A ‘Nation of Villages’ and a Village ‘Nation State’: The Arapesh Model for Bernard Narokobi’s Melanesian Way

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ABSTRACT

Published writings by the Papua New Guinean politician and intellectual Bernard Narokobi present modern Papua New Guinea as a projection of village-based social relations; as he writes in Foundations for Nationhood, ‘We are a nation of villages’. This article explores Narokobi’s idea of Papua New Guinea as a village writ large, showing how this conceptualization drew upon his experience of a particular historical and cultural place, the Arapesh village of Wautogik in the mountains of East Sepik Province, where he spent his childhood and returned regularly throughout his life, and which he described as a nation unto itself in an unpublished manuscript that he composed in his later years. Beyond finding reflection in his writings, which often build upon Arapesh concepts and motifs, Narokobi’s valorization of Wautogik as a worthy model led him to reciprocally invest, in a deeply principled way, in the village’s continued vitality and integrity as a social entity.

Key words: Decolonization, Melanesia, Bernard Narokobi, village, the Melanesian Way, Arapesh culture, nationhood, Papua New Guinea

The Jewel in the Crown of the Melanesian Way

In this article, I bring Bernard Narokobi’s understanding of ‘the village’ to bear on his call for an integrative modern Melanesian identity or ‘Melanesian Way’ based on Indigenous culture, the theme that appears most prominently throughout his

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The blueprint for the Melanesian Way can be found in Papua New Guinea’s constitution. There, in the Preamble, are listed five national goals, each of which is accompanied by a set of directive principles or practical actions that should be taken in order for Papua New Guinea (PNG) to achieve that goal. Originally formulated by Narokobi in more elaborate form as part of his work with PNG’s Constitutional Planning Committee in the early 1970s, the National Goals and Directive Principles remained dear to him throughout his life, finding restatement in various ways in many of his publications. Here, in full, is the fifth and final goal, along with its associated directive principles:

5. Papua New Guinean ways.

We declare our fifth goal to be to achieve development primarily through the use of Papua New Guinean forms of social, political and economic organization.

WE ACCORDINGLY CALL FOR—

(1) a fundamental re-orientation of our attitudes and the institutions of government, commerce, education and religion towards Papua New Guinean forms of participation, consultation, and consensus, and a continuous renewal of the responsiveness of these institutions to the needs and attitudes of the People; and

(2) particular emphasis in our economic development to be placed on small-scale artisan, service and business activity; and

(3) recognition that the cultural, commercial and ethnic diversity of our people is a positive strength, and for the fostering of a respect for, and appreciation of, traditional ways of life and culture, including language, in all their richness and variety, as well as for a willingness

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1 Non-italicized references to Narokobi’s concept of ‘the Melanesian Way’ in this article are intended in this generalized sense, rather than in the narrow sense of what he published in the volume of that name.


to apply these ways dynamically and creatively for the tasks of development; and

(4) traditional villages and communities to remain as viable units of Papua New Guinean society, and for active steps to be taken to improve their cultural, social, economic and ethical quality.

This text from the Preamble to the *Constitution of Papua New Guinea* (hereafter PNG *Constitution*), which dramatically foreshadows Narokobi’s later writings on the Melanesian Way, concludes with the principle that ‘traditional villages and communities’ should ‘remain as viable units of Papua New Guinean society’. As emphasized by Arapesh anthropologist Andrew Moutu, in saying this Narokobi was staking out a ‘serious philosophical position’: that justice and fairness would not come from institutions, but instead must ‘be driven by some kind of social logic’. For Narokobi, the entity that provided that social logic was the village (Arapesh *wabir*, Tok Pisin *ples*). As I will argue here, flourishing villages are not just one among many desiderata Narokobi had for the future of his aspiring new nation. Named outright in these final words of the Preamble to the PNG *Constitution*, they are anything but an afterthought. In Narokobi’s vision, they were the jewel in the crown of the Melanesian Way.

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In his book *Life and Leadership in Melanesia*, Bernard Narokobi says that if he was going to tell you ‘what the real PNG is all about’, he would have to write a multi-volume treatise on ‘the village’. The topics he proposed to cover would merge local and national scales, span the mythic rural past and an ambivalent urban present, and include physical objects, social patterns, and historical events. The volumes he imagines would cover pre-contact history, technology and culture, inter-ethnic relations, modern institutions, legal infrastructure, conflict resolution practices, ‘politicians’ propaganda’, and ‘helicopter hover’.

This multi-volume treatise would be nothing less than a textbook teaching ‘the visitor’ the curriculum of the village, which Narokobi likened to the ‘University of Melanesia’. To him this village curriculum was nearly synonymous with the Melanesian Way, and at the time of PNG’s transition from colony to nation, Narokobi saw in it a powerful potential to ‘radicalise, activate, inspire, and motivate’ the new nation’s citizens.

Those familiar with Narokobi’s intellect and energy will not be surprised to learn that he in fact wrote an ambitious treatise on the village like the one just described. He left it not only unpublished but also untitled, so I refer to it as the

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5 Joseph Gabut, Andrew Moutu, and Camillus Narokobi, interview with Ira Bashkow, Port Moresby, 26 May 2018, audio recording, Bashkow private collection, University of Virginia.
7 Ibid., 55.
8 Ibid., 53.
9 Ibid., 55.
History of Wautogik Village in light of its primary area of content. Narokobi shared the 112-page manuscript with me in 2006, while he was serving as high commissioner to New Zealand. I believe he did this because he knew of my interest in Arapesh ethnohistory and because he supported my efforts to document and preserve knowledge about Arapesh language and culture. He wanted the manuscript to be available for his descendants, middle-class Papua New Guineans living in town, who were undoubtedly its target audience. In consultation with the Narokobi family and with permission from the Narokobi Foundation, I am now preparing an annotated digital version of the manuscript for publication.

Here I introduce Narokobi’s manuscript and use it to explore its author’s relationship with a particular historical and cultural place, the Arapesh village of Wautogik in the Prince Alexander Mountains of East Sepik Province known affectionately as Waut by its residents and close neighbours; in the Arapesh vernacular the village’s affiliates are called Wautogigem. I will show that Wautogik village was central to Narokobi’s conception of PNG nationhood and, in part for that very reason, presented him with a problem that he felt compelled to grapple with throughout his life. If, as Narokobi was convinced, the foundation for Papua New Guineans’ distinctive Melanesian identity was rooted in the village, how could that identity be sustained in an era when villages across PNG, including his own ancestral home of Wautogik, were themselves undergoing dramatic transformation?

The work of interpreting the History of Wautogik Village is worth undertaking for several reasons. It is a contribution to the personal and intellectual biography of Bernard Mullu Narokobi, an influential figure in Papua New Guinean public life. It is a source of evidence about coastal Arapesh language, culture, and ethnohistory, all areas in which knowledge is now fading as young people are raised in town or migrate out for work, traditional cultural transmission is weakening, and the regular use of the Arapesh language has given way to PNG’s creole lingua franca Tok Pisin. Finally, and most importantly for present purposes, it provides insight

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10 Bernard Narokobi, ‘History of Wautogik Village’ (unpublished ms., Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, c. 2006).
11 I have been conducting research on Arapesh since 1997. Many of the materials collected in the course of this research have been archived electronically at http://www.arapesh.org/.
13 Preservation and publication of Bernard Narokobi’s ‘History of Wautogik Village’ manuscript, NEH–Mellon Fellowships for Digital Publication FEL-262814.
14 The spelling of the village name is debated. Wautogig is almost certainly historically correct, but like many of the villagers I write it (and standardize the spelling here) as Wautogik with a final k, in line with current pronunciation.
into Narokobi’s model for the Melanesian Way, using an additional, rich primary source to illuminate Narokobi’s published writings and help us to understand them with greater depth and clarity.

In what follows I explore the notion of the village that is ubiquitous in Narokobi’s work, withholding judgement on its (in any case irreconcilable) combination of general, mythic, and concrete elements. My aim is to show how the numerous references to Arapesh cultural and linguistic particulars that pervade his writings provide a critical key to understanding his thinking about the Melanesian Way, the new nation he was dedicated to building, and his own familial relations, all of which were bound together for him within a common frame.

The two sections that follow focus on Narokobi’s published writings. In the first, I aim to illustrate how prominently the notion of the village figures in Narokobi’s ideas about nationhood. In the next, I argue that the village that served as Narokobi’s model for the nation was not a generalized Papua New Guinean one, but a specifically Arapesh one. Finally, I introduce Narokobi’s unpublished History of Wautogik Village manuscript, showing how it brings Narokobi’s lifetime of experience nation building to bear on the situation of his home village. A postscript discusses Narokobi’s History of Wautogik Village as a text, offering a vision for its posthumous publication that attempts to be respectful of the Melanesian Way.

PNG as a ‘Nation of Villages’

Narokobi’s many publications integrate a conception of the modern Papua New Guinean nation with what are fundamentally village-based social relations. As he writes in Foundations for Nationhood, ‘There can be no PNG until we come to grips with our ancient reality. We are a nation of villages’. According to Narokobi, the village is Melanesia’s ‘most visible and effective social unit’. It is ‘the starting point for our economic development’ and the basis ‘from which individuals will find meaning’. Narokobi suggested that it was ‘the graduates of the Melanesian university [rather] than those who graduate from Western universities’ who were PNG’s real knowledge-holders (Tok Pisin ol save man) or potential leaders; it was the graduates


17 Narokobi, Foundations for Nationhood, 15.


of the Melanesian university who would, ‘with the help of their elders … slowly but surely bring … about village reforms’ and transition the country into a sustainable state of modernity and development. Narokobi so treasured the cultural ethos transmitted through village life that he proposed that ‘living in a village for some time, at the same level as the people’ should be an eligibility requirement for the appointment of high-level public servants and candidacy for political office. He even floated the proposal that belonging to a village should be a condition for citizenship.

Throughout Narokobi’s work, references to the village as a social entity reveal a thoroughgoing interpenetration of local and national scale. So, for example, he characterizes Australia and PNG as ‘two different villages’ with a ‘friendly relationship’. Similarly, he insists that ‘[t]owns, cities, and industries must be villagised’ if Papua New Guineans are to achieve ‘true liberation’. Conversely, Narokobi said, ‘Here [in PNG] every village is just about a country of its own’. He proposed as a model for rural Melanesian political organization a confederation of ‘small democratic [village] republics, like interpenetrating circles with common areas of culture and civilization’; he dreamt of city plans that emphasized village-like housing developments built around common courtyards and shared facilities to help ‘develop and maintain the convivial sense of communal living which is the essence of Papua New Guinea’.

It made sense to Narokobi to model nationhood on the village because the village is what provides Papua New Guinean social entities larger than the clan or family with a basis for political sovereignty. In his work on Arapesh warfare, the ethnographer Reo Fortune called the unit corresponding to Narokobi’s village construct the ‘sovereign locality’. For Narokobi, sovereignty was a key criterion for village status: What captured the group’s own ‘view of themselves’ as tied together

20 Narokobi, Life and Leadership in Melanesia, 61.
21 Narokobi, Life and Leadership in Melanesia, 63.
24 Narokobi, Life and Leadership in Melanesia, 28.
26 Narokobi, ‘We the People, We the Constitution’, 28, 29. As he moved through his studies and into his career, Narokobi was undoubtedly influenced by the widespread international discourse on the village as the proper unit of development for decolonizing polities, an idea which was promoted in PNG by the churches and expatriates with experience of decolonization from Africa. We know that Narokobi was reading Gandhi (see Bashkow, this issue), whose views on the role of cultural self-respect and village development in nation-building bear a remarkable resemblance to Narokobi’s. See, for example, section III, ‘Gandhi’s Affirmation of Indian Culture’, in Rudolf Heredia, ‘Interpreting Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj’, Economic and Political Weekly 34, no. 24 (1999): 1497–1502.
through ‘social relations … without subordination’ was the village.28 Ideally, villages are not only autonomous but also equal in their autonomy, maintaining ‘a fine sociological balance … [in which] no one group can claim on the basis of its technology that it is better or superior to another’.29 When such conditions obtain, sovereign groups have the authority to enter into external (‘international’) relations and hence to engage in war, trade, and diplomacy. In the Arapesh region, each village was historically tied to others in a higher level grouping, ‘a loosely knit political alliance’ or regional ‘road’ mediated by trade friendships between individual families who lived along it.30 But Narokobi rejected a grouping at this level as an appropriate basis for political constituency because, unlike the village, it did not provide ‘a common forum for a coherent social order’.31 Mutual recognition and the potential that creates for institutionalized cross-village exchange is discussed explicitly by Narokobi in his book Lo Bilong Yumi Yet [Our Own Law]: Law and Custom in Melanesia.32 Narokobi points to Australia’s gift to PNG of a building in which to house its parliament upon independence as an act of exchange between the two nations that recognized PNG’s political sovereignty and equivalence to Australia.33 As we will see below, Narokobi also used a meeting house to symbolize the sovereignty of the village when he had one built in Wautogik.

Narokobi took the village to be an appealing model for the aspiring PNG nation because of the kind of sociality it presupposed. Within the village, autonomy gives way to mutual dependence. In writing about this central social value Narokobi often uses the terms ‘cooperation’ and ‘interdependence’: ‘[W]e should be aiming for the creation of institutions that will enable us to practice co-operation and interdependence in politics and in economic development as well as in religion and cultural life’.34 Because of their ethic of mutuality, villages have a human quality, with ‘real faces and souls. In [villages] people mattered. The laughs and the cries of our neighbours were shared and we cared for each other’.35 In good Melanesian fashion, ‘caring for each other’ meant sharing material assistance:

In villages, whenever a person needs food, firewood, leaves [for roofing thatch], water, or help building a house, they will freely ask for help from relatives.

31 Narokobi, Lo Bilong Yumi Yet, 21.
32 Narokobi, Lo Bilong Yumi Yet, 28–9.
34 Narokobi, ‘Nobility of Village Life’, 68.
Of course not all help is readily given. But to those who share, help is never denied them.\textsuperscript{36}

In line with the high value he placed on interdependence, Narokobi saw village decision making as proceeding not through competition but through consensus: ‘we did not have a government and an opposition. Whenever there was a meeting, the big and influential men met, gave their views, and decisions were made and carried out after a consensus was formed’.\textsuperscript{37} Taking a leap and projecting this image up to a national scale, Narokobi calls upon Papua New Guineans to imagine themselves part of a village-like ‘nation of communities, free and interdependent’.\textsuperscript{38}

**The Arapesh Model in Narokobi’s Published Writings**

While commentators have noted Narokobi’s conceptual reliance upon the village, they have not, to my knowledge, explored why and what difference it makes that in his published writings he so frequently makes this abstract ‘socio-geographical notion’ concrete with Arapesh particulars.\textsuperscript{39} Narokobi’s most elaborate and sustained mobilization of Arapesh culture appears in his 1989 book *Lo Bilong Yumi Yet*. There, in a major section entitled ‘Law and Society in Classical Melanesia’, he argues that it would be futile to try grafting something corresponding to ‘Melanesian customary law’ onto the Western legal order adopted along with the PNG Constitution. Noting that the Arapesh language does not even have a word for ‘law’, Narokobi asserts that ‘[i]n the classical Melanesian context law is not an independent science or discipline’.\textsuperscript{40} Of course there are ethics and ideas about justice and appropriate behaviour, but these are interwoven with other aspects of life and will not always be compatible with Western legal concepts. For example, it is an Arapesh ethic that ‘the living are the custodians of the dead and are guided in their actions or inactions by them’, and this presents a challenge for the law, Narokobi writes, because a properly ‘Melanesian jurisprudence will have to give full cognizance to the interaction between living persons and the spirits of the dead’.\textsuperscript{41} Basing his argument on concepts drawn from Arapesh social organization, he works through ‘some basic elements’ of the Melanesian social order as a step towards envisioning what a distinctively Melanesian approach to jurisprudence might look like. The Arapesh ideas do not always have ready vernacular labels, but Narokobi uses them when they do, and the text here is generously embelished with Arapesh terms.\textsuperscript{42} Among them are *miejn* ‘soul, will’; *ginau* ‘political power,

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{37} Narokobi, ‘Nobility of Village Life’, 63.
\textsuperscript{38} Narokobi, *Foundations for Nationhood*, 12. Narokobi’s perspective here is not entirely consistent with the interpretation of the nation as a village writ large. It is more akin to the rejected notion of an Arapesh ‘road’ or alliance mentioned above.
\textsuperscript{39} Narokobi, *Lo Bilong Yumi Yet*, 72.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 8, 9.
\textsuperscript{42} The Arapesh language forms presented here are transcribed in accordance with the conventions established in the Arapesh Grammar and Digital Language Archive (see http://www.arapesh.org/
socially sanctioned leadership; *gaba* ‘readiness to reciprocate others’ (Narokobi glosses this as ‘doing good’ towards others; it is discussed again below); *giha* ‘empathy’ (Narokobi glosses this as ‘sympathy’ and describes it as ‘pity, mercy and forgiveness’); *buunim* ‘exchange partners’; *saki* ‘traditional teaching’; *kri* ‘consent’; *takwim* ‘the authority of elders’; *kipaici* ‘others, foreigners’; and, most importantly for present purposes, *wabir* ‘village, community’. 43

Why Narokobi would dwell upon concepts such as these will hardly require explanation for anyone with knowledge of Melanesian social life. Nevertheless, each is elaborated in a particular way in Arapesh culture, and these particularities are implicit in Narokobi’s musings about how they contribute to the orderly functioning of Melanesian society. Of the *wabir*, Narokobi says that it ‘is not just [one’s] house or dwelling place, but … an abode to which one is either emotionally affiliated or physically allocated’; each spirit and animal is likewise intensely attached to its *wabir*. 44 As ‘the springboard from which everything moves out’, the *wabir* has a powerful pull on its residents, who will be moved by their emotional attachment to fiercely defend it. 45 His description calls to mind anthropologist Margaret Mead’s suggestion that Arapesh people conceive of their relationship to their lands as one of ‘belonging’ as much as ownership, such that a diminishing population represents a loss not only to the human community but to the ancestral lands themselves, which will be sadly devoid of inhabitants to care for them and enjoy their fruits (perhaps implying that lands, like the dead, should be recognized as agents in a properly Melanesian jurisprudence). 46 Another Arapesh term Narokobi discusses is *saki* (typically used in the plural, *sakih*) ‘traditional teaching’, which he describes as an ‘acceptable interpretation of common experience’ that historically took the form of esoteric speeches or exhortations offered by Arapesh elders in public fora. 47 Such edifying discourse would have been prompted by the kinds of colonial situations Narokobi was concerned with, ‘where new traditions create havoc and disorder, chaos and confusion’, and where traditional teachings would have been offered in an effort to call norm violators back into line. 48 Narokobi similarly explicates the term *ginau*, a structural position in the Wautogik clan hierarchy that is seriously under-translated by the English gloss ‘leadership’. 49 In *Lo Bilong Yumi Yet* the term is discussed under

grammar_phonology.php). The glosses provided here are mine, with some of them following Narokobi’s definitions, and some of them departing where my understanding differs.

44 Ibid., 72
49 Contemporary Wautogik villagers use the term *ginau* in a way that diverges from the description given in the ethnographic literature for the nearby Mountain Arapesh village of Alitoa, where the *ginau* is treated as one of a pair of opposed moieties; cf. Margaret Mead, ‘The Mountain Arapesh: III. Socio-Economic Life; IV: Diary of Events in Alitoa’, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 40, no. 3 (1947): 181–4.
two headings, ‘power’ and ‘eldership’, as the right of a ‘paramount chief’ to speak on behalf of a whole community. This privilege is ideally conferred to a senior male who is an eldest son in the village’s leading clan. But attribution of gi’au is not mechanical: even those in just the right structural position ‘have no automatic right to the “big man” status’; instead, the individual must be felt deserving of the title because it is believed that he will ‘speak with authority and demonstrate deep knowledge of the clan or village history and tradition’. When modern and traditional leadership roles are juxtaposed, it is the village leadership role that takes precedence: even a ‘departmental head who commands thousands of civil servants throughout a country, on return to his village, will find that he is subject to the authority of his clan elder or village elder’. So we see that when Narokobi talks about power in Melanesia as being both ‘personalised and institutionalised’, he is working with this distinctively Arapesh model in mind.

Not only do numerous terms like these from the Arapesh language find a place in Narokobi’s texts, but he also illustrates his points with motifs taken from his home village of Wautogik on the Arapesh-Boikin border in the Sepik ‘West Coast’. An example is a colourful story from the Wautogik village folkloric canon that Narokobi presents as an allegorical commentary on the harms of small-minded self-interest. It is a tale about a disagreement that takes place between two of PNG’s iconic birds, the hornbill and the cassowary, who had until that point been good friends. The disagreement is brought to a swift and unfortunate end by the actions of a tiny ant called in Arapesh deden. With the hornbill’s prompting, the deden chews through the tree branch on which the two birds are sitting as they quarrel. When the branch breaks, the heavy cassowary falls to the ground while the hornbill flies up, separating the birds thereafter into non-overlapping spheres. The deden story is told in Foundations for Nationhood, a book threaded through with apprehension about the Papuan independence movement which was active at the time Narokobi was writing. Narokobi’s use of the tale implicitly likens the separatist urge to the lurking power of the tiny deden.

Narokobi similarly offers an Arapesh ‘just-so’ story to support his assertion that the gendering of social roles is less straightforward than ‘the modern revolutionary woman’ might assume, a position that is reiterated in anthropological work on the symbolic structuring of gender in Melanesian gift exchange economies.

51 Ibid., 64, 52.
52 Ibid., 64. Here Narokobi also observes that an Arapesh leader’s power is still ‘subject … to the question of obedience. No member of the community nor the community as a whole need consent to [a leader’s] decision’. So if Arapesh polities may be said to have ‘chiefs’, they are of a very peculiar sort. See also Bablis, this issue.
53 Ibid., 53.
54 Narokobi, Foundations for Nationhood, 21.
The tale tells how in an earlier epoch Arapesh women used to fight with spears and engage in political oration, and ‘even wore the beard’; but with time women abused their powers, leading them to forfeit their position of leadership and resulting in the pattern so common across rural PNG in which men ‘do politics’, that is, sit and talk, while women do the hard physical labour necessary to maintain their families.  

Narokobi has been taken to task since he began writing on the Melanesian Way for being ‘conservative in his views on women’s rights and the modern PNG woman’. The classic second-wave feminist discourse on issues such as equal rights to work outside the home and reproductive autonomy did not appeal to Narokobi, as they were framed in modern Western terms that did not map neatly onto the village settings that centred his thinking. Even Papua New Guinean feminist scholar Anne Dickson-Waiko, one of Narokobi’s fiercest critics, saw in his conservatism the limiting influence of his ‘own Bukip [Arapesh] and Sausa [Boikin] language groups’, that is, the fact that he was often relying on his own village background even when theorizing about life in town.

Anthropologist John Burton similarly questions whether Narokobi’s conceptual reliance on his Arapesh background might be an unwarranted overreliance, given the enormous diversity of both actual living arrangements and more abstract patterns of social organization in PNG. After all, there is no objective sense in which the village could be considered a ‘representative’ rural habitat for Papua New Guineans. Wautogik, in fact, cannot even be considered an authentic Arapesh one. The consolidated form in which Narokobi experienced his home village was largely a colonial product, its inhabitants having moved their primary settlement off their ancestral lands to new locations in a series of stages after the Second World War in order to more easily access schools, health centres, and the coastal vehicle road that allowed them to travel between the village and the town of Wewak. Even before the war, small hamlets were being abandoned as people began moving together into nucleated settlements, a change in residence pattern that was replicated all across PNG in response to church and administrative directives. In pre-colonial times, Arapesh households were dispersed in small clan-based hamlets of just a few families linked to a shared ceremonial centre; ceremonial centres were in turn subsidiaries of a

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56 Ibid., 38.  
58 Dickson-Waiko, ‘Women, Nation and Decolonisation in Papua New Guinea’, 186. The anthropological literature on Arapesh culture may also have influenced Narokobi’s attitudes about gender, a possibility that is explored further below.  
smaller number of named localities. This multi-tiered structure of village affiliation is implicit in the early ethnographies of the region.\footnote{Arapesh residence patterns are explored in detail by Paul B. Roscoe, ‘Settlement and Sociality among the Mountain Arapesh’, \textit{Ethnology} 33, no. 3 (1994): 193–210. See, also, Fortune, ‘Arapesh Warfare’; Margaret Mead, ‘The Mountain Arapesh: I. An Importing Culture’, \textit{Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History} 36, no. 3 (1938): 202; Mead, ‘The Mountain Arapesh: III. Socio-Economic Life; IV Diary of Events in Alitoa’, 179–81.} The village where Narokobi lived during the 1940s and 1950s was, therefore, already quite non-traditional even by Arapesh standards. By that time, the Wautogik community had abandoned not only its historical homelands and residential patterns but also a great many of the social institutions that had formerly guided the conduct of village life. Most important among these were the \textit{tamberan} cult, with its men’s spirit houses and gendered disciplinary practices, ritually supported yam gardening, and competitive feasting. It had also incorporated many new ones, including Catholic worship, formal education, and the planting and marketing of cash crops.

But for purposes of understanding the cultural shaping of Narokobi’s Melanesian Way, it matters little what Wautogik village – or any other village – is or actually was. What matters is what Narokobi felt it to be such that it constituted an appealing model for him. For he clearly found in his village a social entity worth contemplating and emulating, one that contrasted with town as a place of moral integrity where the Melanesian individual was deeply bound up with kin and in communion with nature.\footnote{Colin Filer, ‘The Bougainville Rebellion, the Mining Industry and the Process of Social Disintegration in Papua New Guinea’, \textit{Canberra Anthropology} 13, no.1 (1990): 9. See, also, Donald Denoon, \textit{A Trial Separation: Australia and the Decolonisation of Papua New Guinea} (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), 114. Denoon characterizes the vision for a state comprised of a ‘confederation of villages’ put forth by Narokobi in his work with the Constitutional Planning Committee as ‘utopianism’.} The village that emerges from Narokobi’s writings may well be a mythical one ‘which exists everywhere and nowhere’ and betrays no signs of the propensity for fissure and disintegration that is known to actually beset Melanesian communities.\footnote{Henry Olela, ‘Narokobi and His Critics on the Melanesian Way’, in Narokobi, \textit{The Melanesian Way}, xi.} But despite the shaky foundations of ‘the village’ as an analytic concept, as anthropologist Michael Goddard observes, an idyllic rural place whose ‘internal sociality has the integral nature of a stereotypical village of the late colonial period’ even today ‘remains a potent discursive image’ for contemporary Melanesians.\footnote{Goddard, ‘The Town in the Village’, 130, 127.} It certainly remained so for Narokobi.

It has raised some eyebrows that Narokobi rooted his conception of the Melanesian Way so deeply in his own home region of PNG. But at the same time, his construal of Melanesia as a unified entity has also been criticized for being overly homogenizing – abstract and without psychological reality.\footnote{Henry Olela, ‘Narokobi and His Critics on the Melanesian Way’, in Narokobi, \textit{The Melanesian Way}, xi.} As one critic put it:
‘[T]he ordinary village man in Papua New Guinea cannot feel Melanesianism in his bloodstream … [N]o Engan tribesman or a Manus fisherwoman feels that he or she is a Melanesian by the very essence of the word’ 66 But for Narokobi, the differences among Melanesian societies were not a problem to be reconciled; they were resources to be constructively brought forward, excitedly discussed, and innovatively combined and recombined. What he actually did throughout his life was repeatedly tack back and forth, probing the connection between his own experience as an affiliate of a particular village and his identity as a citizen of the new PNG nation.

Narokobi was disposed to make this connection because he had a keen cultural reflexivity. This quality was already well developed in him by the time he was a young man studying law in Sydney. Living in Australia, Narokobi found himself constructed not just as an Arapesh, but as a Papua New Guinean, a representative of a higher-order socio-geographic unit in contrast to Europeans or Australians—just as I, when in PNG, occupy the identity of ‘an American’ in relation to my Melanesian hosts, even though I, too, of course hail from a more specific place. Narokobi’s emerging sense of himself as simultaneously an Arapesh, a Papua New Guinean, and a citizen of the world is evident in a letter he wrote to Mead in 1970 while in Sydney in his fourth year of law school:

The more I think about values my tribe hold, the more often I return and live in the village, and the more I see of the Western Way of life, the more convinced I am that there is something in my tribe that is noble and worth knowing …

Whenever I get the opportunity here in Australia, I tell people about my tribe. I feel now that I can feel proud of my tribe and at the same time feel I belong not only to Papua-New Guinea, a nation to be, but to the world community at large …

My heart yearns for union with nature, with my traditional background and Western conditioning. I think it is possible. If therefore it is possible for one man, it can be possible for a number and so a nation could be born, composed of different elements, all combining in diversity to form a national integration.67

The experience of dislocation and longing for home while abroad at school during their young adult years is a prominent theme in recollections by the pioneer generation of modern Pacific political leaders that Narokobi belonged to.68 Moving away

from PNG and living in Australia both consolidated Narokobi’s understanding of his hosts’ culture and made him more conscious of his own. This may be part of what gives the Melanesian Way what Ton Otto calls its ‘affinity with the anthropological concept of culture’. Just as anthropologists making observations about the cultures they study implicitly draw upon their background experiences to do so, Narokobi’s own Arapesh village of Wautogik served as a proxy for Melanesian culture, in contrast to Australia, while he was in Sydney at law school. While there, he even wrote a short novel set in an unnamed precolonial Arapesh village. In 1973–4, upon returning to PNG after completing law school, he served the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC) as its sole Indigenous advisor, and in that role, too, he found himself relying on his Arapesh intuitions to stand for and speak on behalf of all PNG. His confidence in doing this was no doubt solidified by the intense public consultation sessions that he participated in with the CPC. His interactions with Melanesian people from West New Britain to the Highlands to the Massim confirmed for him that his Arapesh intuitions were tapping into a broader cultural ethos.

Narokobi was aware that Arapesh examples were foregrounded in his writings. Yet he did not mean for these to eclipse other expressions of Melanesianness. In his interview with Ton Otto he defended his Arapesh-centrism thus:

I am trying to make a dance that I know best. And when I make this dance, I am not saying that your dance is no good. I am not saying that the Engan dance is no good. I am merely expressing myself in an Arapesh dance and it is your job to express yourself in your dance and together we create something… I am merely trying to… make a picture out of the colours that I have.

From the perspective of Melanesian discursive conventions, it would have been inappropriate for Narokobi to speak on behalf of other Papua New Guineans like Engans because he had no claim to their knowledge, which properly belonged to the descendants of their ancestors and the owners of their lands. So while Narokobi may have resisted defining the Melanesian Way, he amply exemplified it in the ways he had authority to do, and knowledge of Arapesh language and culture enables us to more fully appreciate his examples.

70 Bernard Narokobi, Two Seasons: A Novel (Madang: Divine Word University Press, 2002), 5. Narokobi said he was inspired to write the novel ‘as a way to keep in touch with my roots and to break the boredom of law’.
71 Ritchie, this issue.
72 Quoted in Otto, ‘After the “Tidal Wave”’, 50.
THE HISTORY OF WAUTOGIK, A VILLAGE ‘NATION STATE’

The foregoing exploration of what exactly the village meant to Narokobi provides a helpful interpretive framework for integrating many of the ideas put forth in his published writings. It also sheds light on the meaning and purpose of an unpublished manuscript he composed in his later years, the *History of Wautogik Village*. The document is an expansive, detailed, politically judicious exposition. It starts out in deep historical time with the story of the village’s founding when two strangers, each of whom had fled from catastrophe at home, encountered one another in the forest and formed an alliance. It then follows the history of the village through to the time of writing. But the manuscript does more than narrate a series of parochial historical events. It attempts to orient readers to the cultural and political ethos of Arapesh village life, leadership, and social obligations as Narokobi understood them. This, he felt, was an urgent task because knowledge of these matters was no longer being transmitted; as Narokobi puts it in the preface, ‘I fear [that] if I do not write, no one will … [J]ust as a day fades into darkness so do our memories fade from realities into fantasy and eventually silence. Death scatters our memories’. In addition to presenting the village’s ancestral charter stories, the manuscript covers the village’s leadership structure; inter-locality relations; principles of land ownership and land transfer; traditional practices such as games, dances, and competitions; and approaches to conflict resolution. It describes local villagers’ responses to their early colonial encounters; their experiences during the Second World War; their enthusiastic embrace of Catholicism; the role Narokobi and other leaders of his generation played throughout the Sepik coastal region and the emerging nation of PNG during the independence period; and the numerous accomplishments of the Wautogik village diaspora, many of whom, like Narokobi himself, came to hold prominent positions in government, civil service, and business.

In light of the criticism Narokobi has received for his objection to feminism, it is interesting that the manuscript devotes considerable attention to Wautogik village mothers, daughters and wives. Individual women of past generations are named and praised for both their traditional and modern virtues – as well as their intersection. Narokobi describes the women of his mother’s generation as ‘generous … to their last taro or banana’ while also noting that some of them played a leadership role behind the scenes as they would ‘guide the menfolk in public debates and speeches’. He expresses admiration for one woman of that era who ‘learned to read and write’, while saying wistfully of another that she ‘coped patiently and without complaint with [her husband’s] business and gambling fortunes and misfortunes’.

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74 A note in the preface to the text suggests that it was written c. 2000.
75 Narokobi, ‘History of Wautogik Village’, 1. Page numbers cited here reference the pagination of the original printed manuscript. Minor changes to the text have been made in the interest of clarity.
76 See, also, Bashkow, this issue.
78 Ibid., 55.
Women’, Narokobi highlights the educational and professional achievements of contemporary village women, offering celebratory comment on their having ‘made it in what was then a men’s world’.  

The final chapter of the manuscript, ‘Sex and Marriage among Wautogigem’, is a reassertion of traditional values in response to changing sexual mores. Narokobi may have felt obliged to address these topics in part as a counter-statement to the notion that Arapesh culture could be characterized as having a ‘feminine temperament’, a claim made famous in Margaret Mead’s book Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies. This is the one thing Narokobi could expect any non-Arapesh readers to already ‘know’ about Arapesh culture: Narokobi had read Sex and Temperament while he was a law student in Sydney and had observed that many others in Australia had also read the book, as the copy he checked out of the library ‘looked well worn down’. The experience of reading it in 1968 motivated him to initiate the correspondence with Mead which was quoted from in the preceding section. While he was complimentary to Mead in his correspondence with her, in the History of Wautogik Village he repudiates her ‘findings’ that Mountain Arapesh men are ‘subservient or passive’, asserting instead that Wautogik was ‘generally male dominated’. In my view he was not wrong.

The History of Wautogik Village manuscript exhibits the same interpenetration of scale that is found in Narokobi’s other writings, confirming that for him, not only was the nation a village writ large, but the village should also be understood as a nation in its own right. Throughout the exposition he makes this identification clear by pursuing many of the logical extensions it implies: the Wautogik village nation had external territorial boundaries, internal subdivisions (clans or ‘tribes’), formal diplomatic relations with neighbouring ‘nations’, a systematic leadership structure, an economy and laws. Narokobi describes Wautogik as ‘a well settled nation state with a well-recognised government and clearly established boundaries at the dawn of the first contact’. He even finds an analogue for the segment of the Wautogik village clan hierarchy called nimbagw ‘dogs’ in PNG’s national government: ‘In the modern government system, the Jibainerim, the Baimribis and the Kadaim [clans] are like the opposition’. Not being giya, leaders, they do not take the lead in village-wide affairs.

79 Ibid., 59.
80 Mead, Sex and Temperament.
82 Ibid., ix.
84 Dobrin and Bashkow, “Arapesh Warfare”.
86 Ibid., 32.
87 An alternative interpretation of Wautogik political structure emphasizes the systematic opposition between the Abahinem and the Karapehem clans, with the nimbagw backing them up by helping to provide food for village-wide events. Joseph Gabut, Andrew Moutu, and Camillus Narokobi, interview with Ira Bashkow, Port Moresby, 26 May 2018.
The History of Wautogik Village also devotes many pages to Wautogik’s relation to the ‘surrounding nations’, describing the nature of their traditional diplomatic links, particularly those with the neighbouring Boikin villages of Walanduom and Kwangen. Narokobi even notes that traditional Arapesh ‘trade friendships’ between these and Wautogik maintain their relevance in the present day:

[T]he two nations and two peoples established diplomatic links with each other. Though they spoke two different languages and belonged to two different cultures, the two became allies and close friends. Even to this day, the Walanduoms and the Wautogigem have a close friendship. The former [National Capital District] Governor Philip Taku, MP for Port Moresby Northeast and [Narokobi’s younger brother] Camillus and I are hula ‘trade friends’, meaning we are the inheritors of the original first contact relationship. Although we live in the city and hold state offices … [and although] we belong to different political parties, we continue to honour this relationship today. We call each other hula.88

Just as the seat of the PNG nation’s power was its Parliament House, Wautogik also had a community-wide meeting house that was built in the years immediately following independence.89 Around 1987, the year he was first elected to PNG’s national parliament, Narokobi had the meeting house rebuilt near his own house in the village and invited guests from afar to come and dance in celebration of its opening.90 It is no coincidence that this structure, at once a symbol of village unity and autonomy and a key site of inter-village diplomacy, came to be known in Tok Pisin as the Wautogik haus palamen (‘Parliament House’).

When the History of Wautogik Village is read against Narokobi’s published writings, one element that might seem incidental in the manuscript is revealed to be a systematic theme: his references to Christmas and New Year. At the end of Chapter 7 of The Melanesian Way, in a section entitled, ‘Divided by the Call of Civilization’, Narokobi tells an atmospheric story about a journey he took back to Wautogik on New Year’s Day, 1977. Accompanied by a dozen young men in a four-wheel drive truck, Narokobi struggled up the poorly constructed, muddy vehicle road to his ancestral village home, now located on a mountain, Huraimbo, originally belonging to the neighbouring Bogumatai people. But when he arrived he was greeted by only a few old people, who ‘poured their souls out in silence and in streams of tears’ as they embraced him. Narokobi and those with him were ‘touched and moved by mountain mists and hidden treasures of a rich past, suspended on an uncertain future’:

We drove along the ridge in heavy rain to the end of the road. The road ended at Huraimbo, our hill village still on foreign tribal and

88 Narokobi, ‘History of Wautogik Village’, 7–8. Here Narokobi uses the Boikin word for this relation, hula. In Arapesh it is called gabikin.
89 Ibid., 75–6.
90 They were Sio dancers from Morobe Province. Andrew Moutu, pers. comm., 25 Feb. 2018.
village land. Once more despair and grief engulfed me. Huraimbo, this big and beautiful village which had come to be known as the new Wautogik for over 30 years was haunted. There were houses standing on single posts, with earth eaten and washed away by running water, roofs of houses had been torn off and the grass was overgrown.

Oh Huraimbo, my beautiful village. This was the home of great cultural debates, of great cultural festivities, and social gatherings. This was the home where our people on their own – without the help of missionaries, patrol officers, politicians or a cultural council official – had organised and held a dance festival with Madang people. But now, my beautiful and vibrant village was like a desert.91

It was a poignant moment for Narokobi, one that prompted him to wonder whether the village he so cherished would always continue to exist. He writes,

> Children have gone to work in towns and cities to return for only three weeks at Christmas. For the hope and freedom we were promised for which we toiled [and] split up our families … the only reward I saw on New Year’s Day 1977 was gloom and despair.92

The image of the successful town dweller struggling against the elements to make his way back to his ancestral home just as one year gives way to the next is deeply symbolic for Narokobi at a moment when Melanesia was in transition from one major historical era to the next. Would there always be a village for him and the other members of the village diaspora to return to? Would his fellow villagers in the diaspora continue to consider it home and want to return? In Chapter 16 of the History of Wautogik Village, a chapter that is focused on ‘Present Day Wautogik Women’, Narokobi lists nine professional women who were born to Wautogigem, and then shifts to a long list of ‘[e]ducated women from other provinces or places’ who had married in to Wautogik.93 Interestingly, he includes for each one of them a comment on whether they might one day move to the village with their husbands, taking as evidence whether they had spent time there during the Christmas/New Year holidays:

> It remains to be seen if these women will retire and live in Wautogik village. It is worth noting that most of these women have gone to the village on Christmas holiday and lived in the village for a little while.94

It was Narokobi’s dream that Wautogik would remain a vibrant community that would extend all the way out to its living town kin, continually drawing them back with a richness and fulfilment that could be found nowhere else. Because PNG could only be considered successful as a nation if life continued to flourish in its

92 Ibid., 124.
94 Ibid.
villages, observing what happened in Wautogik when the diaspora returned for the Christmas/New Year celebration was, for him, like ‘taking the temperature’ of the Melanesian Way.95

But Narokobi was not content simply to appraise the village’s social health. Because a Melanesian modernity presupposed vital villages, throughout his life he was led to invest in his own village as a social entity in a deeply principled way. In part he approached this by doing the same kinds of things other Papua New Guineans in positions of influence have done: arranging for services like schools and aid posts to be located within walking distance of the village, attempting to reduce barriers to travel in and out of the village by having roads built, paying for sick villagers to be brought to town for medical treatment, and contributing to community development initiatives.96 In the mid-1990s Narokobi applied for and received an international aid grant from the European Union to build a set of rainwater collection tanks in Wautogik to help ease the (mostly women’s) burden of fetching water, which otherwise requires long walks downhill to streams and then back uphill again carrying heavy baskets of wet laundry and buckets of water for cooking.

Another way that Narokobi invested in the village was by promoting cohesion and group consciousness among the larger community of Wautogigem.97 When he was in town in Port Moresby or Wewak, he was a generous host and active visitor, welcoming fellow Wautogigem into his haus win (Tok Pisin ‘open-walled shelter’) and stopping by their homes to greet them when he found himself in their neighbourhood. He also tried to ensure that Wautogik group consciousness would continue into the future by documenting the village history for his descendants in the History of Wautogik Village and by choosing to emphasize in it the particular things that he did. For example, 15 pages of the 112-page manuscript are devoted to discussion of games and ol singsing (Arapesh ulaiahs ‘song/dance complexes, performances’) – complex activities that bring villagers together in a spirit of lively cooperation. The extensive discussion of this topic in the manuscript is justified by the power of dancing to create a valued state of unity and alignment that is at once physical – even rows, simultaneous drumbeats, unified colour schemes – and social.98 Although ownership of a singsing may be held at the clan or family level, and one or two families may take the lead in organizing it, its success requires cooperation of the whole group:

   Mendep is a complex dance. It involves the whole village. The whole village must stand together and act as one community … Careful planning is required to perform this dance. The person who proposes

95 This in-gathering of the village diaspora was possible because the extended holiday permitted them to travel.
96 On the social meaning of vehicle road building, see Stefan Dalsgaard, ‘The Battle for the Highway: Road, Place, and Non-place in Manus (Papua New Guinea)’, Paideuma 57 (2011): 231–49.
97 See the article by Bashkow, this issue.
this dance must come up with manpower and resources to sustain its execution. Community harmony is essential. Co-operation, collaboration and community spirit coupled with joint action is necessary to see this dance through.  

Hosting a *singsing* also emphasizes the village’s positive identity in relation to surrounding communities – an important property of village nationhood discussed above. While Narokobi does include details about each dance’s origins and distinctive features (like its emotional tone, its decorative scheme or the language it is sung in), his emphasis in the exposition is on the particular occasions in recent memory when the villagers gathered to perform it.

It is difficult to make sense of the attention given to games in the *History of Wautogik Village* manuscript without considering their role in strengthening the village’s sense of itself as a community. There are many other aspects of village life that Narokobi could have chosen to address in the manuscript but did not – for example, hunting, fishing, and gardening techniques; folktales; preparation of favourite feast foods; an overview of the annual calendar or gardening cycle; and so on. Instead he included a chapter on games because games are enjoyable and bring people together, and he wanted to see them continue. Not only did Narokobi write about games in the *History of Wautogik Village*, he also actively promoted the playing of games in the village during his lifetime. The materials archived in the Arapesh Grammar and Digital Language Archive include a recording by Scola Sonin telling of a village-wide ‘game day’ Narokobi organized in Wautogik during the mid 1990s.  

Teams were formed and village residents and diaspora together competed at European style races like tug of war, traditional activities like twine rolling or spinning coconut shell tops, and innovated hybrids like target shooting using spears aimed at a banana stump or an adaptation of the egg-and-spoon race that substitutes a *muli* (Tok Pisin ‘lime’) for the egg. Ever alert to the importance of the need to distribute gifts widely throughout the community, Narokobi sponsored the prizes and the communal meal that concluded the event. Although her telling of the event took place two or three years later, Sonin was still able to recall the items she had won: a plate, a cup, and a nice-smelling soap. There was no other purpose in the event but for the villagers to engage in communal activity and enjoy the experience of doing so. It is surely no coincidence that Narokobi chose to hold this event on New Year’s Day, that symbolic moment of transition that was so significant to him.

There is one omission from the *History of Wautogik Village* that deserves special comment. It was brought to my attention in 2013 by Waugotik elder Julius Yehaipim as he thought over the manuscript’s coverage. Yehaipim pointed out that the *History of Wautogik Village* includes no description of *goba*, the ritual payments to the living members of a person’s mother’s kin group that the children of the deceased make after their parent dies. *Goba* payments recognize the mother’s contribution in forming the life of her deceased child by ‘buying back her blood’, symbolically compensating her family of origin so as to quiet any bad feelings.

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they might have at the time of the death, cut off any future claims against them, and begin the process of ‘finishing’ the memory of the one who died. Gõba is one of the few traditional obligations that Arapesh villagers (diaspora included) almost universally acknowledge today, so it would indeed be a surprising omission from the History of Wautogik Village exposition if Narokobi’s point was to educate readers on those aspects of village life that are of greatest cultural importance now or in the past.101 But if we understand Narokobi’s goal as not so much to describe village customs as to provide a foundation for the continued existence of the village as a social entity, then it makes sense that he did not include it. The practice of gõba needs no nurturing because it is structured in a way that ensures its own continuity: the family members expecting to receive gõba payments will see to it that it continues. But what does need nurturing is a shared commitment to the social whole: Wautogik village, that hard-won collectivity – extending beyond the level of any individual, family, or clan – that has always been fragile, but without which, Narokobi was convinced, there would be no Melanesian Way.

**Postscript: Towards a Melanesian Way of Publishing Narokobi’s History of Wautogik Village**

As Alex Golub and I discuss in our article introducing this special issue, Narokobi’s reluctance to define the Melanesian Way in part reflects an ‘audience-orientation’ that aims to elicit readers’ own active investment in his ideas. The preface to The Melanesian Way makes Narokobi’s dialogic or elicitory intent apparent. There he states, ‘What I say wrongly today let the learned of tomorrow, or even this very day, set right. But if I do not say something today, those of tomorrow will have nothing to go from, even to correct’.102 In other words, Narokobi indicates, even expressions of strong disagreement would signal successful uptake of the work: ‘[M]y one hope is that [my thoughts] will inspire by anger others to think more, to write more and to be more’.103 It is this same dedication to dialogue that motivated Narokobi to include the voices of his critics in The Melanesian Way.

His aspirations for the History of Wautogik Village were similarly dialogic. As he writes in the preface,

> Much of what I write now is a recollection of what I heard from my father, Anton Narokobi, years ago. My father has been dead for twelve years and I fear my recollection may not be so accurate. Still, it is better to write what I know and allow others who heard anything different to write differently, or correct me.104

101 The published edition of Narokobi’s ‘History of Wautogik Village’ will include links to descriptions of this customary practice provided by other knowledge holders.
103 Ibid., vi.
Not long after he shared the *History of Wautogik Village* manuscript with me in 2006, Narokobi and I had a phone conversation in which I thanked him for the manuscript and encouraged him to publish it. He told me he despaired of ever being able to do so, as so many of the village’s knowledge holders had passed away that he feared there was no one left who knew enough to correct it.

At issue was not so much the truth of the manuscript’s content, in the sense of its correspondence to an objective reality, as a concern about the social process through which such knowledge of communal import should be communicated. Narokobi never meant for the *History of Wautogik Village* to stand as the last word on Wautogik village. In the ordinary course of village affairs, public political statements would always be made in a group setting, where any individual’s words would be subject to affirmation, further elaboration or disagreement by others. Each stakeholder would have the opportunity to speak, and, as Arapesh people have told me, ‘put another idea on top’ of the other things that had been said. The discussion came to an end not when the facts of a matter had finally been established, but when everyone with something to contribute had had a chance to speak. Narokobi wanted what he wrote in the *History of Wautogik Village* manuscript to be subject to that same kind of process that stimulates the articulation of differing views. So during a visit I made to Wautogik in 2013, I read the entire manuscript aloud in the village, inviting people to correct my pronunciation of Arapesh terms, note any points of disagreement, and ‘put their own ideas on top’ of Narokobi’s wherever they felt something more or different needed to be said. My current publication plan for the *History of Wautogik Village* approximates this multivocal style of knowledge sharing by annotating the text in a digital medium. It will be linked at appropriate points to the recordings of the 2013 reading and to archived recordings of oral texts produced by other knowledge holders, many who have since passed away, speaking on related topics or offering their own versions of Narokobi’s stories. As a result of this prior research, and through use of the digital medium, it is possible to create a presentation of the manuscript that respects the customary Melanesian mode of knowledge circulation that is no longer achievable orally, nor satisfactorily approximated by a print publication of the sort Narokobi imagined in 2006, but that energized so much of what he wrote throughout his career: an exchange among equals motivated by shared dedication to their beloved village/nation/wabir.

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New models such as this for the written transmission of traditional cultural knowledge will increasingly be necessary in Melanesia and elsewhere in the Pacific as social and technological change both proceed.