the greater good (Chao, 2021b). If some humans bear the palm in profit, then others must bear with. As Evelina, a young mother from Khalaoyam, reflected, 'For oil palm to feed and fuel the world, Marind and their forests must be sacrificed. For some people to be fed, others must go hungry.' For others yet, the possibility of justice itself cannot exist until West Papuans reclaim their right to freedom and self-determination as an independent nation. Here, political emancipation from colonial rule is understood as the only avenue for genuine justice to be done to Papuan ways of being, becoming, and belonging—with each other and with the sentient forest ecology. As Paulinus Balagaize, an elder from Mirav, affirmed, 'Independence (*merdeka*) is the only true justice. Until we regain our freedom, our wounds will never heal. Until we get *merdeka*, justice is just another empty word.'

And what of oil palm in all of this? As I described earlier, many Marind attribute the destructive effects of agribusiness to the voracious and self-interested nature of oil palm itself. Yet the idea of punishing oil palm for its destructive actions was absent in their discourses and reflections. In part, this is because Marind are aware that there are human actors driving and dictating the particular ways in which oil palm grows in Merauke, and its consequent ecological effects. Indeed, oil palm becomes an object of pity for community members who contrast its totalizing subjection to human control in monocrop plantations with the freedom of plants and animals in the realm of the forest. For instance, some of my interlocutors described oil palm seeds as 'orphans' because their growth and development (and eventually, death) was dictated by humans. Women expressed sorrow over the fate of oil palm fruit, or 'oil palm children' that are ripped from parent stands during harvesting and violently flung into overloaded trucks 'like corpses.' Many villagers, meanwhile, wondered if oil palm ever felt 'lonely' or 'sad' in the genetically homogeneous environment of the monocrop landscape, where few other species can survive.

For Marind, then, knowing the multiple facets of oil palm's world as both a driver of ecological harm *and* as an object of human and technological

exploitation complicates the relationship between justice and punishment. On the one hand, oil palm subverts the species and ecologies that enable Marind to become human, or *anim*, through their bodily relations to other organisms. Yet oil palm is also robbed of its own lively 'plantiness' (Head, Atchison and Gates, 2012) in the realm of the monocrop, where it is deprived of its native home, multispecies relations, and autonomous growth. Marind, then, are not indifferent to the lifeworld of oil palm beyond what they themselves experience in its destructive presence. Rather, they recognize that oil palm is both a subject and object of injustice. As Barnabus mused, 'Maybe oil palm, too, deserves freedom. Maybe oil palm, too, deserves justice.' The matter of justice thus raises important and troubling questions for Marind over *what* justice might look like, *how* it can be achieved, and *who* deserves it—among and beyond humans.

Among Marind of the Upper Bian, then, conflicting visions of justice go hand in hand with contestations over the etiologies, subjects, and objects of justice. A similar ambivalence surrounds the temporal dimensions of justice as a when for many Marind. Jacques Derrida suggests that justice is always already *à-venir*, or 'yet-to-come' (Derrida, 1992). Donna Haraway describes multispecies justice as inherently speculative and future-oriented (2016, p. 3). Walter Benjamin contends that justice in the future requires a revolutionary reclaiming of the past that refuses the hegemonic notion of time as unilinear 'progress' (2015, p. 254). As I noted earlier, Marind of the Upper Bian read the past in and through the forest as the embodiment of ongoing interactions between organisms. This past is inscribed in the bark of sago palms, the grease of cassowaries, and the wetness of rivers. The relief of the landscape thus constitutes a living mosaic of relations, stories, encounters, and matters across species lines, that shape peoples' experiences, emotions, and memories as they exchange skin and wetness with the forest. By destroying the forest as a spatially embedded past, agribusiness troubles the possibility of hope for justice in the future.

At the same time, agribusiness-driven transformations in the present are already negating the possibilities of life to come. Lethal chemicals infiltrate lands, rivers, and bodies. Bulldozers obliterate sago groves, fruit trees, and other sources of sustenance. Intensive agriculture depletes soils of their nutrients and rivers of their waters. In the ruin and rubble of techno-capitalist landscapes, what kind

of justice remains envisageable for organisms already-gone and never-to-come remains elusive.



*Figure 4. Driver of destruction, object of violence.
An oil palm monocrop in Merauke, West Papua. Credits: Sophie Chao.*

Conclusions

As I have explored in this article, Marind of the Upper Bian inhabit a realm populated by diverse other-than-human actants whose fates and futures are indissociable from their own. In this realm, the category of the ‘human’ is always already a composite of relations established with other-than-human lifeforms—kindred plants and animals of the forest but also introduced organisms like oil palm, that threaten the wellbeing of Marind and their other-than-human kin through their relentless proliferation. These emergent more-than-human dynamics sit in turn within long-standing and ongoing processes of Indigenous dispossession, displacement, and disempowerment in West Papua—processes that are rooted in the forced incorporation of the region into Indonesia and that are now being exacerbated by top-down and exclusionary projects of corporate agribusiness development and biodiversity conservation. Marinds’ very own humanity is undermined by entangled regimes of color and capital in a region long denied its freedom and autonomy. In this context,

environmental justice reveals itself, as Rose et al. (2012, p. 1) note, to be thoroughly entangled with human ways of inhabiting the world, and broader questions of politics, race, and social justice (see also Moore, Pandian and Kosek, 2003). At the same time, the characterization among Marind of oil palm as a foreign and rapacious plant-being problematizes the potential (and not merely symbolic) role of other-than-human species as perpetrators, and not just subjects, of injustice (cf. Card, 2004; Ginn, Beisel and Barua, 2014). Thinking with species, then, demands that we stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) of organisms that are threatened by techno-capitalist assemblages, but also those that thrive within them. At the same time, thinking within species demands that we attend to those lives deemed ungrievable (Butler, 2004, 2010) within racially and politically imbued hierarchies of the 'human'.

As anthropologist Naisargi Dave (2018) has argued, the concept of justice very acutely comes to fore precisely when justice is absent. Justice, in this light, can be defined as lack or absence of a form of violence or harm: not being removed from or dispossessed of one's land, not being subjected to racist treatment, or not being forcefully separated from the other-than-human beings and ecologies that are constitutive of one's being, becoming, and belonging. Perhaps, then, one of the qualities of justice is that even if (or precisely because) it is never quite here, it is also never completely impossible. Its possibility always exists and can sometimes manifest in the form of unanticipated, more-than-human events. I became aware of justice's capacity to materialize in unforeseen and unintended ways in the autumn of 2015. During the months of September and October, forest fires deliberately started in Indonesia to clear land cheaply for palm oil and pulp and paper plantations blanketed vast swaths of Southeast Asia with a heavy layer of toxic smog. Described by scientists as the highest release of climate-changing carbon since record blazes in 1996, and one exacerbated by the El Niño drought, the haze provoked seriously respiratory health problems among residents of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore—where most major oil palm conglomerates are headquartered—and an estimated 100,000 casualties (Mathiesen, 2016; Rochmyaningsih, 2016).

At around the same time, rumor was spreading among residents of the Upper Bian that a nearby agribusiness operator was on the verge of bankruptcy. Ganoderma, a resilient species of fungus, had infiltrated the plantation and was killing oil palms by the hundreds. Described by oil palm companies as a 'cancer', the fungus had concealed itself in the roots systems of host and neighboring palms, only to proliferate in a sudden and uncontrollable manner. Rotting, yellowed oil palm fronds littered the soil, which had to be completely excavated and replaced to avoid contaminating newly planted trees. A host of bacteria were being deployed by the corporation as biofungicides in a desperate attempt to inhibit the fungal growth, but their short lifespan did little to stop ganoderma's ravaging effects. Reflecting on these two coinciding events, Gerfacius Gebze, a man from Khalaoyam, mused:

Oil palm kills our forest. Oil palm drinks our rivers and eats our land. Now, people as far as Singapore are dying because of smoke from oil palm plantations. Singapore is where the oil palm companies are based. Malaysia, also. And Jakarta. The big bosses have lots of money, but now they eat dust and smoke. Ganoderma, too, is eating up oil palm, killing oil palm. The big bosses can't do much about it. They are losing money every day. Perhaps this is some kind of justice?

Monocrop plantations, such as the ones proliferating across the lands of Gerfacius and his kin, testify to the unprecedented scale and impacts of human activity on the planet (Haraway, 2015, pp. 162, footnote 5). But plantations also escape the seemingly totalizing control of humans over anthropogenic landscapes. If states and corporations are macro-parasites of nature, then toxic gases and resilient fungi are micro-parasites that operate without regard for laws or boundaries (Brown, 1987). Ultimately, no 'body' is immune to the effects of techno-capitalist expansion—no matter how far removed we (think we) are from its sources and sites. Perhaps, then, as Gerfacius suggests, justice lies in the hands of 'nature' itself—a 'nature' that encompasses familiar ecosystems and kindred organisms, but also new and unexpected agents of justice such as sovereignless toxic hazeclouds and lethal fungal proliferations (see Chao, 2021c).

Of course, not everyone—human and other—benefits and suffers the consequences of intentional and contingent ecological transformations in the

same way, or to the same extent (Nixon, 2011; see Caluya, 2014). For this reason, attending to the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous and other marginalized peoples who inhabit the ‘shadow places’ (Plumwood, 2008) of capitalism is critical in rethinking the possibility and form of justice within and across species lines (TallBear, 2011; see DiNovelli-Lang, 2013; Ogden, Hall and Tanita, 2013). In rural West Papua, the colliding ecologies of forest and plantation, and everything they embody and symbolize, raises troubling questions for Marind over what justice might look like, how it can be achieved, and who deserves it—human or other. Violence reveals itself less than human-only prerogative, but rather a multispecies act—both in terms of its subjects and

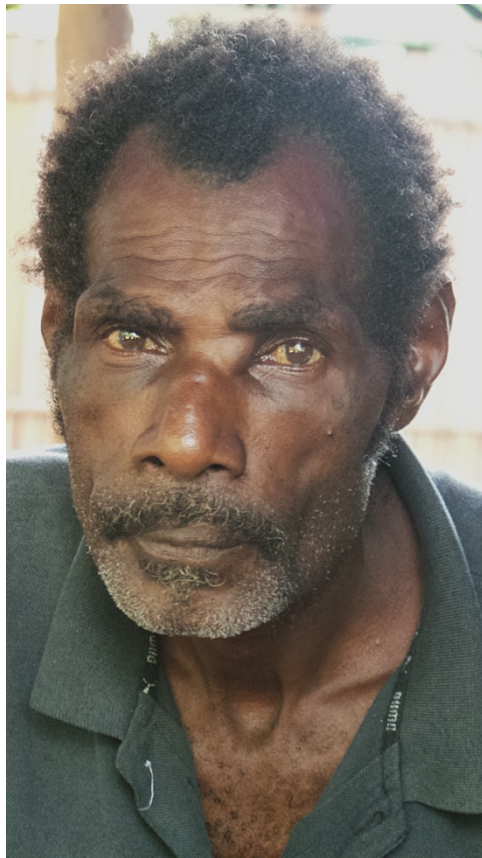


Figure 5.
“No one knows for certain what justice might be. ... Everyone is looking for the right path.” Pius, a Marind elder from Khalaoyam village.
Credits: Sophie Chao.

objects, and indeed often both at the same time. Approaching injustice and violence as multispecies acts in turn invites us to reframe the assumption that only humans are capable of violence against other-than-humans—an assumption that in itself may come dangerously close to reproducing yet another form of human exceptionalism (Chao, 2022).

Tacking between justice in human and other-than-human terms, as Marind taught me to do, also invites an expansion of the concept and practice of justice beyond the ‘here’ and the ‘now’. Other subjects and objects of justice come into play across space and time. The myriad organisms (human and other) whose past lives and labors have shaped, and are inscribed in, the disappearing ecologies of the Upper Bian. The multispecies communities whose futures are pre-empted by the proliferation of techno-capitalist natures.

The global community of consumers who rely daily on palm oil in the present—as food, ingredient, biofuel, source of violence of toxic pesticides, fertilizers, and haze on human and environmental health across place, species, and generations. The feral pests that sabotage the capitalist project by parasitizing on plantation cash crops. Working through the poetics and politics of more-than-human entanglements thus requires that we untether justice itself from its human-centric and individualistic premises, and instead approach relations across lifeforms as a subject of justice—from intimate relations of mutual care and kinship to violent relations of exploitation, extraction, and extinction. Grappling with justice for humans and other-than-humans in synchronous—rather than sequential terms—is no easy task. It may open new forms of hope and empowerment for some, while foreclosing these avenues for others. It involves traveling a path, to return to Pius’ words, towards shared and livable futures—a path always already traveled alongside companions both loving and unloving, familiar and unexpected.

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Ethics statement

The research presented in this article was approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. 5201500051, 31 March 2015) and by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. 2020/049, 25 February 2020).

Notes

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for all places and persons, with the exception of major provinces and cities. I underline terms in Marind and italicize terms in Bahasa Indonesia or *logat* Papua, the Papuan creole of Bahasa Indonesia. While older generation Marind still speak the native Bian dialect, Bahasa Indonesia and *logat* Papua have become the lingua franca between different ethnic groups, between sub-ethnic groups who speak different Marind dialects, and between older and younger generations within the same community.

² A revised version of this story was previously published in *SAPIENS*. See Chao (2019c).

³ Oil palm is known as *kepala sawit* in Indonesian and *Elaeis guineensis* in scientific taxonomy.

⁴ Statistics for the total area targeted for oil palm developments in Merauke vary across sources, with figures ranging from 200,000 to 2.8 million hectares (Kompas, 2006; The Jakarta Post, 2012).

⁵ I undertook eighteen months of fieldwork in the Upper Bian villages of Khalaoyam, Mirav, and Bayau as a doctoral candidate between August–December 2015, March–July 2016, and August–November 2017, and as a human rights advocate between March–June 2013. My fieldwork in the Upper Bian, facilitated by local human rights NGOs and the humanitarian branch of the Catholic Church in Merauke, explored how deforestation and oil palm plantation developments reconfigure the multispecies lifeworld of Marind, including their impacts on Indigenous notions of time, personhood, place, subsistence, and dreams. Methods deployed included participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, ethnobotanical research, and sensory attunement to the everyday interactions of Marind and other-than-human lifeforms in the villages, forests, and plantations. Quotes

from Marind cited in this article were obtained during the course of everyday participant-observation and interviews in the villages of the Upper Bian.

⁶ The multispecies sentience animating the Marind forest lifeworld resonates with similar notions of morality and law among Yarralin people in Aboriginal Australia. For Yarralin, moral relations between species are premised upon an acknowledgment that each life form is alive, conscious, knowing, and acting. Together, the diverse lifeforms that compose the Dreaming are bound in direct or indirect relations of care and reciprocity that in turn enable them to co-exist through an ethos of balance, symmetry, and mutual respect (Rose, 1984, p. 29, see also Rose 1996).

⁷ Sago palm is known as *dakh* in Marind, *sagu* in Indonesian, and *Metroxylon sagu* in scientific taxonomy.

⁸ The western half of the island of New Guinea was known as Nederlands-Nieuw-Guinea (Netherlands New Guinea) under Dutch rule. It was renamed Irian Barat under the administration of Indonesian President Sukarno (1962–71) and Irian Jaya under the administration of Indonesian President Suharto (1973–99).

⁹ For an overview of key extractive projects in West Papua up to 2000, see Down to Earth (2011).

¹⁰ Resonating with Elisabeth's words, Papuan independence activist Filep Karma (2014) has denounced the plight of West Papuans who continue to be treated 'like half-animals' under Indonesian rule (see also Chao, 2021d).

¹¹ See *Request for Consideration of the Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Merauke, Papua Province, Indonesia, under the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's Urgent Action and Early Warning Procedures*, 2011, 2012, 2013; *Request for Urgent Assistance to Address the Imminent Threat to the Right to Food of the Indigenous Peoples in Merauke, Papua Province, Indonesia*, 2011; *Joint Statement at the Asia Regional Consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on the Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Asia*, 2013.

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