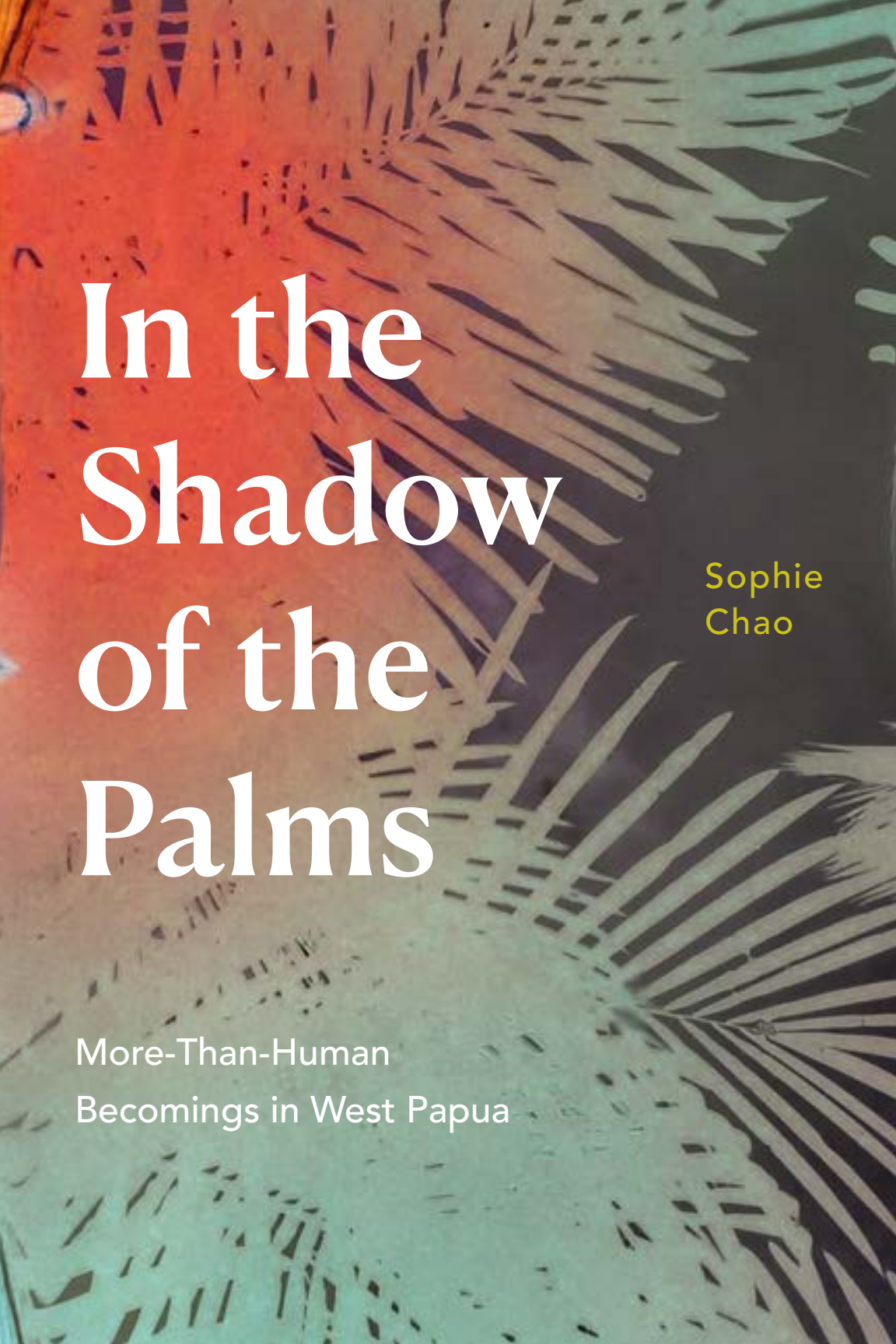

In the Shadow of the Palms
Sophie Chao
More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua

In the Shadow
of the Palms

In the Shadow of the Palms

More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua

SOPHIE CHAO

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Durham and London 2022

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Courtney Leigh Richardson
Typeset in Minion Pro and Avenir by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Chao, Sophie, author.
Title: In the shadow of the palms : more-than-human becomings in West Papua / Sophie Chao.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021031629
ISBN 9781478015611 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478018247 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478022855 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Palm oil industry—Social aspects—Indonesia—Papua Barat. | Palm oil industry—Environmental aspects—Indonesia—Papua Barat. | Palm oil industry—Indonesia—Papua Barat. | Plantation workers—Indonesia—Papua Barat—Social conditions. | Sustainable development—Indonesia—Papua Barat. | Rural development—Indonesia—Papua Barat. | Deforestation—Indonesia—Papua Barat. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Anthropology / Cultural & Social | SCIENCE / Environmental Science (see also Chemistry / Environmental)
Classification: LCC HD9490.5.P343 I5 2022 |
DDC 331.7/63385109951—dc23/eng/20220103
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021031629

Cover art: Sago palms, color altered. Courtesy of the author.

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges the University of Sydney, which provided funds toward the publication of this book. Funds were also provided by the Australian Research Council.

Publication of this book is supported by Duke University Press's Scholars of Color First Book Fund.

Frontispiece. In the shadow of the palms. Sago fronds reflected in starch and water. Photo by Sophie Chao.

To Jacob, for his humbling courage in all walks of life.

CONTENTS

Oil palm killed the sago
Oil palm killed our kin
Oil palm choked our rivers
Oil palm bled our land

Valuable like agarwood, sago is not
Expensive like red meranti, sago is not
Elegant like the frangipani, sago is not
Majestic like the banyan, sago is not
But life it brings and growth to share
Food it gives and water it cleanses
Shade it offers, rest it promises

So, jail me, shoot me, burn me, kill me
But bring my shattered bones to the sago grove
To rest among the suckers, to drink from cleaner rivers

Sago, sago, you first came into being
In a place called Timasoe
There, our children grew strong and bold
Our wives had shiny skin and abundant sweat
Our men were tall and fit
Timasoe, Timasoe, Timasoe
You are west of the cassowary mound near Doeval
East of the last bend of the Milavo tributary
North of the juniper bushes
Where my ancestor Khiano gave birth to Yom
A sacred place, a peaceful place

Where wild deer and pigs and birds came
For water and shade and protection from the rain

Oil palm killed the sago
Oil palm killed our kin
Oil palm choked our rivers
Oil palm bled our land

Timasoe, Timasoe, Timasoe
Dare I visit you now?
With sorrow and shame, I tread your soil
My bones weak from riding trucks
My skin grey from eating rice
My hands bloodstained from the dollar bills

Timasoe, you are now a bare and barren place
Lodged between the Trans-Irian Highway and plantation blocks
Between roads and dust, you stand
Hostage to oil palm, the settler palm, you weep

For no sago here will grow
No rivers here will flow
No gentle winds shall blow
No songs tomorrow know
Our bones your earth shall stow

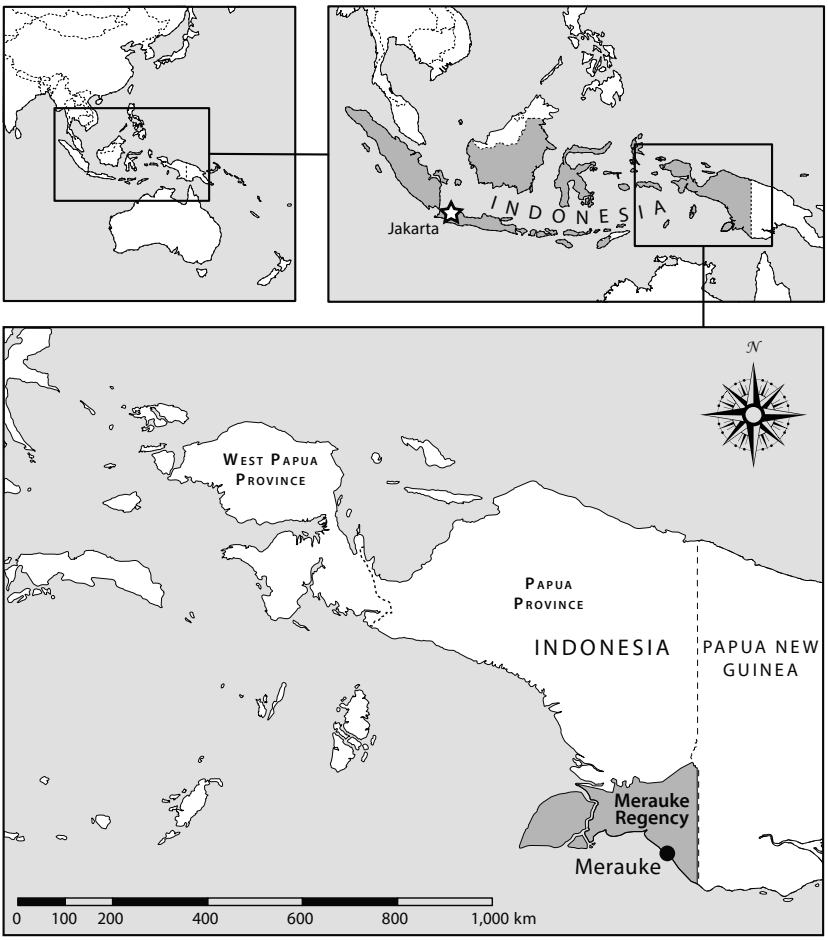
—The song of Marcus Gebze, elder of Mirav village, West Papua

INTRODUCTION

Nausea. Anger. Grief. Driving through oil palm plantations with my Marind companions in rural West Papua brought home to me the boundless devastation and disciplined monotony of industrial monocrops as no high-resolution drone footage or glossy environmental magazine ever could. Endless rows of oil palms surrounded us, silently condemning our clandestine vehicle. A cortege of trucks rumbled into the horizon, dragging loads of felled woods amid shrouds of stubborn red dust. The palm oil processing plant, looming on higher ground, spewed smoke and steam throughout the day and night. Illegal land-clearing fires consumed the forest, blanketing the landscape in a choking haze.

Hunched beside the road, young plantation laborers watched us drive by with dull gazes. Paraquat, a deadly herbicide, trickled down from rusty canisters strapped to the women's backs, the blue-green venom seeping into their exposed skin. Banned in many countries because of its toxic effects, no antidote exists for this lethal chemical. I thought of babies never to come. The faces of my friends, huddled in the bed of the truck, were caked in dust and watched the landscape unfurl, weeping. Infants retched from the stench of mill effluents as we jolted down dirt roads without stopping so as to avoid attracting the attention of military men employed by the companies to guard their plantations. Bunches of oil palm fruit lay strewn along roadsides, piles of moldering blood-red and coal-black, shot through with razor-sharp thorns. Bulldozers and chainsaws ripped through isolated patches of the remaining vegetation. Silhouetted against the bleary sun, pesticide-spraying helicopters zigzagged back and forth above us, spreading a milky veil of hazy toxins.

Crouched in the back of one of the trucks in late July 2015, Paulus Mahuze, a Marind clan head from Khalaoyam village in the West Papuan regency of Merauke, explained to me how oil palm had arrived in his homeland.[1] On August 11, 2010, a delegation of government representatives from Jakarta, led by then minister of agriculture Ir. H. Suswono, had officiated an inauguration



Map I.1. Merauke Regency in West Papua, Indonesia. Map by Geoffrey Wallace.

ceremony in the nearby village of Sirapu. They were launching the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE), a USD $5 billion agribusiness scheme intended to promote the country's self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs and make Indonesia a net-food-exporting nation. Papuans from across the region were invited to the event, including Marind community members from villages along the upper reaches of the Bian River, where I undertook my fieldwork. Paulus described the ceremony:

> It was a hot day. There was dust (abu) everywhere, raised by the government convoys and military trucks.[2] The dust stung our eyes and made the children cry. The government brought oil palm (sawit) company

> bosses with them from pusat ("the center," or Jakarta). They gave us instant noodles, pens, bottles of water. They also gave us cigarettes—the expensive kind. They talked a lot about MIFEE. MIFEE this, MIFEE that . . . but we didn't understand what MIFEE was. We did not know what oil palm was because oil palm does not live in our forests. Then, the government officials and the oil palm bosses left. They never returned to the village. They promised us money and jobs. They said MIFEE would provide us with food. I thought that they would plant yams, vegetables, and fruit trees. Instead, they planted oil palm. They planted oil palm everywhere they could. They turned the whole forest into oil palm. They cut down all the sago to plant oil palm. This is what happened. Since then, everything is abu-abu ("gray" or "uncertain").

By May 2011, the Indonesian government had allocated some two million hectares of land in Merauke to thirty-six domestic and international corporations for the development of oil palm, timber, and sugarcane plantations. Vast swaths of forest had been felled or burned. Major watercourses had been diverted to irrigate the newly established monocrops. Today, Paulus's home village of Khalaoyam, along with several others along the Upper Bian River, are encircled by oil palm plantations that cover several hundred thousand hectares of former forest and extend north into the neighboring regency of Boven Digul. As we enter the third decade of the third millennium, dozens more companies are applying for operational permits. Agribusiness continues to expand relentlessly across the region.

I first visited the Upper Bian in 2011, while working as a project officer for the UK-based human-rights organization Forest Peoples Programme. At the time, I was undertaking field investigations with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and church institutions to document the social and environmental impacts of oil palm developments in Merauke. These investigations revealed that agribusiness projects were being designed and implemented without the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Marind (see Awas MIFEE 2012; Ginting and Pye 2013; Ito, Rachman, and Savitri 2014). Military-corporate collusion was rampant. Consultations, when undertaken, presented projects as a fait accompli and offered limited information to communities on the potential risks to their food security, land rights, and economic livelihoods. Oil palm projects were routinely framed in corporate and government rhetoric as key to national interests, regional economic growth, and the "development" (pembangunan) of West Papuans into modern, civilized subjects. Yet employment opportunities for local Marind proved limited, as companies preferred

to bring in their own labor force or hire migrants. Other grievances shared by Marind villagers included unfulfilled corporate social responsibility schemes, critical levels of water pollution, endemic biodiversity loss, and deforestation through illegal burning.

Oil palm developments in Merauke thus exemplified vividly what anthropologists have called the "dispossessory dynamics" of agribusiness expansion—a process premised on and perpetuating structural violence in the form of land alienation, growing poverty, intergenerational displacement, and precarious rural livelihoods (Li 2017a; Tsing 2005; West 2016). The plantations also represented a classic case of "land-grabbing," or the large-scale acquisition of land in the Global South for agricultural development, intensified by the food, fuel, and finance crisis of 2008 (Borras and Franco 2011; Edelman, Oya, and Borras 2015; D. Hall 2011). In this regard, the dispossessory dynamics of agribusiness in Merauke were not radically dissimilar to what I had witnessed in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago where oil palm is industrially cultivated, and most notably in Sumatra and Kalimantan. However, the particular *ways* in which this dispossession was being experienced on the ground differed.

Very early on, I was struck by how Upper Bian Marind conceptualized the arrival of oil palm. The stories I heard in the field were not about global markets, corporate interests, or food security. Nor did they primarily revolve around the issue of rights—land, human, or Indigenous. Instead, cryptic statements abounded in villagers' reflections on their present condition, which were invariably preceded by the temporal marker "since oil palm arrived." Oil palm, people told me, was a modern totem that had made time stop. The forest had become a world of straight lines, haunted by a rapacious and foreign plant-being. Cassowaries and crocodiles were turning into plastic and weeping like humans as their native habitats disappeared. At night, oil palm depleted the flesh and fluids of dreamers in their sleep. Meanwhile, the skin of animals and plants was drying out as oil palm sapped wetness from the earth and devoured the forest.

These narratives challenged my activist habitus. They also stimulated my curiosity. Eventually, they brought me to leave the world of human rights advocacy and undertake long-term ethnographic fieldwork among Upper Bian Marind. These early experiences thus marked the beginning of a long personal and intellectual journey of encounter with difference—a difference whose many facets I will explore in the chapters that follow. Oil palm expansion, I came to realize, could not be framed as either a social or an ecological problem. Nor could it be addressed purely through the discourse of human rights or environmental justice. This expansion was radically reconfiguring Marinds' sense of place, time, and personhood—their bodies, their stories, even their

dreams. It affected men, women, and children both present and to come who, together with their forest kin, appeared to be undergoing a more-than-human existential crisis—one that left no single sphere or species of life untouched. Many NGOs, including the one I worked for, targeted the Indonesian government, international corporations, and financial investors in their anti–oil palm campaigns. And yet the communities whose rights we advocated for seemed more interested in oil palm itself—where it comes from, what it wants, how it differs from native species, and why it is so destructive.

Against this backdrop, the book before you explores how Indigenous communities in an out-of-the-way place engage with the disruptive effects of an other-than-human actor.[3] Specifically, I ask: How do Marind experience, conceptualize, and contest the social and environmental transformations provoked by deforestation and oil palm expansion? How do these transformations reconfigure the relations of Marind to each other, to other species, and to their environment? And how do plant-human dynamics in the Papuan plantation nexus inform our understanding of more-than-human entanglements in an age of planetary unraveling?

Appreciating how oil palm transforms the interspecies relations, geographies, and temporalities of the Upper Bian requires that, like Marind, we take seriously the attributes of plants as particular kinds of agents. The villagers with whom I worked do not conceive of oil palm solely as a sessile object of human exploitation or a passive instrument of capitalist gain. Rather, widespread speculation over oil palm's affects and effects arises from the fact that the plant itself is seen (and feared) as a willful entity—one that is voracious, destructive, and alien. In the proliferating being of oil palm, the forces of neoliberal capitalism and settler-colonization resist conceptual abstraction and find a material grip. Violence reveals itself as a multispecies act.

ALONGSIDE MELTING GLACIERS, MARINE oil spills, and inundated islands, large-scale plantations are emblematic of an era characterized by the unprecedented magnitude of human activity on the planet.[4] Within the agribusiness industry, the palm oil sector is particularly notorious for its destructive environmental impacts. Palm oil represents one of just four commodities responsible for the majority of tropical deforestation and the second largest industry sector driving global warming (Global Forest Coalition 2017). Oil palm plantations dramatically reduce biodiversity and damage the habitats of endangered species. They undermine ecosystem services such as nutrient cycling, water purification, and soil stability. The adverse consequences of oil palm expansion

on the livelihoods and land rights of Indigenous peoples and other local communities have also been extensively documented (see, inter alia, Andrianto, Komarudin, and Pacheco 2019; Colchester and Chao 2011, 2013; Gabriel et al. 2017; Li 2017b). Yet despite growing controversy over their social and environmental impacts, oil palm plantations continue to spread across the tropical belt, driven by economic development imperatives, renewable energy policies, and a growing world population. Integral to the global agroindustrial food system, palm oil remains the cheapest and most versatile vegetable oil on the market, present in over half of all packaged goods globally (World Wildlife Fund 2020).[5]

Scholars from a range of disciplines have condemned industrial plantations for subjecting cash crops to totalizing human control and for jeopardizing biodiverse forest ecologies.[6] Comparatively speaking, however, agribusiness has received less ethnographic attention than other environmentally destructive industries, such as mining and logging. Existing studies have focused primarily on the anthropogenic forces driving plantation expansion and the experiences of peasant groups involved (more or less willingly) in the plantation sector as laborers or smallholders.[7] The ways in which Indigenous communities in Merauke conceptualize and engage with monocrops provide an important counterpoint to these accounts. Marind are directly affected by the ecological destruction wrought by agribusiness, but most remain excluded from the sites and circuits of palm oil production. Few are, or wish to be, employed by local corporations. Indeed, many Marind are averse on moral grounds to agriculture, horticulture, and other forms of plant or animal domestication.

Perhaps most important of all, Upper Bian Marind do not primarily attribute the destructive impacts of oil palm expansion to human actors, technologies, and market forces—even as they are well aware of them. Instead, they attribute these effects to the volition and actions of oil palm itself. The blame that Marind place on oil palm is pivotal to this story. It is what makes it differ from other works on plantations and plant-human relations. It is what disrupts the human-centered focus of political economy approaches to the agroindustrial sector. It is also what brings into the picture other powerful entities that, like oil palm, are deemed by Marind to be introduced and invasive—the state, settlers, soldiers, and corporations.

And yet blaming oil palm is only part of this story. As much as they resent the plant for its radically destructive effects, Upper Bian Marind also pity oil palm for its subjection to totalizing human control. Others express curiosity about oil palm's origins, needs, and desires. Ambivalent affects and heterogeneous perspectives coalesce around this alien plant of unknown ways and

wants. Taking seriously the conflicting meanings of oil palm prompts us to ask which lives and deaths matter within capitalist natures, to whom, and why.[8] It invites attention to justices alternately enabled or preempted by agroindustrial landscapes—environmental and social, restorative and intergenerational, human and more-than-human (Chao, Bolender, and Kirksey 2022).[9] It reveals the potential and limits of the "species" as a mode of analysis, relation, and practice. And it points to violence itself as a multispecies act—one in which humans are not always the perpetrators and nonhumans not always the victims.

In this book, both ethnographic description and conceptual abstraction help to reveal the granular textures of Marinds' changing lifeworld. I avoid imposing a carapace of theory atop the moving flesh of ethnography. Instead, I thread thick description and distilled abstraction in the manner of the barks and filaments that my Marind sisters artfully fashion into woven sago bags. Some of the concepts I deploy in this story are Marinds', and others are mine but draw from those of Marind. Some concepts are inspired by the work of Indigenous and critical race scholars and others stem from what might be considered the traditional Western canon of theory.[10] Moving back and forth between theorizing ethnography and ethnographizing theory, I respond to Black feminist scholar Zakkiyah Imam Jackson's (2013, 681) call to collapse the hierarchical distinction between Western theory and non-Western cosmology—a distinction that itself replicates and perpetuates the historical oppression of Indigenous and other marginalized peoples by (settler-)colonial regimes. In switching my analysis of Marind thought between Western eyes and Indigenous eyes, I work against the colonization of ethnography by theory when theory is taken to be "produced" by (and often for) the Global North, based on ethnographic realities that "happen" in the Global South.[11] Instead, I look for theory in "small places" (Agard-Jones 2013, 183) produced by peoples who persist in the face of imposed invisibility and who have something important to say about what it means to live under entrenched regimes of color and capital (see also Banivanua-Mar 2016; Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2018; K. Teaiwa 2014; West 2016).

Attending to theory in small places reveals the agentive and imaginative capacities of people in the face of structural inequalities that are relative to, but never totally determined by, macrolevel forces. It draws attention to the critical vantage points held by communities at the margins of the world capitalist economy and the complex idioms through which they articulate ongoing processes of accumulation through dispossession.[12] In the context of the global ecological crisis, starting from the local allows us to appreciate the specificity

of loss and potentiality in the very places where they materialize and come to matter. Rather than a study of the ontology *of* Marind, this is an account of Marind *as* ontologists of their own changing worlds—one that takes as its primary objective the acknowledgment of Indigenous creativity and the decolonization of anthropological thought and practice.[13]

This book adopts human-vegetal relations as a central lens for exploring the changing lifeworld of Upper Bian dwellers. In doing so, it contributes to a vast body of anthropological literature that has found in plants a fruitful entry point to understanding human cultural forms and social organization.[14] Alongside their material uses and ecological functions, plants in Indigenous and other horticultural communities are often endowed with a soul or other form of agentive consciousness. In Melanesia and Amazonia, for instance, plants may be personified as kin (notably as surrogate children) or classified as male or female and associated with particular personalities or traits—gentle, aggressive, ugly, or beautiful.[15] Some cultures correlate the substance and structure of particular plants to those of humans. The sexualization of plants is often linked to notions of fertility and procreation, giving rise to gender-inflected modes of plant cultivation, exchange, and consumption.[16] Stages of vegetal growth may be associated with the human life cycle and intergenerational reproduction or serve as the basis for broader divisions of seasonal or calendrical time.[17] In some societies, plants coaxed into maturation through ritual, magic, and song enable those who nurture and consume them to access sacred sources of knowledge or acquire other-than-human forms and faculties.[18]

Anthropological studies of plant-human relations have tended to focus on native vegetal lifeforms with a well-defined status within local cosmologies—for instance, taro, yams, and sago in Melanesia and cassava, tobacco, and ayahuasca in Amazonia. This book, on the other hand, focuses primarily on a plant—oil palm—that was only recently introduced into West Papua and that many Marind consider alien and invasive. I examine the ontology of oil palm by cross-pollinating classic environmental anthropological literature with insights derived from the *plant turn*, a budding interdisciplinary current that foregrounds the role of plants as communicative, sentient, and worldmaking actors.[19] The plant turn moves beyond the treatment of plants in purely representational and functional terms. It invites us to think and theorize *with*—rather than just about—vegetal lifeforms as agents in their own right. It also considers the historical, affective, and mimetic entanglements of humans and plants, in a practice that Theresa Miller (2019) calls "sensory ethnobotany."[20] In an age of rampant ecological crisis, scholars of the plant turn exhort us to "make allies"

of vegetal beings to sustain our mutual dependencies and generate "new scenes of, and new ways to see" plant-people relations (Myers 2017a, 299–300).[21]

The storied relations of plants and people recounted in this book speak powerfully to the ethical urgency of reimagining interspecies entanglements in an age of planetary undoing. At the same time, the sites and subjects at the heart of this story—Indigenous lifeworlds and monocrop plantations—offer a critical counterpoint to the predominantly Western- and technocentric focus of the plant turn and related strands of thinking in the broader fields of the environmental humanities and posthumanism. Departing from the prevalent focus on scientific and conservationist perspectives within these currents, I ground my analysis in the theories, experiences, and knowledges of an Indigenous community whose social relations have always encompassed other-than-human beings but are now challenged by the occupying presence of a lethal vegetal lifeform.[22] In so doing, I seek to expand approaches for reimagining what is possible in more-than-human worlds that remain largely situated in the unmarked White space of Euro-American (settler-)colonialism.[23]

But this book also invites a more fundamental critique of posthumanist currents. On the one hand, Marind practice a posthuman ethic in positioning themselves as one kind of self among a plethora of agentive forest lifeforms. No "Great Divide" separates or elevates humans from "nature" in the Upper Bian. Rather, Marind come into existence through their corporeal, affective, and material connections to kindred plants and animals, within a broader ethos of relationality in which all lives and lifeforms are interdependent.[24] Yet Marind are also grappling with an other-than-human being—oil palm—that is invasive and destructive. Many of them actively resist the technocapitalist assemblages attempting to turn them into posthuman "cyborgs."[25] These assemblages include the plantation economy and its production-driven logic; the dreams of "modernity" promoted by the government and incarnated in oil palm; the racialized treatment of Papuans as primitive peoples in need of development; the commodified foodstuffs replacing Indigenous, sago-based foodways and ecologies; and the conversion of animate forests into homogeneous monocrops.[26] Together, these imposed transformations perpetuate the dispossession of Marind of their bodily and territorial sovereignty. Together, they alienate Marind from the multispecies relations that make Marind human in the first place.[27]

In this light, the posthumanist effort to decenter the human and practice multispecies love becomes problematic. It brings us into alliance with a plant whose entanglements with Marind and their forest lifeworld is neither

desired nor conducive to multispecies thriving. These entanglements stem from a capitalist formation—the plantation—that is itself imbricated with imperial forms of violence, enslavement, and expropriation, including racialized hierarchies of humanness and attendant necrobiopolitical regimes.[28] Far from solely an economic production system, the plantation, in the words of Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, is also a race-making institution (2002, 200). As landscapes of empire, plantations remind us that environmental problems are indissociable from histories of colonialism, capitalism, and racism, which have rendered some beings less or differently human than others.

In the story that follows, the racial logics of capitalism and colonialism manifest in the paralyzing effects of state-corporate geographies, the asymmetric relations of Indigenous Marind to non-Papuan settlers, and the paternalistic rhetoric of progress surrounding agribusiness developments. These dynamics reveal how oil palm's relatively recent arrival exacerbates the ongoing subjection of Indigenous communities to racializing assemblages that render them subhuman and disposable before the law.[29] West Papuans today, independence activist Filep Karma (2014) notes, continue to be treated like half-animals.[30] Their imprisonment, killing, and torture are not only tolerated by the state but also at times celebrated (Hernawan 2015). Their right to self-determination continues to be denied and their lands and resources continue to be appropriated without consent (Chao 2019a). In arguable contrast to the postcolonial world, where the imperial logic of discrimination and displacement perdures as ruin and debris (see Stoler 2013, 2016), the racialized logic of settler-colonialism in West Papua is very much alive and well.[31]

Giving center stage to plants in a world where colonizing plants and people are destructive and racialized multispecies communities are their victims serves to challenge universalist assumptions of human exceptionalism—a widely critiqued concept in the posthumanist tradition. It demands that we approach posthumanism itself as a *plural* category of being—one alternately embraced or eschewed by communities positioned as subhuman under colonial and technoscientific regimes. It demonstrates the importance of attending to Indigenous epistemologies in appreciating which lifeforms are deemed loving or unloving, and consequently lovable or unlovable.[32] Never straightforward binaries, these categories reveal themselves to be species-inflected—but not always species-determined—modalities of being within the dispersed ontologies of the Upper Bian.

The poetics and politics of more-than-human entanglements in Merauke invite us in turn to rethink the notion of violence as solely or primarily an anthropogenic act. As my host father, Marcus Gebze, sings in the Prologue,

Marind inhabit a world held hostage by an invasive "settler palm" that kills the sago, murders their kin, chokes their rivers, and bleeds their land. This world demands that we take seriously the possibility of plants, not as amoral, but as *immoral*, subjects. It brings into question the prevalent characterization of plant-human dynamics as reciprocal and beneficial and of plants as nonappropriative, giving beings.[33] It also offers a sobering counterpoint to the celebration of more-than-human encounters as inherently conducive to multispecies intimacy and thriving.[34] Instead, the words and worlds of Upper Bian Marind draw attention to the potentially exclusionary and diminishing effects of more-than-human entanglements.[35] In doing so, these words and worlds provocatively reframe the assumed human monopoly on violence as potentially yet *another* instance of human exceptionalism. When a particular group of humans and their other-than-human kin are subjected to the damaging effects of a proliferating plant, we find ourselves forced to redefine violence itself as a multispecies act.

In elaborating this argument, I explore how oil palm—a literal *neophyte* (from the Greek words for *new* and *plant*)—becomes a potent object of wonder for Marind, which alternately indexes or challenges the ontological ruptures wrought by agribusiness expansion (cf. Scott 2016, 476). Such ruptures manifest in the dynamics of Marinds' everyday village life, in their material engagements with the environment, in their interactions with state and corporate entities, and in their dreams, which magnify the dystopic effects of oil palm on the landscape and its lifeforms. Across these and other settings, multiple diverse scales, subjects, and species coalesce or collide in generative friction (Tsing 2005).[36] The frictions I examine arise from Marinds' fraught encounters with colonialism and modernity, along with their associated actors, technologies, and claims to knowledge and power, including knowledge as power. They entail the substitution of sentient forests with technocapitalist plantations. They encompass the antagonistic relation between introduced cash crops and native species, whose respective proliferation and obliteration speak unsettling truths to Marind about their own fates and futures. Together, frictions in the plantation as *contact zone* reveal an ontological dissonance between the Marind lifeworld and the forces of agroindustrial capitalism, as incarnated in the sago palm and the oil palm, respectively.[37]

Exploring the dispersed ontologies of the oil palm and the sago palm brings me to examine the clashing visions, projects, and desires of state and corporate actors, on the one hand, and Indigenous actors, on the other—what emerges in these spaces of encounter, what is excluded from them, and what might be hoped of them.[38] Drawing from almost a decade of involvement in the land rights campaigns of Upper Bian Marind, I assess the obstacles faced by activists

as they struggle to curb the proliferation of oil palm and protect their sago-based ecologies, foodways, and relations. I also demonstrate how Marind engage creatively with the ambiguity of oil palm to generate new possibilities of being for themselves and their forest kin.

In focusing on the radical ruptures engendered by oil palm in Merauke, the story that follows exemplifies what Sherry Ortner (2016) calls "dark anthropology"—an anthropology that attends to social experiences of oppression and injustice in the rise of global neoliberal capitalism. To this end, I explore the Indigenous modes of analysis and praxis through which Marind conceptualize and critique the ontological ruptures wrought by agribusiness expansion.[39] I situate these ruptures within broader processes of cosmological decline that manifest in the transformed bodies and relations of humans and other-than-humans.[40] I examine how plants themselves come to act as potent symbols for larger sociohistorical forces that shape the contested spaces of the plantation, forest, and village. I also attend to the moral and sensory dimensions of plant-human entanglements as they manifest in the tangible violence of the waking world and in the anxiogenic dreams that haunt Marind in the sleeping world. By interweaving political ecology with phenomenology, I seek to bring to light what Paige West calls the "affects of dispossession" (2020, 122), or the sensory and affective ways in which systemic loss, violence, and destruction are experienced by people in their situated relations to each other and to the more-than-human dwellers of unevenly shared and increasingly vulnerable environments.

At the same time, this story engages with dark anthropology's counterpart, or what Joel Robbins (2013) calls "anthropologies of the good." To this end, I explore the meaning of the good life among Marind in light of their conceptions of morality, relatedness, and interspecies care.[41] I investigate how beings in the forest participate in the (trans)formation of moral selves and relations through bodily exchanges of wetness and skin. I examine how the good coalesces in the affective textures of Marinds' relations with sago—a plant that my companions invariably describe in contrast to oil palm.[42] Following Unangax scholar Eve Tuck (2009), I also analyze how Upper Bian communities resist and refuse the darkness of the present and the precarity of futures both imposed and arrested through their daily interactions with human and other-than-human beings, their involvement in land rights campaigns and participatory mapping, and their emergent sense of solidarity as collective victims of the violence of oil palm.[43] These everyday imaginative acts in turn invite us to reflect critically and capaciously on the (im)possibility of hope in a present of impasse—a present when, as many Marind affirm, the arrival of oil palm has made time itself grind to a halt.[44]

The good and the bad form one of several counterpoints that animate the story. As entities that accrue meaning through their relationship to each other, counterpoints reveal how Marind creatively flesh out the categorial differences that matter as they forge a "Papuan Way" in the wake of ecological destruction.[45] The counterpoints I explore include the materiality of the landscape and its cartographic representation, the duality of body and mind, and the mirrored ontologies of human and bird shape-shifters. They encompass the opposed moralities of sago palm and oil palm, the gastropolitical divides embodied in rice and sago, and the fraught dynamics of oneiric possession and diurnal suffering. Other counterpoints include the interplay of interspecies violence and care, the opposed perspectives of plastic drones and forest birds, and the seemingly incompatible patterns of monocrop capitalistic production and multispecies social reproduction. The text before your eyes, which draws together multiple voices, utterances, and discourses that I gathered through my own intersubjective interactions with Marind in the field, is itself nothing less than contrapuntal.[46]

More than anything, however, the story I tell attends to the generative spaces that lie *between* the counterpoints of good and dark, or what Paulus Mahuze—the head of Khalaoyam village—described as the realm of abu-abu.[47] Many Marind in the Upper Bian referred to 2015—the year I started my fieldwork—as a time when the world became abu-abu, meaning "gray" or "uncertain." That year, the sky turned hazy and dark from the thick smoke raised by large-scale forest burning—a cheap and fast, if illegal, way of clearing land to make way for agribusiness concessions. As the ashes of incinerated vegetation dispersed across land and sky, 1.5 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions were released from over 120,000 fires across the archipelago. The gray year was also one of severe drought caused by El Niño and aggravated by the diversion of major waterways to irrigate the newly established plantations. When the rains finally fell they were brief. By then, the waters of the Bian had turned gray from the daily discharge of toxic palm oil mill effluents.

Much like gray is neither black nor white but rather a mix of both and ashes are the barely tangible residue of irretrievably incinerated forms, the oil palm, the MIFEE project, and the future itself, were shrouded in menacing opacity during the year of ashes. Compensation payments and employment opportunities that had been promised to local communities had yet to materialize. Instead, cheap housing popped up across the landscape to house a sudden influx of Javanese laborers. New concession markers were erected in unexpected locations and without prior notice to local inhabitants. Despite sustained efforts, local and international advocacy initiatives were failing to slow agribusiness expansion.

At the same time, rumors that MIFEE might be relocated to other parts of West Papua rippled sporadically throughout the villages. Several oil palm companies were said to have gone bankrupt. Others had vanished after reportedly making a fortune by illegally logging the precious woods in their concessions and trading them on the international market.[48] While many Marind remained staunchly opposed to oil palm developments, others sought employment within the plantations or worked as intermediaries for the corporations. Opaque like the tenacious haze blanketing the parched landscape of the Upper Bian, oil palm itself lay at the heart of a material and ontic crisis of visibility.[49] Intense concerns and curiosity were exacerbated by uncertainties surrounding the plant's own abu-abu dispositions and desires.

Abu-abu, as I examine in this story, encompasses ambiguous affects and atmospheres, things and beings, and spatialities and temporalities.[50] It is a condition of awkward existence distributed across unevenly situated human and other-than-human communities of life whose futures are threatened by intensifying agroindustrial landscape transformations. Amid such transformations, inhabiting abu-abu means living with opacity as a generalized and constitutive state of being. But abu-abu can also generate new becomings amid ruptured more-than-human meshworks. In certain instances, embracing abu-abu can even become a form of covert resistance—one that refuses the exclusions and erasures produced by fixed classificatory schemes intent on governing matter and meaning through reductionist logics of separation and stratification.[51]

In the Upper Bian, abu-abu manifests in the uncertain fate of the forest, the ambiguous efficacy of Indigenous maps, and the strange lives of village-bound cassowaries. Abu-abu shrouds the conflicting desires of Marind as they make do in a world of plastic foods, concrete totems, and deadly dreams. It haunts the clashing temporalities of the world before and after oil palm, the violence of imposed futures, and the shape-shifting beings that lurk within the murk. Abu-abu will follow us throughout this account, alternately foregrounding or subverting the contrapuntal dynamics of the Marind lifeworld.

Acts of resistance and refusal in the world of abu-abu are often mundane and rarely heroic. These acts, to borrow Elizabeth Povinelli's words, are "ordinary, chronic, and cruddy rather than catastrophic, crisis-laden, and sublime" (2011, 13). For some Marind, resistance takes the form of defiant, self-directed violence—the ripping of one's hair and the drawing of one's blood. For others, resistance means making maps that won't sit still, eating sago rather than rice, rebuffing the passage of time, or finding solace in the world of dreams. Perhaps most important, resistance among Marind entails an epistemic refusal to reduce oil palm to any singular or bounded ontology—good, bad, or other.

As destructive as it might be, oil palm *also* exists to Marind as an exploited victim, an object of curiosity, a pathway to an expanded world, and possibly even a kind of kin. In this shadowy world, where new beings subvert the realities and relations of Marind and their forest companions, the line between the good and the bad remains very much in the making. But before we enter the murky realm of abu-abu, let me flesh out the ethnographic setting where our story unfolds.

MERAUKE REGENCY IS LOCATED at the southern tip of Indonesian Papua, a region that borders Papua New Guinea to the east, the Boven Digoel and Mappi regencies to the north, and the Arafura Sea to the south and west. In ecological terms, the area is composed of low-lying and generally flat peat land, grassland, and dense swamp forests. In the inland back plains, serpentine rivers heave to the cadence of monsoonal rains, giving rise seasonally to Papua's most extensive wetlands. A range of resident and migratory birds, including waterfowl and waders, inhabit this zone of the TransFly EcoRegion. Larger animals, including cassowaries, tree kangaroos, possums, and crocodiles, populate its forests and rivers.

Plant life in Merauke is equally diverse, with monsoon forests containing an exceptionally high number of endemic plants unique to the region. A mixture of Phragmites, tall sedge grasses, and low-swamp grasses flourish in the permanent marshes, while semipermanent to seasonal Melaleuca swamp forests occupy terrains on higher ground.[52] Riverbanks and mangroves are home to dense groves of sago, a pinnate-leaved palm of the tropics known in Western taxonomy as *Metroxylon sagu* Rottbøll and as dakh and sagu in Marind and Indonesian, respectively.[53] Today, these biodiverse ecosystems are increasingly being replaced with monocrops of oil palm, a plant known scientifically as *Elaeis guineensis* Jacquin and as kelapa sawit or simply sawit in Indonesian.[54]

The villages of Khalaoyam, Bayau, and Mirav, where I undertook my fieldwork, are three of eight settlements lying along the upper reaches of the Bian River in Merauke's inland subdistricts of Ulilin and Muting. They sit within the customary territories of Marind, a vast triangle that stretches two hundred kilometers eastward along the coast from the Muli Strait in the west to twenty-five kilometers east of Merauke City and two hundred kilometers inland beyond the banks of the Fly River in Papua New Guinea. The villages are home to approximately six hundred households who self-identify in the Upper Bian dialect as Marind Bian (Marind of the Bian River) or Marind-deg (Marind of the forest).[55]

Each Marind clan (bawan) is related to a group of species whom they call grandparents (amai) or siblings (namek). Clans and their amai share descent from dema, or ancestral creator spirits, who drew them out of fissures in the earth at the beginning of time.[56] Many Marind names take the form of the plant or animal amai followed by "-ze," meaning "child of." For instance, the Mahuze clan are "children of the dog" and the Balagaize clan are "children of the crocodile." The interactions of amai and Marind are anchored in principles of exchange and care. Amai grow to support their human kin 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, and hunt, gather, and consume them. These reciprocal acts of nurture enable humans and amai to partake in a shared community of life within the ecocosmology of the forest.

The communities of Khalaoyam, Bayau, and Mirav derive their subsistence primarily from hunting, fishing, and gathering. Sago flour, the staple starch food, is supplemented with forest tubers and roots (mainly taro and yam), fish, and forest game such as Rusa deer, lorises, possums, cassowaries, fowl, kangaroos, crocodiles, and wild pigs. Fruit including rambutans, papayas, bananas, golden apples, traditional mangoes, figs, watery rose apples, langsat, kedondong, jackfruit, and coconuts are also obtained from the forest, alongside leaves, roots, barks, resins, and saps that are used to make medicinal ointments and concoctions.[57] With large-scale deforestation underway, however, access to these foods has become difficult. Today, imported foodstuffs, such as government-subsidized rice, cooking oil, sugar, coffee, tea, instant noodles, and cookies, are increasingly consumed in the villages of the Upper Bian. These goods are also offered by oil palm companies as part of their land compensation or social welfare packages and now constitute an important component in Marinds' diet.

Aside from Marind, a minority of other Papuan ethnic groups live in the villages along the Upper Bian, such as Jair, Auyu, Muyu, and Wambon. Kinship connections across these settlements, as well as with villages in the northern regency of Boven Digoel and across the border in Papua New Guinea, are close. Community members travel regularly up and down the river and through the forest to visit relatives and attend customary rituals and meetings. These movements, however, are increasingly hindered by the establishment of privatized and strictly guarded monocrops along the national border. Most Marind in the region are Catholic, with a minority of Protestants concentrated in the upstream villages of Wam and Pasior. The Upper Bian is also home to a small population of primarily Muslim transmigrants (orang trans) and spontaneous migrants (pendatang), originating from Java, Makassar, Nusa Tenggara, and

Maluku. This non-Papuan population has increased significantly over the last decade, as settlers relocate to Merauke to work as laborers and harvesters in the newly established oil palm plantations.

Accounts produced by anthropologists, explorers, and administrators during the Dutch colonial years frequently portrayed Marind as violent and invasive warmongers.[58] According to archival materials from the British Public Record Office dating from around 1891 to 1903, Marind—whom the British and Dutch administration called *Tugeri*—were renowned throughout the region for their frequent headhunting raids on the neighboring Wasi and Buji tribes (MacGregor 1893a, 1893b).[59] Joining forces to go out on war parties, Marind reportedly managed to venture far east into what Europeans designated as British territory, west to Frederik Hendrik Island (now Yos Sudarso Island), and north across the Digul River. Headhunting and the adoption of children from raided communities purportedly enabled Marind to expand their territorial control and increase their population. At the same time, trade, intermarriage, cultural exchange, and ritual cooperation with other ethnic groups remained widespread.

Repeated Marind incursions eventually led the British administration to request that the Dutch establish a physical presence in the region. In February 1901, the governor of the Dutch East Indies demarcated Merauke as an onderafdeling (subdistrict) under the afdeling (district) of Southern New Guinea, and an official outpost was founded in Merauke City in February 1902. Three years later, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart established themselves in the coastal village of Wendu and its surrounds. The mission gradually spread up north, reaching Okaba in 1910 and the hinterlands of the Upper Bian two decades later. The first inland mission was established in present-day Mirav in 1930.

However, the advance of foreign missionaries, colonial administrators, scientific expeditions, and traders in the Upper Bian was hindered by a landscape of semipermanent swamps and thick forests, the prevalence of various mosquito-borne diseases, and the purported reputation of Marind as lawless headhunters. The large body of colonial and ethnographic literature concerning the coastal—rather than inland—Marind reflects the limited influence of external actors in the hinterland. This includes Dutch ethnologist Jan van Baal's detailed monograph, *Dema: Description and Analysis of Marind-Anim Culture* (*South New Guinea*), which, as van Baal acknowledges and as my own fieldwork confirmed, is primarily a description of coastal Marind groups (1966, 12–13).[60]

By the 1930s, many Marind ritual practices had been abolished by the Dutch administration—for instance, ceremonies that marked the transition of children

across age-groups and headhunting expeditions that once sustained Marind populations through the adoption of children from raided tribes (Boelaars 1981; Corbey 2010; Ernst 1979). Nevertheless, informal activities in the forest remained key indicators of children's growth into anim, or "humans"—the first capture of game among boys, for instance, and the first weaving of sago bags among girls. Despite the sedenterization of Marind into "model villages" (model kampong) and the establishment of "civilizing schools" (beschavings scholen), village and school absenteeism was prevalent and Marind continued to regularly travel to the forest with their kin and children (Derksen 2016, 129).[61] The dema were recast by missionaries as primitive fetishes to be abandoned in the age of Christianity. But the dema lived on in the forest and continued to exert their influence on the landscape and its diverse dwellers. From the early twentieth century onward, the coastal Marind adopted introduced horticultural techniques such as rice paddy cultivation and entertained a lively (albeit at times animus-filled) trade in copra and iron with Chinese, Javanese, and Makassarese merchants (Swadling 1996, 178; Verschueren 1970, 57).[62] In contrast, and with the notable exception of the plume-trade boom of 1908–1924, traditional modes of subsistence in the interior continued largely unaffected throughout much of Dutch rule (Garnaut and Manning 1974, 15–17; van der Veur 1972, 277).[63] Horticultural projects initiated in this period were small-scale and located near the coast and the city rather than the hinterland.

Even today, the Upper Bian remains relatively less urbanized compared to coastal Merauke. Telecommunication services are available only a few hours a night in Mirav and there is no telephone signal in Khalaoyam or Bayau. Roads and other infrastructure in the region are minimal. Settlements consist of rows of rickety wooden houses with one or two small kiosks that provide limited basic supplies. Villages receive some income from government-support programs such as GERBANGKU and RESPEK and from the sale of nontimber forest products in Merauke City. Such income, however, is scarce and sporadic. Government funds only occasionally reach the villages and community members' access to urban markets is impeded by distance and transportation costs. Compensation payments for lands surrendered to oil palm companies represent another one-off source of income for some villagers. Averaging just under 5 USD per hectare, these payments are disproportionately less than the value of lands that were ceded (Al Jazeera 2020; Forest Peoples Programme, PUSAKA, and Sawit Watch 2013). Education rates in the Upper Bian are low, with less than half the population completing high school, 1 percent attending university, and 13 percent receiving no formal education (Basik 2017, 46). In the province with the lowest Human Development Index of the nation, infant mortality

rates are high, life expectancies are thirty-five years for men and thirty-eight years for women, and HIV infection rates are the second highest in Indonesia.

The modern history of West Papua, which I explore in greater detail in ensuing chapters, is notoriously violent and volatile.[64] The Dutch authorities transferred administration of the region to Indonesia on May 1, 1963. This was followed by the controversial Act of Free Choice in July–August 1969, which resulted in what many Papuans see as the forceful incorporation of West Papua into the Republic of Indonesia. In response to ongoing demands for independence, a Papuan Special Autonomy Law was passed in 2001 but then radically weakened under the rule of Megawati Sukarnoputri, when political and economic power were firmly redirected into the hands of the central government. Hopes for peaceful resolution of what Jason MacLeod, Rosa Moiwend, and Jasmine Pilbrow (2016, 8) call the longest-running and most violent political conflict in the South Pacific, grew in the buildup to the election of Joko Widodo ("Jokowi") in 2014. Soon thereafter, however, concerns were raised when the president appointed several contentious military commanders to West Papua and established a new transmigration program, prompting a renewed influx of settlers into the region (Munro 2015a; Wangge 2014).[65]

Little has changed on the ground for most West Papuans since Jokowi's election. Top-down extractive activities have exacerbated community impoverishment and ecological degradation. Government corruption, military-corporate collusion, and the criminalization of activists restrict Papuans' capacity to seek recognition of their rights to lands and livelihoods. Cultural and religious assimilation policies are compounded by a growing population disparity between Papuans and non-Papuans across the province (Elmslie 2017). This disparity is particularly marked in Merauke, where Papuans now represent less than 40 percent of the population (Ananta, Utami, and Handayani 2016, 472). The violence of the colonizing state perdures in the form of incarceration, harassment, torture, sexual violence, and brutal military responses to Indigenous social justice movements. Since 1969, military clampdowns have occurred every year on the first of December, when Papuans commemorate their stolen independence by raising their national flag, the Morning Star.[66]

The entrance of Jokowi into office has also seen an acceleration in the implementation of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, the mega-scheme driving oil palm expansion in Merauke. Central to Indonesia's Masterplan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Economic Development 2011–2025, MIFEE is expected to encompass three regencies and connect Merauke to six other economic production centers in the Papua–Maluku Economic Corridor. Although originally designed as a paddy cultivation scheme, the actual composition

of MIFEE is dominated by oil palm, timber, and pulp and paper operations. Today, oil palm plantations, planned or projected, extend across some 1.7 million hectares in Merauke regency and occupy over 20 percent of the Upper Bian area (Franky and Morgan 2015). Ranging from 20,000 to 100,000 hectares each and operated by thirty-six national and international corporations, plantations creep right up to the edge of the villages, encroaching on sago groves, hunting zones, sacred graveyards, and ceremonial sites.

In historical terms, MIFEE constitutes the latest development in a long process of top-down resource exploitation in West Papua. This exploitation has included large-scale pulp and paper production, timber plantations, endangered wildlife trafficking, and nickel, oil, coal, gas, copper, and gold mining (see Down to Earth 2011). Moreover, MIFEE sits within a long history of oil palm cultivation in Indonesia, dating back to the early 1900s, when the first monocrop estates were established in Deli, North Sumatra. While oil palm plantations expanded rapidly under Dutch colonial rule, palm oil yields suffered episodic plunges during the Japanese occupation in World War II, the struggle for Indonesian independence up to 1945, and following the nationalization of Dutch companies in the 1950s. With the establishment of the New Order under Suharto, full-scale government support for agribusiness development led to a tenfold expansion in oil palm monocrops within two decades, boosted by capital injections from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. State-owned and smallholder-managed agribusinesses were gradually subsumed within larger estates, operated by a handful of private conglomerates. Political decentralization and global market forces have done little to undermine the sustained flow of profit to this powerful politicobusiness oligarchy, whose rise to power was facilitated by the close ties of its magnates to Suharto's totalitarian regime.[67]

In 2006, Indonesia surpassed Malaysia as the top palm oil–producing country, and today it supplies some 61 percent (thirty-six million tons) of the world's palm oil (Indonesia Investments 2017). According to the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, oil palm plantations in the country covered 12.3 million hectares as of 2017, representing a 1.1 million hectare increase from the preceding year (Badan Pusat Statistik 2017, 9). With arable land increasingly scarce in Sumatra and Java, the monocrop frontier is now moving east into West Papua, a region deemed attractive for its vast areas of unexploited lands and cheap labor force.[68] This expansion is further boosted by the government's annual crude palm oil production target of sixty million tons by 2045. Achieving this target will require developing an additional 8.2 million hectares of land, an area equivalent to the entire island of New Guinea (Saleh et al. 2018).

Across the national border, the oil palm sector is also expanding rapidly in Papua New Guinea (see Cramb and Curry 2012; McDonnell, Allen, and Filer 2017). Today, palm oil constitutes Papua New Guinea's most valuable agricultural export and oil palm plantations represent the largest source of non-government employment (Allen, Bourke, and McGregor 2009). In 2017, oil palm concessions accounted for 2.2 million of the 5 million hectares alienated through Special Agricultural and Business Leases, a legal process designed to enable customary landowners to exploit their land for business purposes and to participate in the cash economy (Gabriel et al. 2017).

As in Indonesia, oil palm plantations in Papua New Guinea usually take the form of private estates owned by mega-conglomerates of predominantly Malaysian origin, which are also active in other sectors such as sugar and beef production and logging (Filer 2013, 316; Gabriel et al. 2017, 219). Patronage politics has facilitated the allocation of land to these companies without the free, prior, and informed consent of local landowners, fueling horizontal disputes and community fragmentation on the ground (Filer 2011; Nelson et al. 2013). Increasingly reliant on palm oil for their income, many rural villagers struggle to maintain a livelihood balance between subsistence horticulture, small-scale business, and export crops (T. Anderson 2015; Koczberski and Curry 2005). Competition over land, resources, and benefits also provokes tension between incoming migrant workers and native inhabitants (Koczberski and Curry 2004).

Local communities in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia have resorted to an array of institutional mechanisms to seek redress for the violation of their land rights. These include cases submitted to national courts, transnational advocacy campaigns, and complaint mechanisms activated under the voluntary certification standard of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (Pye and Bhattacharya 2013; Filer 2017; Gabriel et al. 2017). Similar land rights advocacy efforts have been underway in Merauke since 2011, when oil palm was introduced to the region under the MIFEE mega-project.[69] These efforts, however, have been mired in a dearth of accurate information about the corporations active in the area and by the often contradictory policies regulating land acquisition and development at the national and provincial levels. Repeated attempts to activate UN mechanisms and palm oil certification schemes have been hampered by bureaucratic red tape, ineffective redress mechanisms, and communities' limited knowledge of their rights under national and international laws. Poor infrastructures, high travel costs, land privatization, and a prevalent military presence make access to the area difficult and dangerous for NGOs and researchers. The politically volatile context of West Papua and the

threat (whether real or perceived) posed by independence movements to the Indonesian State further impede the efforts of Marind to secure their rights to lands and livelihoods. Government surveillance has intensified in response to their campaigns, including in the form of interrogations, extrajudicial incarcerations, and harassment from the police and military.

BEFORE I OFFER AN outline of the story to come, allow me to dwell briefly on how this book came into being. Like the shape-shifting humans, animals, and plants that enliven it, this is a "becoming" book—both in terms of the places and peoples I describe and in terms of my own changing relationship with Marind over the last decade. The themes, subjects, and setting of this research were specific, selective, and situated—both by me and by my interlocutors in the field. Neither comprehensive nor timeless, the study I present is thus a necessarily partial and subjective reconstruction of the Upper Bian lifeworld.[70]

My fieldwork was facilitated by the Merauke Secretariat for Peace and Justice, the humanitarian branch of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and a key collaborator in my previous human rights advocacy work in the region. During my eighteen months in the Upper Bian, I divided my time equally among the settlements of Khalaoyam, Mirav, and Bayau, following the movements of local inhabitants and the practicalities of weather and transport.[71] The greatest portion of my fieldwork, however, was spent, not in the villages, but rather in the forest, in the company of Marind groups traveling to meet friends and kin, to forage, and to process sago. These expeditions were crucial to understanding Marinds' place-making practices and their relations to the forest and its diverse lifeforms. It was in the forest, for instance, that I was enskilled by my companions in the arts of pounding sago, sharing skin and wetness with the grove, walking, and listening to the voices of birds and rivers. Cultivating these bodily ways of knowing was central to my transformation from foreign friend to near-kin—a transformation that culminated when, finally, I learned to dream in the forest like Marind.

But this world was also a difficult and dangerous one to enter and navigate. Inter- and intracommunity tensions ran high in the Upper Bian at the time of my research. The slow violence of ecological degradation was compounded by the immediate violence of the everyday. While forests were being systematically decimated to make way for oil palm, over a dozen community members had been incarcerated for opposing agribusiness. Twenty-two local land rights activists had died under mysterious circumstances after receiving anonymous death threats. Many faced ongoing intimidation and harassment from

the police and military. My own fieldwork was cut short after two nuns at the Franciscan nunnery in Mirav, where I would seek shelter whenever military surveillance intensified, were beaten and raped by company-hired thugs. At the same time, a growing number of local landowners were ceding lands (their own and others') to companies in exchange for cash. Elite co-optation, bribery, and inequitably distributed compensation were breeding conflict between Marind standing "for" (pro) or "against" (kontra) oil palm and the many more individuals who sat somewhere in between. Disputes within clans, villages, and households had taken the lives of five community members.

In a place where the haunting force of the state, military, and corporations manifests as both lawfare and lawlessness, I had to be enskilled by my companions in the arts of strategic concealment and cultivated (in)visibility. As a person of French and Chinese descent, my Eurasian physique proved both an advantage and a challenge. On the one hand, my Asian traits reduced my visibility in a region where the presence and activities of foreigners are strictly monitored. On the other hand, some Marind initially regarded me with suspicion as a possible government spy or Javanese migrant. Others voiced concerns that I was working as an undercover consultant for oil palm companies because of the associations they made between my Chinese origins and the world of "business." My role as a foreign researcher had to be disguised under other identities, both prearranged and improvised. Depending on the setting, I was alternately a nun finishing seminary in Jayapura, a voluntary English teacher from Korea, a cousin thrice removed of the local Dayak priest, or a first-time tourist and avid birdwatcher. My tools of data collection, too, had to be camouflaged under various guises. Notebooks written in Chinese and French, encrypted hard drives, and quadcopter drones made their way to and from the villages at the bottom of jute bags filled with salted fish and sago flour, which were then set aside for me to collect from trustworthy traders. Meanwhile, second-hand mobile phones recorded police patrols' conversations and decimated forests from inside carefully punctured cigarette boxes—some brands, not all—held out of passenger windows or balanced between my knees during strategically timed toilet breaks.

The longer I spent in the Upper Bian, the better I became at noticing and dealing with situations of potential danger to myself and my hosts. I learned to recognize undercover militia from their crooked right index finger—"it never recovers from pulling the trigger"—and identify spies from the smell of scented aftershaves available only in the city. I learned to time my movements against the rounds of plantation security patrols. I learned to wait for days for cars that never arrived because their drivers had been called in for

police interrogations or that arrived unexpectedly packed with armed passengers. I gradually became accustomed to the 3 a.m. wakeup call of police truncheons banging violently on village doors. I discovered where the women and children would retreat when drunk plantation guards staggered through the village at dusk, shooting blanks, vomiting bile, and jeering in slurs at the Papuan "monkeys" and "dogs." I learned when to be quiet or feign ignorance, how to be part of the field and when to let go of it.

The hauntings of the field perdured long after I left West Papua—in threatening communiqués from the Indonesian National Intelligence Service, in trolls offering to facilitate my return to the region, and in oil palm itself. Indeed, the more I came to know this plant in the field, the more I realized its omnipresence beyond it—illustrating investment advertisements on the pages of Air Asia inflight magazines, spread out below me when I flew into Kuala Lumpur for my monthly visa renewal, printed on out-of-circulation 1,000 rupiah coins, growing in the botanical gardens of Bogor, Sydney, Paris, and Singapore—and of course, present in the foods and toiletries that I consumed daily.

This book, too, is a kind of haunting. I write it knowing that half the people cited have died of more or less natural causes and that many remain incarcerated for their activism. Others, meanwhile, have since joined the palm oil companies they once so vehemently opposed, eking out a precarious existence as seasonal fruit harvesters and pesticide sprayers. I write knowing that I can no longer share skin and wetness with my sisters in the grove or return to West Papua in the foreseeable future, at a time when state violence against West Papuans, while certainly not new, has become newly prominent.[72] I write wondering what Marind today remember of me and what they will make of me if ever I return. I write in the company of haunting thoughts and traces: the mysterious fate of an orphaned cassowary chick; the bones of children who died of malnutrition; the miscarriage I suffered shortly after my friends were brutally assaulted in the nunnery; and the oil palms, which, to this day, still visit me in my sleep.

This story, then, is written from a place of grief and loss. But it is also a story written out of defiance and responsibility—the responsibility not just to tell the story, but to *tell the story well* (cf. Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 343–58). Telling the story well required that I do justice to the heterogeneous ways in which Upper Bian Marind conceptualize the radical transformations taking place across their lands and forests. It involved dwelling in the pervasive grayness of an abu-abu world both imposed and contested. It meant foregrounding the complexity of Marinds' own theories of change and changing theories about worlds present, past, and to come. It entailed grappling with the limits of the textual medium

in conveying the affective and phenomenological textures of landscapes at once aural, sonic, and oneiric. Telling the story well also invited attention to the difficulties in tacking back and forth between narratives of damage and defiance, of crisis and continuance, of suffering and survivance—the challenge, not of suppressing bitter stories in favor of hopeful ones, but of telling *better*, bitter stories.[73]

In attempting to tell this story well, I have sought to flesh out differences of all kinds as they play out among human, animal, and vegetal protagonists on the Papuan resource frontier and to attend to the *difference that difference*(*s*) *makes*—for an Indigenous community in an out-of-the-way place, for an anthropology beyond the human, and for all of us implicated in oil palm's lifeway as everyday consumers of palm oil and as situated dwellers of a wounded planet. A work of politically engaged anthropology, this book focuses primarily on socioecological topics. But it also speaks more broadly to changing possibilities of life in an age of earthly unraveling and to the kind of work that anthropologists can do to illuminate these possibilities.

At the same time, telling the story well has demanded a politics of refusal on my part—one that accounts for, and respects, meaningful silencings and erasures. The need to sustain relations of trust with my hosts, compounded by the precariousness of my presence in a region where foreigners' movements are strictly controlled, limited my insights into the perspectives of other relevant but potentially hostile actors. These included state and corporate representatives, the military, and non-Papuan settlers. Internal factions among Marind themselves demanded that I choose sides during my fieldwork. For instance, I had to avoid interacting with "pro"–oil palm villagers who had surrendered lands and sought employment in the palm oil sector. These individuals were widely criticized by those standing "against" oil palm, and whose views predominate in this account. In any case, "pro"–oil palm community members were difficult to find. Fearing retribution from fellow villagers, many had relocated with their families to plantation lodgings or to Merauke City.

As cultural theorist Eva Giraud notes, in an activist context, all political and ethical positions come with omissions that are necessary and necessitate acknowledgment (2019, 4). Ethnographic writing and analysis, too, involve making conscious decisions about what stories *not* to tell, in line with the refusals of our interlocutors in the field (Simpson 2016, 328, 331). Absent from this account, then, are the stories of Marind men laboring as plantation pesticide sprayers and fruit harvesters. Absent, too, are the stories of Marind women ostracized by their kin for selling their bodies in the city; stories of local politicians and agribusiness tycoons; stories of malnourished infants whose lives were too brief to

be either remembered or retold; stories of eighteen-year-old Javanese soldiers thrust to the far-most end of the archipelago after pulling the short straw in the placement lottery; and stories of wombs and breasts burned by pesticides and shame. Largely absent also from this story are the perspectives of those who facilitated my research in Merauke—the local church and various NGOs. While I touch on them in passing, I have chosen, based on my deep indebtedness to those who made this research possible, not to delve into the conflicting politics at play between these actors and Marind communities.

In a similar vein, I have chosen to respect in my analysis the tendency toward cultural generalization, which constituted a dominant feature in the discourses of my interlocutors. This tendency speaks to the paramount importance Marind place on communal knowledge production and collective consensus when it comes to self-representation. Remaining faithful to how Marind themselves wished to be portrayed was all the more important in the context of their everyday subjection to top-down, exclusionary decision making; untransparent land appropriation; and paternalistic development rhetoric. At the same time, I have sought throughout my account to convey Marinds' own conundrums over what counts as cultural knowledge, for whom and to what effect, and how contestations over these matters were shaped by the personal backgrounds and life stories of the individuals concerned.

Finally, my attempt to follow the everyday life of Upper Bian villagers has excluded certain topics from the purview of this work. These include heterosexual and homosexual fertility rites, warfare, and headhunting, which represent central cultural themes among the language families of coastal south New Guinea.[74] My gender and age limited my access to these topics, which tend to be discussed only among male elders. These former practices also continue to reinforce primitivist stereotypes of West Papuans in Indonesia and are a source of shame for many of my companions, who were consequently reluctant to discuss them.[75] The second domain I do not explore in detail is religion. Marind have certainly been affected in various ways by decades of Christianity, yet the topic of religion was invariably eclipsed by my interlocutors' deep-seated concern and curiosity about oil palm—the plant that was relentlessly taking over their territories and destroying their treasured forests and groves. Moreover, religion was not a major part of everyday life in the Upper Bian. People would attend church services only occasionally, and sago expeditions in the forest always took precedence over religious events in the village. While discourses about religion did occur in the presence of representatives of the church, they quickly gave way to stories about ancestral spirits and forest kin when these representatives left the scene. In excluding religion from my analysis, I do not seek

to downplay its impact on the Marind lifeworld. Rather, I seek to foreground the histories, presences, and beliefs that mattered to my interlocutors in the context of what *they* perceived to be the most important event of their time—the arrival of oil palm.

Many of the themes I explore in this book are embedded within the global phenomenon of climate change. Statements from Marind themselves speak powerfully to the uncanny ruptures characteristic of the present planetary crisis—rivers flowing upstream, worlds becoming plastic, or time coming to a stop. Indeed, my companions are acutely aware that there is something global about the local realities they inhabit—the transnational career of palm oil as capital, for instance, or the international demand for food and fuel that drives the expansion of this cash crop.[76]

Marind have their own idioms for describing these partial, interscalar connections: cosmological desiccation, unrestrained violence, colonizer plants, to name just a few. Marind also situate the ecological transformations of the present within a series of historical antecedents that have cumulatively eroded their relations with the more-than-human world. In grounding my analysis in Indigenous theories of continuity and change, I thus seek to give precedence to Marinds' *own* understandings of historicity without imposing climate change as a temporal framing that, as Anishinabe scholar Kyle Powys Whyte (2018a, 236) reminds us, Indigenous peoples did not create nor consent to and against which Indigenous peoples do not necessarily situate their existences and relations.[77]

The foregrounding of Indigenous modes of analysis and representation shaped the process through which this book was produced from the very outset. Practicing what Charles Hale (2006) calls "activist-research," I involved communities from the initial conception of the research topics to the drafting of ethics applications; the planning of fieldwork locations, timing, and activities; the selection of outlets where the data would be published; and the form and content of the book before you—what stories it would tell, in what order, and why.[78] I have respected my companions' wishes as far as possible with the exception of pseudonyms, which, while used throughout, remain contentious for many of those whom I have cited. One of these is Marcus, whose song opens this book and whose stance on pseudonyms muddies the ethical and political merits of established writing conventions. "The government and corporations have taken our land and forests," Marcus noted. "They have taken our food and future. We have lost everything. Yet still, you would take away our names?"

Practicing activist-research also brought me to support Marinds' land rights campaigns by facilitating human rights workshops in the field, training

communities in participatory mapping, and producing a documentary on customary lands and livelihoods in the Upper Bian.[79] These activities, which I touch on in several chapters, highlighted the struggles Marind face in (re) claiming their rights and aspirations effectively in the presence of state and corporate audiences. They also speak to my own politics as an engaged anthropologist and to "engagement" itself as a means through which I sought to remain accountable for the many risks Marind took in accepting me into their world.[80]

The story that follows is structured around four contrapuntal couplets, each shot through with the grayness of abu-abu—place and maps, humans-turned-cassowary and cassowaries-turned-human, sago palm and oil palm, and hopelessness and hope-in-dreams.

Each chapter opens with the pleasures of story and description. I return to these descriptions throughout the chapters, interweaving them with scholarly concepts that have helped me grapple with the complexities of more-than-human worlds. This practice is intentional. Repetition and return help me avoid relegating Marinds' words and deeds to mere anecdote or illustrative vignette. Instead, I aim to keep these experiences alive and present—in the image of the refrains of Marind songs, the constant pounding of sago in the grove, and the layered sounds of birds and humans in the forest. By bringing scholarly insights into conversation with Marind voices, this evocation also represents a kind of nurturing of community. By saying the names, the positions, and the stakes and then repeating them so we never forget, I seek to nurture an ethos of intellectual inclusiveness and generosity. This ethos brings me to engage with theories across a broad disciplinary and durational scope. Beyond the realm of scholarly writing, it provides a much-needed shot of life to a discipline that is often dead through individuation.

The first chapter explores the making of the landscape in the Upper Bian. As they travel through their environment, Marind retrace the paths of their predecessors and create relations with each other and with organisms encountered along the way. These intersecting routes give rise to Marinds' sense of rootedness within the forest, seen as an animate realm cocreated with diverse, other-than-human lifeforms. Today, this dynamic landscape exists within a network of state and corporate nodes of control—roads, military garrisons, and plantations—which I describe as pressure points. I introduce these sites by describing a journey I undertook with a village elder, Darius, which culminated with Darius violently lacerating his own body in reaction to an armed security guard who refused us entry onto an oil palm plantation. The fraught significance of roads, military garrisons, and plantations, I demonstrate, arises from the tension between what they promise and what they destroy. I analyze

how these pharmakonic pressure points, along with their inhabitants, exert an ambivalent force on both Marind and forest beings by enabling certain kinds of movement while simultaneously interrupting the flow of organisms that enlivens the forest.

The ambiguous effects of topographic pressure points resurface in a different guise in the context of mapping, a contested representational practice explored in the second chapter. Marind criticize government maps and their unnaturally straight lines because they epitomize the totalizing control of the state over the landscape and its inhabitants. Some also disapprove of drone-mapping technology because, like the state, drones impose a top-down but lifeless perspective on space. In contrast, Marind community members produce living maps that are shaped by the sounds and movements of forest organisms and their emplaced relationship to humans past and present. I illustrate this process by describing a mapping expedition that was guided by the song and flight of a bird and its storied relations to Marind mappers. Producing maps that refuse to sit still constitutes a form of resistance on the part of Marind to the state's hegemonic gaze. However, this dynamism also undermines the legitimacy of community maps in the context of advocacy. Among Marind themselves, cartographic conundrums abound over whose perspective, participation, and perception matter in the production of accurate and effective spatial representations. These three elements are in turn linked to Marind conceptions of personhood as a malleable and more-than-human attribute, as I examine in chapter 3.

I begin chapter 3 by analyzing *skin* and *wetness* as physical expressions of human and other-than-human beings' social and moral standing. Glossy skins and wet bodies communicate Marinds' capacity to become anim, or "human," through reciprocal exchanges of fluids with species and elements of the forest—from plants and animals to rivers and soils. In contrast, the poor or deteriorating condition of skin and wetness indicate an imbalance in social relations, which is now exacerbated by the expansion of monocrop plantations and their noxious chemical atmospheres. At the same time, the porosity of bodies produced through interspecies exchanges of skin and wetness puts humans at risk of perspectival capture by forest organisms. This hazard is heightened during skin-changing, when individuals adopt animal bodies and perspectives but then find themselves unable to retrieve their human flesh and fluids. Becoming anim thus reveals itself a precarious and potentially reversible process—one that depends on, but can also be undermined by, fluid encounters with other-than-human beings.

If oil palm challenges the possibility of sustaining interspecies kinships in the forest, it also gives rise to new and ambiguous interspecies relationships

in the village. With agribusiness projects expanding relentlessly, a growing number of animals now approach Marind settlements in search of shelter and subsistence. As I explore in chapter 4, Marind are conflicted over how to interact with these creatures. Many pity domesticates because they have lost their "wildness" and behave like non-Papuan settlers, whom Marind deem alien because of their "modern" way of life and foreign origins. This transformation, in turn, evokes for Marind their own experiences of political oppression and ethnic domination as coerced citizens of the Indonesian State. Yet many domesticates appear to enjoy living in settlements and refuse to return to the wild. Similarly, a growing number of Marind are drawn by the promissory lure of modernity. Some appear resigned to their subjection to Indonesian rule. Those who decry their political domination realize that they themselves replicate the oppressive role of the state over Papuans by subjecting animals to human control. Domesticates thus provoke anxiety for Marind because they offer an all-too-faithful reflection of the ambiguous condition of their human keepers.

Chapter 5 presents a welcome hiatus from the oppressive violence that characterizes the world "after oil palm." Here I invite the reader back from the village to the forest to explore the intimate relations of Marind with the sago palm. I begin by following Marind in pigi kenal sagu, "going to know sago." This practice encompasses a range of activities through which community members affirm their social ties to each other and attune themselves to the lifeworld of sago and its symbiotes. By immersing themselves in the sounds, sights, and smells of the grove, Marind discover the storied lifeways of sago palms and how they intersect with those of humans and other organisms across time and space. The grove is also a gender-inflected realm where women celebrate their role as mothers based on affinities between their lifegiving form and fluids and those of the sago palm. Together, the physical, sensory, and affective dimensions of being-in-the-grove are what endow sago pith with a distinctive social taste. Eating and knowing sago are also politically imbued acts through which Marind affirm their identity as "sago people," in counterpoint to non-Papuan "rice people" and to the colonial-capitalist regimes that foreign beings and foods incarnate.

The storied lifeways of sago palms contrast markedly with the dispositions and effects that Marind attribute to oil palm, as I examine in chapter 6. While sago sustains the forest lifeworld, oil palm refuses relations with Marind and the diverse organisms whose lifeways it destroys. Alien and invasive, the plant pursues a solitary existence and devours land and water to further its proliferation. In the image of its own self-interested disposition, oil palm also breeds fragmentation within Marind communities over matters of compensation and

land rights. Sago and oil palm thus emerge as two radically opposed extremes within an affectively and politically charged moral-vegetal spectrum. However, this seemingly stark counterpoint is complicated by the fact that Marind also pity oil palm for its subjection to totalizing forms of human control. Furthermore, many villagers express deep-seated curiosity about oil palm's unknown origins, needs, and lifeway. The ontic opacity of the plant thus intensifies its speculative affordances as a heterogeneous object of wonder.

Chapter 7 turns to the attritive effect of oil palm on time. In particular, I examine a prevalent statement among Upper Bian Marind—that since oil palm arrived, time has come to a stop. After outlining the episodic disruptions that characterize Marind historicity, I examine how the time-stopping effects of oil palm arise from the plant's modality of growth, its association with the future-oriented temporality of capitalist modernity, and its enlistment in the nation-building visions of the Indonesian State. By imposing its monotemporal growth on the formerly polytemporal forest ecosystems, oil palm obliterates the spatially experienced past of human and other-than-human organisms. This, in turn, forestalls the possibility of a meaningful present and thwarts the shared future of the forest's dwindling communities of life. Yet the halting of time can also be conceived as a form of resistance on the part of Marind to the promissory futures inflicted on them by the state. By rejecting hope—an inherently future-oriented disposition—Marind symbolically repudiate the temporal configurations on which externally imposed technocapitalist and nationalist visions of the future are premised.

The final chapter explores "being eaten by oil palm," a dysphoric mode of dreaming that has become increasingly common since the establishment of agroindustrial plantations. Marind consumed by oil palm frequently undergo experiences of harrowing torture in their sleep. Most dramatically, dreamers witness and experience their own deaths repeatedly from the perspectives of diverse forest beings whose existence, like their own, is jeopardized by agribusiness. Dreams of being eaten by oil palm thus constitute amplified projections of everyday anxieties triggered by the deleterious effects of oil palm on places, persons, and time. At the same time, these nocturnal experiences, along with their collective narration, enable the formation of new solidarities among people bound by their subjection to the violence of oil palm. Practices of communal dream interpretation in particular reveal the interpsychic significance of dreaming as a social activity that creates oneiric alliances between oil palm's victims, both human and other. Being eaten by oil palm thus becomes a powerful imaginative means through which Marind unearth hope amid the dystopic transformations haunting their waking and sleeping worlds.

Dreams of being eaten by oil palm, experienced both by Marind and myself, form interludes between the couplets of this story. I convey these accounts in the image of the disjointed experience of dreaming itself, an interstitial realm lying somewhere between the conscious and the unconscious, between the real and the imagined—a realm, to return to Paulus's words, of abu-abu, or grayness. These disturbing, haphazard dreams disrupt the narrative flow of my account. They trouble any semblance of holistic coherence or conclusiveness to the analysis presented therein. In doing so, dream interludes counter what Michael Taussig (2015, 5–7) calls "agribusiness writing"—a writing stripped of its capacity to provoke surprise and confusion, which entrenches the illusion of mastery over reality. The raw and harrowing accounts of these dreams are enhanced by the eschewal of literary embellishment. Their meanings remain in the making, inviting the reader's own contrapuntal interpretation.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 In this book, *Merauke* refers to the regency of Merauke (kabupaten Merauke) and *Merauke City* refers to the regency's capital city and main urban center (kota Merauke). The *Upper Bian* (Bian atas) refers to a vast region of forest, swamps, and marshlands lying along the northern reaches of the Bian River in Merauke. This area covers some 8,593 km^2, or 18 percent, of Merauke and sits 300 kilometers north of Merauke City. I use the term *West Papua* to refer to both the Indonesian provinces of Papua (propinsi Papua) and West Papua (propinsi Papua Barat). The eastern half of New Guinea island, which encompasses these two regions, was known as Irian Barat during the Sukarno era (1963–1971) and Irian Jaya during the Suharto era (1973–1999). With the exception of major cities and provinces, pseudonyms have been used for all persons and places cited.

2 I underline terms in Upper Bian Marind and leave roman terms in Indonesian, or logat Papua, the Papuan creole of Indonesian. The native tongue of Upper Bian Marind belongs to the Trans-New Guinea phylum and is spoken from the coastal areas of Merauke in the south to the mouth of the Digul River and in the Fly River region of Papua New Guinea. While older-generation Marind still speak the Bian dialect of Marind, logat Papua has become the lingua franca between different ethnic groups in the area, between subethnic groups who speak different Marind dialects, and between older and younger generations within the same community. Considered to be distinctively Papuan by my interlocutors, logat Papua, or Papuan Malay, is a creole of Indonesian that emerged during the first wave of Indonesian transmigration into Merauke in the 1970s, when Upper Bian Marind first came into contact with non-Papuan settlers, and prior to that, through their interactions with coastal and urban Marind. Most of my interactions and interviews in the field took place in this idiom, with the exception of certain key Marind terms for which no logat Papua translation exists or that my interlocutors deemed important to express in their native tongue for cultural and political reasons. In other cases, the sacred nature of Marind concepts and practices—skin-changing, stories, and wildness, for instance—and their association with male knowledge and male spaces meant that I could only access what my companions believed to be their closest equivalent in logat Papua. The English terms I offer for these words are therefore based on logat

Papua translations rather than the original source language. Sections of long prose and poetry featured in this book were compiled in the form of fieldnotes and audio recordings and then transcribed and translated from logat Papua into English by the author, with terms originally pronounced in Marind underlined.

3 I borrow the term *out-of-the-way* from Anna Tsing (1993) and Paige West (2006a) to describe places on the periphery of capitalist world systems, where people creatively channel their marginality into creative forms of interpretation, critique, and protest. Out-of-the-way places challenge the assumed stagnancy and homogeneity of the periphery. They reveal the periphery to be animated by plural ways of knowing and being, which are achieved through transcultural dialogue across diverse sets of actors and forces. Out-of-the-way places thus reveal the inherent instability of political meanings and the capacity of marginalized peoples to destabilize seemingly hegemonic forms of authority. On the related notions of margins and frontiers elaborated by Tsing and West, see notes 12 and 68.

4 The unprecedented scale and impacts of plantations have recently brought scholars in the environmental humanities to coin the current era the *Plantationocene*. The term, according to feminist Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholar Donna Haraway (2015, 162n5), denotes a spatiotemporal formation rooted in racialized forms of colonialism, which entails the mass substitution of biodiverse forests with industrial monocrops, to the detriment of the human and nonhuman organisms that forests sustain (see also Chao 2022a). The concept of the Plantationocene is helpful in tempering the human-centric optic of the Anthropocene and foregrounding the pervasiveness of plantation logics and legacies in the past and present. However, I do not deploy it as a conceptual frame in this book. Like the many other taxonomic candidates vying to capture the essence of the current (s)cene—Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Plasticene, Technocene, and the list continues—the Plantationocene demands a reduction of everything to some "thing." In doing so, it excludes or obscures empirical realities and attendant genealogies of thought and practice that speak directly to the arguments presented in this book. As Janae Davis et al. (2019) note, the Plantationocene discourse privileges multispecies dynamics over racial politics, does not engage with the gendered and bodily effects and affects generated by plantation violence in the Caribbean and United States, and does not account for the wide variety of preexisting critiques of plantation formations in Black and feminist studies (see also Jegathesan 2021). Elided within the multispecies core of the Plantationocene, too, are Black modes of interspecies intimacy, creativity, and resistance toward plants, objects, and other nonhuman lifeforms in colonial plantation zones (see, for instance, Carney 2020; King 2016; Wynter 1971). Also neglected is the vast and distinctive body of literature on South Asian plantation trajectories and ecologies, which foregrounds the centrality of the plantation and its gendered labor dynamics in the formation of postcolonial nationhood, social justice, and agroindustrial sustainability (Besky 2013; Jegathesan 2019; Sen 2017). New World plantations in particular are important to highlight here because of their fundamental impact on modern social and economic arrangements in the Western hemisphere and elsewhere (see Benítez-Rojo 1996; Mbembe 2003; Mintz 1985; Trouillot

1988, 1997). In excluding these literatures and experiences, the Plantationocene ends up replicating what geographer Kathryn Yusoff (2019) and others identify as a critical and consequential flaw of the Anthropocene (another term that I intentionally avoid in this book)—namely, a neglect of the historical construction of Blackness as non-White, therefore nonhuman, and therefore passive, geologic matter (see also Silva 2017; Wynter 2015).

At the same time, transatlantic plantation formations and their legacies followed distinctive historical and geographical trajectories leading to those described in this account. Under European colonial rule, plantations entailed the uprooting of Black people from their native soils to the United States and the Caribbean and their enslavement as undifferentiated flesh (Spillers 1987) and fungible property (Hartman 1997). In the Melanesian context, historiographies of trading networks confirm the status of New Guinea as an exporter of slaves to the Moluccan world in the precolonial period. The regional slave trade, however, was formally abolished by the Dutch administration as part of a broader process of missionization and civilization (see L. Giay 2016; Timmer 2011). Prior to its abolishment, the slave trade centered primarily on the coast—notably, the Raja Ampat Islands (a vassal of the Tidore Sultanate) and the Onin Peninsula—and did not affect Upper Bian Marind, whose lives and pasts I recount in this book. In the contemporary Papuan plantation sector, Indonesian settlers are invariably privileged over Indigenous Papuans in terms of employment opportunities. Marind are thus exempt from the onto-epistemology of "labor" that Black literary studies scholar Shona Jackson (2012, 54) identifies as central to the colonial (and postcolonial) order and the configuration of the modern, disciplined human—albeit on the premise of an equally discriminatory (if differently colored) racial divide (see also Tsing 2009; Wolfe 1999). Finally, while state and gendered violence certainly figure prominently in West Papuans' everyday lives and political landscape, these forms of violence did not begin with the inception of monocrops. Nor, arguably, can they be compared to the spectacular forms of terror documented in European colonial plantations—from the mutilation of slave bodies to the systemic rape of women and the conscription of the unborn to slavery as speculative labor (Caldwell 2007; Glymph 2012; Morgan 2004).

5 For overviews of the polemics surrounding oil palm in Southeast Asia, see Pye and Bhattacharya (2013) and A. Rival and Levang (2014).

6 For instance, Anna Tsing describes plantation science as a "hegemonic, extinction-oriented creed" rooted in the absolute domination of plants by humans (2011, 19). Philosopher Michael Marder decries the capitalist plantation model for violently homogenizing the distinctive modalities of growth and reproduction of plants and for reducing them to food and fuel destined for human consumption (2011, 469–70). Political scientist James Scott condemns agronomic science for radically simplifying nature, and excluding knowledges, practices, and ecologies that lie outside its productionist paradigm (1998, 262–306; see also Shiva 1993). Political ecologist Michael Dove characterizes the plantation as a regime of discipline of plants and people that privileges the crops and technologies of powerful outsiders and deprivileges the crop- and place-specific knowledge of local smallholders in ways that are "inimical

to . . . [the] existence of alternatives" (2019, S310). In a similar vein, Donna Haraway describes plantations as a "system of multispecies forced labor" and a realm of "out-and-out exterminism" in which the "capacity to love and care for place" is negated (cited in Mitman 2019, 10, 6).

7 See, for instance, Besky (2013); Cramb and McCarthy (2016); Dove (2011); Jegathesan (2019); Li (2014); McCarthy (2010); Sen (2017); Stoler (1985); Tammisto (2018a).

8 The ontological turn is often described as an approach that "takes seriously" the worlds of the peoples we study. In deploying this language and method, I draw from Rita Astuti's useful characterization of what has now become a recurring, yet often glossed-over, expression. Taking worlds and realities seriously, Astuti suggests, means acknowledging the fact that peoples' perspectives are heterogeneous and shifting. It attends to what people themselves have to say and their own interpretations of their words. It recognizes peoples' capacity for critical and creative inquiry into the worlds they inhabit. And it seeks to distil from specific fields ideas of broader relevance and import in understanding the human condition (Astuti 2017, 120; see also Barth 1987; Coburn et al. 2013; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001).

9 On the possibilities for multispecies justice within plantations as "landscapes of empire," see Beilin and Suryanarayanan (2017); Besky (2013); Chao (2021b); Paredes (2022); Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt (2019).

10 As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, decolonizing research does not mean rejecting all Western theory. Rather, it means putting Indigenous peoples' concerns and worldviews at the center of research and approaching theory and research from Indigenous peoples' perspectives and for their purposes (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 89; see also Chao and Enari 2021). I-Kiribati and African-American scholar Teresia Teaiwa make a similar point in their call for a broad engagement with theory and theorists of all kinds as an exercise in intellectual agency and a foundation for Indigenous self-determination in the academy. Engaging with White scholarship, Teaiwa writes (2014, 52–53), is a way of recognizing its contribution to Pacific genealogies of thinking while nonetheless retaining sovereignty in the face of "the ancestors we get to choose" (see also Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001; Turner 2006).

11 In this, I follow Aletta Biersack's (2006a) call for a reimagined political ecology that inquires into alterior bodies of practical and theoretical knowledge and, in doing so, decolonizes environmental knowledge from its North-centric monopoly (see also West 2019).

12 Margins, Anna Tsing notes, constitute powerful topographic and conceptual sites from which to rethink the nature and specificity of local and global formations and to question the stability of these categories in the first place. To focus on the margin, Tsing continues, does not mean reducing marginal peoples and places to icons of stability or radical difference nor to symbols of modernity's "dying Other" (1993, x). Rather, margins draw our attention to modes of "creative living at the edge"—both their constitutive differences and internal tensions and their historical positioning within broader regional, national, and global dynamics (Tsing 1994; see also West 2016).

13 For a critique of the "ontology *of*" approach, see Carrithers et al. (2010, 172–79, 194). The approach I describe here has long been a defining feature of anthropological practice, with the possible exception of structural anthropology, However, I intentionally characterize Marind as *ontologists* in order to mark my departure from the prevalent treatment of ontologies as static, apolitical, and bounded meta-concepts, abstracted from the everyday lives of the people said to inhabit them, or what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2012, 64) calls "virtual ontologies" (see also Descola 2013; M. Scott 2007). Rather, I approach ontologies—as transforming ways of being in the world and as discourses *about* these transforming ways of being—as they are experienced, produced, contested, and theorized by Marind themselves through their situated actions and reflections (see also Meyer 2001; Erazo and Jarrett 2017; Willerslev 2004).

14 In his ethnography of coral gardens, for instance, Bronislaw Malinowski (1935) described how Trobriand economic life, social relations, and political organization revolved around horticultural crops and their upkeep. James Fox (1977) analyzes the cultural history of Roti and Savu Islanders in southeastern Indonesia as adaptations to the ecology of the lontar palm. Laurentius M. Serpenti (1965) highlights comparable links between root-crop cultivation patterns and social structure among the Kimaam on Frederik-Hendrik (now Yos Sudarso) Island, west of Marind territory (see also Barker 2008; Panoff and Barbira-Freedman 2018; Peluso 1996).

15 See, for instance, Bashkow (2006, 184); Battaglia (1990, 49); Bonnemère (1994); Descola (1986, 166, 175, 197, 215–17); Halvaksz (2013, 149); Kahn (1988, 44); Nimuendajú (1939, 90; 1946, 60); Rival (1998); Tuzin (1972, 234); West (2012, 119).

16 See, for instance, Dundon (2005); Heckler (2004, 243–48); Christine Hugh-Jones (1979, 114–32, 200–217); Pouwer (2010); Stasch (2009).

17 See, for instance, Bonnemère (1996a); Ellen (2006); S. Hugh-Jones (1979, 165–73); Leenhardt (1979); Mondragón (2004); Mosko (2009); van Oosterhout (2001, 31–50); Peluso (1996); Russell and Rahman (2015).

18 See, for instance, Malinowski (1935, 52–55); Gell (1975); Tammisto (2018a, 40–41). Another vast body of literature has explored the transnational trajectories of plants from cash crops to global commodities across space and time. Works in this vein include multisited ethnographies of tea (Besky 2013), maize (Fitting 2011), rice (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993), coffee (West 2012), sugar (Mintz 1985), hoodia (Foster 2017), rooibos (Ives 2017), wheat (Head, Atchison, and Gates 2012), and rubber (Dove 2011).

19 The plant turn is part of a broader interdisciplinary field known as *multispecies studies*, which seeks to displace notions of human exceptionalism by attending to the biological, political, and cultural lifeworlds of animals, plants, fungi, and microbes that humans become-with (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016). In light of the radical impacts of human activity on planetary ecosystems, scholars of multispecies studies call for respect, curiosity, and care toward other-than-human organisms and for greater attention to the constitutive entanglements of life—human and other—with the apparatuses of modern science and technology (Despret 2004; Tsing 2014a; van Dooren and Rose 2011). It

is important to note, however, that the recognition and analysis of interspecies dependencies and vitalities is not new to multispecies studies. As Shaila Galvin points out, both earlier environmental anthropology and multispecies studies developed in conversation with concepts and methods derived from the natural sciences. Both are also driven by distinct ethical and political concerns: to displace notions of non-Western primitivism on the one hand and to counter assumptions of human exceptionalism on the other (Galvin 2018, 237).

20 "Sensory ethnobotany," Theresa Miller writes (2019, 5), is an interdisciplinary framework that takes seriously the lived experiences of humans and plants alongside the valuation of these experiences by their human and vegetal protagonists. This approach attends to the forms, values, and meanings of sensory and symbolic relationships with plants for humans, as well as the biotic capacities of plants themselves to respond to human value systems through processes of growth and development. Sensory ethnobotany is also historical in that it attends to transformations and continuities in human-plant relationships over time and across different social, political, economic, and cultural contexts.

21 Natasha Myers coined the term *Planthroposcene* to describe the emergence of new scenes and ways of seeing across human- and plantworlds. Rather than designating a time-bound era, the Planthroposcene, Myers writes, is an "aspirational episteme and way of doing life"—one that demands that we "find better ways to get to know plants intimately and on their terms . . . outside of the rhythms of capitalist extraction" (2017a, 299–300).

22 For examples of science- and conservation-focused studies in the plant turn, see, inter alia, Hartigan (2017); Hustak and Myers (2012); Myers (2015).

23 Critical race, queer, and crip theorists have widely criticized posthumanism and new materialisms for failing to interrogate the dehumanization of "Man's human Others" *alongside* the nonhuman (Haritaworn 2015, 212). Critical race scholar Neel Ahuja, for instance, points out that little has been written on the colonial genealogies of the posthumanist turn in contemporary scholarship and invites us to think about intra- and interspecies entanglements through their histories of colonial warfare and racialization (2016, xiv–v). Jamaican novelist and philosopher Sylvia Wynter reminds us that the "human" often refers to a particular "ethnoclass" (i.e., Western, White bourgeoisie) that "overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" and hence seeks to secure its own well-being at the expense of other racialized humans, other-than-humans, and the more-than-human collective (2003, 260; 2015, 196). In doing an anthropology "beyond the human," Zakkiyah Imam Jackson notes, we need to ask first what and, crucially, *whose* conception of humanity we are moving beyond (2015, 215). Any "posthumanist" account needs to attend to the structural violence through which humanity itself is gendered and racialized in ways that exclude, inferiorize, objectify, debilitate, and animalize some (sub)human lives over others based on assumed worth, ability, or productivity. Ignoring such historical and contemporary modes of exclusion within the human category risks reinforcing the very same kind of Eurocentric transcendentalism that posthumanism seeks to disrupt (Z. Jackson 2015, 215).

Meanwhile, Indigenous scholars have called for greater engagement on the part of multispecies ethnographers with Indigenous peoples, philosophies, practices, and protocols, which have always recognized and related to other species, ecosystems, and elements as agential and social beings. Among them, many have critiqued posthumanism (and the ontological turn) for forcing or obscuring Indigenous modalities of thought, practice, and agency within Western categories, while ignoring matters of race, history, and sexuality (see Hunt 2013; Sundberg 2013; TallBear 2015; Todd 2015; Watts 2013).

Within the plant turn specifically, Sarah Ives (2014) cautions against celebrations of multispecies belonging and relationality that obscure complicated, contested, and sometimes violent biopolitics. Meanwhile, Ruth Goldstein (2019) voices concern that "plant turn" scholarship—among other theoretical turns—emanating from Euro-American settings might contribute to an ongoing colonial practice of drawing from, but not acknowledging and citing, Indigenous theories and cosmologies, which have long recognized plants as consequential agents and relations. In doing so, the plant turn, Goldstein cautions, may end up replicating and exacerbating the totalizing and historical erasure of Indigenous knowledge and practice under colonial ecologies and ecological science (see also Foster 2017; Galvin 2018; Myers 2017b). For related critiques of posthumanism, see Benjamin (2018, 51); DiNovelli-Lang (2013, 142); Gilroy (2017); Ogden, Hall, and Tanita (2013, 13); Puar (2017, 25–26); Weheliye (2008, 321).

24 This ethos of relationality lies at the heart of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies across the Global North and South, and constitutes a central element in Indigenous peoples' collective advocacy toward self-determination (see Deloria 1999; Durie 2005; Meyer 2001; Stewart-Harawira 2012, 2018; TallBear 2011; K. Teaiwa 2014; Winter 2019a, 2019b).

25 Donna Haraway deploys the term *cyborg* to describe the breakdown of material and imaginative boundaries separating the human from the animal and the human from the machine in the late twentieth century (2013, 174–79).

26 In exploring Marinds' fraught relationship to modernity and its attendant social and environmental transformations, this book addresses a central theme in both the anthropology of Melanesia and in Melanesian anthropology (see Morauta et al. 1979). For key texts, see Bamford (2007); Bashkow (2006); Errington and Gewertz (2004); Kabutaulaka (2015); Knauft (2002a, 2002b); LiPuma (2000); Narokobi (1980); West (2012).

27 These imposed transformations exemplify what historian Patrick Wolfe calls the settler-colonial "logic of elimination." The logic of elimination is premised on a negative articulation between settler and Indigenous society that legitimates settler expansion through processes of invasion, confrontation, assimilation, and repression (Wolfe 1999, 27–30, 167–69). Rather than an event, then, the logic of elimination operates as a structure—one that remains as the ideological foundation of settler-colonialisms past and present (see also Wolfe 2006, 388).

28 On plantations as racialized ecologies of empire, see Allewaert (2013); Benítez-Rojo (1996); Mbembe (2003); McKittrick (2013); Thomas (2019). Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe (2003) identifies the plantation as one

of the earliest instances of systemic and institutionalized necropolitical experimentation (see also Rusert 2019). Expulsed from humanity, slaves within the plantation became subjects of domination, alienation, and social death, whose lives were sustained only insofar as they remained useful as labor and property. Slave life, Mbembe writes, is life lived as if in a state of permanent injury, or "death-in-life" (2003, 21)—one that foregrounds necropolitics as the indissociable counterpart of biopolitics.

29 Scholar of critical race studies Alexander Weheliye deploys the concept of "racializing assemblages" to analyze how colonial logics discipline the category of humanity itself into "full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (2014, 4).

30 On racism as structural violence in West Papua, see Butt (2005); Kirksey (2017); Kirsch (2010); Munro (2015b, 2020). The racialization of West Papuans can be traced back to European classifications of the nineteenth century, where the term *Papua* came to define a racially distinctive area encompassing island Southeast Asia and the western Pacific, variously named *Papuanesia* or *Oceanic Negroland* (Ballard 2008). The racial distinction of Papuans from other Pacific and non-Pacific peoples was perpetuated during the Dutch colonial era and became institutionalized in the policies and practices of successive structures of governance in Indonesia, as well as in public discourses and scholarship on West Papua. After Indonesian independence and up until the Act of Free Choice of 1969, racial inferiority served to legitimate the acculturation of Papuans under *Indonesianisasi* ("Indonesianization"), a government-endorsed process designed to incorporate West Papuans into the Indonesian state through formal education, national media, economic development, and transmigration (Gietzelt 1988). In its present manifestations, the logic of racism remains premised on the systemic primordialization, bestialization, and infantilization of West Papuans as peoples in an arrested stage of cognitive and physical development, whose appearance and behaviors are comparable to those of lowly animals, notably monkeys, pigs, and dogs. This logic operates by way of counterpoints that valorize specific and intersecting categories relative to others—Malay versus Melanesian, agricultural-capitalistic versus hunter-gatherer, educated versus uneducated, dark-skinned versus light-skinned, and so forth (Giay and Ballard 2003). Even within the Oceanic ethnic landscape, as Pacific scholars have noted, Melanesians are frequently regarded as racially inferior to lighter-skinned Polynesian peoples (Gegeo 2001, 502; Hau'ofa 2008, 6; Kabutaulaka 2015, 122–26). While certain Papuan political activists have sought to subvert racializing assemblages by celebrating West Papuans' distinct racial identity—manifest through their black skin and curly hair—as the basis for their vision of an independent Papuan nation, racism remains a deeply divisive and contentious issue in the region (see Chao 2021g).

31 On the historic struggle of Indigenous peoples for self-determined decolonization and the ongoing legacies of racialized imperialism in the postcolonial Pacific, see, inter alia, Banivanua-Mar (2016); Durie (2005); Stewart-Harawira (2005); Trask (1999).

32 As Malaitan anthropologist David Gegeo and coauthor Karen Watson-Gegeo note, it is not just the fact of Indigenous knowledge that matters, but also the ways in

which that knowledge is produced, interpreted, and then applied by Indigenous peoples (2002, 403). Indigenous ontologies thus cannot be dissociated from Indigenous epistemologies or from the particular ways in which Indigenous peoples (re)create, (re)theorize, and (re)structure knowledge via cultural discourses and mediums and within situated sociopolitical, economic, and historical contexts (see also Gegeo 1998; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001).

33 For examples of the largely positive moral framing of plant-human relations in the plant turn, see M. Hall (2011); Lewis-Jones (2016); Miller (2019); Myers (2017a).

34 For examples of the love-care-respect complex underlying such approaches, see Atleo (2012); Plumwood (2002); TallBear (2016); Todd (2017).

35 Here, I take up Eva Giraud's call to centralize and politicize the frictions, foreclosures, and exclusions that (multispecies) entanglements inevitably entail, which are often obscured in uncritical celebrations of relationality and its ethical potential (2019, 2–3).

36 I borrow the term *friction* from Anna Tsing to describe the sticky materialities of practical encounters that give grip to global connections in local contexts. Friction, Tsing writes, foregrounds how situated projects and multiscalar interactions come to define movement, cultural forms, and agency. Friction can slow things down by restricting our capacity to move, both imaginatively and physically. But friction can also make movement easier and more efficient, keeping global power in motion. At once confining and generative, friction inflects historical trajectories through contingent processes of enablement, exclusion, and particularization (Tsing 2005, 6).

37 Critical theorist Mary Louise Pratt deploys the term *contact zones* to describe sites of colonial encounter where "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (2007, 7). Following Donna Haraway (2008) and others, I expand the concept of contact zones to encompass the array of more-than-human actors that together participate in shaping the multispecies dynamics of the Upper Bian.

38 As deployed by Edward Hviding (2003) in his analysis of overlapping conservation, logging, and ecotourism projects in the Solomon Islands, "projects of desire" foreground the conflicting aspirations of different sets of actors across sites and scales (see also Tsing 2000). Projects of desire can take material or immaterial form and can be oriented toward the immediate present or the distant future. Projects coalesce as bundles of ideas and practices that are negotiated and realized in particular times and places. What counts as a project depends on what one desires to know, how one understands the relationship between the local and the global, and where one situates oneself within planet-wide interconnections and their attendant frictions (Tsing 2000, 347; see also West 2006a).

39 Stuart Kirsch (2006) describes this approach as "reverse anthropology," defined as an anthropology that takes as its starting point Indigenous peoples' own theories of socioenvironmental change and its causes (see also R. Wagner 1981).

40 On the impacts of colonization on human-forest relations across Oceania, see, inter alia, Bell, West, and Filer (2015); Hviding and Bayliss-Smith (2018); Jacka (2015); K. Teaiwa (2014).

41 I borrow the term *plantation zone* from literary scholar Monique Allewaert (2013) to describe tropical or subtropical places whose economic and political structures have been fundamentally reshaped by the plantation form and its colonial-capitalist undergirdings.

42 In attending to the affective textures of the Marind lifeworld, I seek to address what Tongan and Fijian anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa identifies as a critical omission in anthropological representations of Pacific cultures. Doing justice to the richness of these cultures, Hau'ofa notes (2008, 3–11), means writing about everyday expressions of love, kindness, consideration, and altruism—about humor and morality and the good and the bad, along with the diverse forms of bodily and emotive communication that accompany the spoken word and attendant conceptual categories (see also Barker 2007).

43 In her published letter to communities and researchers, Eve Tuck (2009) critiques "damaged-centered research" for creating one-dimensional representations of marginalized communities as depleted, ruined, hopeless, and vanishing. Instead, Tuck invites analytical and ethnographic attention to the complex desires, personhood, and survivance strategies of Indigenous communities as they find, create, and sustain meaningful lives amid institutional and everyday forms of oppression and invisibilization (see also joannemariebarker and Teaiwa 1994).

44 I borrow the notion of "impasse" from cultural theorist Lauren Berlant to describe the historical present as a moment where existing social imaginaries and practices no longer produce the outcomes they once did and no new imaginaries or practices have yet been created to replace them. Echoing Marinds' concept of abu-abu, the historical present as impasse, Berlant writes, is a "middle without boundaries, edges, a shape." It names a "thick moment of ongoingness, a situation that can absorb many genres without having one itself . . . [a] space where the urgencies of livelihood are worked out . . . without assurances of futurity . . ." (2011, 200; see also Stengers 2015). An impasse can take the form of a situation following a dramatic event, such as the arrival of oil palm in the Upper Bian, when one loses the sense of what must be done and yet must find ways to adjust. It dissolves preextant certainties and categories and forces us to engage in the necessary labor of improvising in a world devoid of guarantees.

45 My use of the term *Papuan Way* is inspired by Papua New Guinean philosopher and politician Bernard Mullu Narokobi's influential concept of "the Melanesian Way," a spiritual vision that Narokobi identified as central to the creation of a culturally self-aware and self-determined postcolonial subjectivity among Papua New Guinean peoples. Resonating with the notion of the counterpoint deployed throughout this book, the Melanesian Way, Narokobi writes, is anchored in a recognition that opposites can and must coexist, in the image of human life itself and its "inconsistencies, contradictions, emotions, reason, and intellect" (1980, 4, 8; see also Narokobi 1983, 22–39). Only through a process of collective and dialectical reasoning can these opposites be transformed into a collective Melanesian future that is at once synthetic, ancient, and forward-looking (see also Dobrin and Golub 2020; Kabutaulaka 2015).

46 In his critique of "ethnographic authority," or the portrayal of the cultural "other" as bounded, abstract, and ahistorical, James Clifford draws attention to the contrapuntal relation at play in the intersubjective dialogue between the informant and the ethnographer and in the ethnographer's representation and analysis of the informant's representation and analysis. Ethnography, Clifford argues, must be understood "not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed 'other' reality." Rather, ethnography must be approached as a "constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects," operating within specific historical relations of dominance and dialogue (Clifford 1983, 133, 119; see also Crapanzano 1992; Wolfe 1999).

47 For critiques of the polarization between "dark anthropologies" and "anthropologies of the good," see Jacka (2019) and Knauft (2019).

48 The acquisition of land for land-banking purposes rather than crop development, or what John McCarthy, Jacqueline Vel, and Suraya Afiff (2012) call "virtual land grabs," has been widely reported across Indonesia's palm oil, rice, Jatropha, and carbon sectors.

49 Inspired by the rampant haze produced by forest fires across Indonesia in the 1998 El Niño drought year, Anna Tsing suggests that crises of visibility—material and symbolic—arise when proper standards of visibility come into conflict or are overlaid. Such periods also generate or reveal contestations over what *should* be visible or invisible, to whom, and to what effect (Tsing 2005, 43–45).

50 The Marind notion of abu-abu brings to mind Michael Taussig's concept of "epistemic murk," the breakdown of knowledge through which colonial modes of production and governance become fused with terror, violence, and chaos and simultaneously come to define and blur the line between reality and representation (1987, 121–22).

51 As Lucas Bessire notes, epistemic murk does not preclude the possibility of becoming-through-negation for peoples who inhabit spaces of loss, death, and destruction. Rather, epistemic murk can be a creative means through which people come to redefine and reconstitute their worlds in the face of seemingly unsurmountable odds (2015, 224–27).

52 On the ecology of Merauke, see Bowe, Stronach, and Bartolo (2007).

53 *Metroxylon sagu* derives from *metra* meaning "pith" and *xylon* meaning "plant tissue."

54 In this book, *oil palm* refers to the oil palm tree and *palm oil* to the oil obtained from the tree's kernel and fruit. The scientific name of oil palm, *Elaeis guineensis*, derives from the Greek *elaia* for "olive" (on account of its oil-rich fruit) and *guineensis* in reference to African Guinea, where the plant grows endemically. The species is also called the African oil palm to distinguish it from the American oil palm (*Elaeis oleifera*) of South and Central America and the maripa palm (*Attalea maripa*) of South America and Trinidad and Tobago. In its native West and Central Africa, palm oil is a source of cooking oil, medicinal ointments, toddy wine, fuel, and housing material. It once featured alongside yams, fish, salt, cloth, and metals in a lively local trade network along the tributaries of the Forçados River in

the Niger Delta. The commodity's first movement beyond Africa was as a foodstuff aboard ships during the slave trade. The Industrial Revolution heightened commercial demand for the product as an ingredient of margarine, candles, glycerin, machine lubricants, soaps, and tin plating (Henderson and Osborne 2000; Jones 1989).

55 The ethnonyms Marind Bian and Marind-deg distinguish Upper Bian Marind from coastal Marind (Marind-duv) of the south, riverine Marind of the eastern Maro River (Marind-kanum), and Marind of the swamps (Marind-bob) in western Kimaam. The self-identification of Marind in relation to the landscape and its ecologies resonates with similar naming practices across New Guinea—for instance, the "mangrove people" of the Sepik Estuary (Lipset 1997), "river people" of East Sepik (Silverman 2018), and "coastal people" of Kamu Yali (J. Wagner 2018).

56 For a compilation of Marind clan affiliations, see van Baal (1966, Annex IV a–d). Amai also include natural elements such as the moon, the sun, and the wind. However, Upper Bian Marind noted that these were of secondary importance compared to plant and animal amai. Throughout my fieldwork, I heard amai species and their respective attributes widely discussed by men and women of different generations. In contrast, my understanding of the role of dema, the ancestral spirits of Marind and their amai kin, was limited by the fact that such knowledge is transmitted primarily by male village elders, exclusively through the sacred medium of origin stories, and usually inside the customary men's house.

57 The forest plants and animals from whom Marind derive their food feature a combination of native species and species introduced into New Guinea both during prehistorical human migrations and by Pacific islanders, Europeans, and Asians during and after the 1870s.

58 For examples of such colonial depictions, see Baxter-Riley (1925); Boelaars (1981); Haddon (1891); van der Kroef (1952). Colonial representations often produced and perpetuated stereotyped depictions of native peoples as alternately romanticized or vilified primitive tribes. These depictions were, in turn, instrumental to the empire's civilizational mission and perdure in contemporary discourses about Indigenous Papuans in Indonesia (Kirksey 2002; Kirsch 2010; Rutherford 2015). As products of militaristic forms of colonialism, they must be treated with the utmost caution.

59 The exonym *Tugeri* was also the name by which Marind were known among the Trans-Fly peoples to the east, against whom Marind directed their headhunting raids (Ernst 1979, 34; Hitchcock 2009, 89n1).

60 Jan van Baal was controlleur of Merauke from 1936 to 1938, then adviser on native affairs to the newly established Government of Netherlands New Guinea (1950–1952), and finally governor of Netherlands New Guinea (1953–1958). His monograph—the first and only comprehensive account of Marind society—incorporates earlier accounts of Marind language and culture produced by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, notably Jan Boelaars and Jan Verschueren, as well as the works of Swiss anthropologist and collector Paul Wirz and German anthropologist Hans Nevermann.

61 Father Hoeboer of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart named the area referred to in this book as Mirav during the 1930s, as part of the Dutch initiative to concentrate scattered and semipermanent settlements into larger permanent villages. The villages of Khalaoyam and Bayau were also established as part of the colonial endeavor to sedentarize Marind into larger administrative units.

62 Prior to Dutch rule and as early as the seventeenth century, the coastal Marind were engaged in the trade of items including copper cannons, choppers, textiles, beads, and earrings with peoples of eastern Indonesia and the Kingdoms of Ternate and Tidore, and later on with the Makassars, Buginese, Arabs, and Chinese (Pouwer 1999, 160).

63 Growing European demand for bird-of-paradise plumes led to an unprecedented influx of hunters into Merauke during this period, including Europeans, Chinese, Japanese, Australians, and Indonesians from Ambon, Kei, and Timor. But by the time Great Britain passed its Importation of Plumage Prohibition Bill in 1921, the trade had fallen into decline. It was banned in Merauke a year later and formally ended across Dutch New Guinea by 1931 (Swadling 1996, 175–204).

64 On the geopolitical history of West Papua, see, inter alia, Brathwaite et al. (2010); Budiardjo and Liem (1988); Chauvel and Bakti (2004); Tebay (2005).

65 Initially implemented under Dutch rule, government-endorsed transmigration into West Papua came into full swing in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988 and 1989 alone, Merauke was scheduled to take in an estimated 500,000 people (Monbiot 1989, 39; see also Arndt 1986, 161–74).

66 Indigenous and Western scholars and activists have characterized the systemic and naturalized violence perpetrated against West Papuans under Indonesian rule as a "slow-motion genocide" (Banivanua-Mar 2008; Elmslie and Webb-Gannon 2013; McDonnell 2020; Ondawame 2006; Tebay 2005; Wing and King 2005). While some of my Marind interlocutors deployed the language of genocide in describing Indonesian occupation and its impacts, many rejected this idiom because of its anthropocentric focus. Colonization, these individuals argued, obliterates, not only Indigenous peoples, but also the sentient ecologies central to Indigenous peoples' sense of self and continuity. Other Marind, meanwhile, distinguished intentional massacre from territorial expansion as the prime driver of colonization—an argument that Patrick Wolfe makes in his distinction between elimination and genocide. As Wolfe (2006) explains, settler-colonizers are concerned with the destruction of Indigenous societies only to the extent that is required for, and enables, settler possession and exploitation of the land. By the same token, settler-colonialism allows for the recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights only so long as this recognition does not challenge settler-colonizers' territorial and political interests (see also Coulthard 2014; Povinelli 2002; Simpson 2014).

67 On state-corporate power dynamics in postauthoritarian Indonesia, see Hadiz (2010); McCarthy and Moeliono (2012); Robison and Hadiz (2004).

68 West Papua thus constitutes a classic example of what Anna Tsing calls "resource frontiers," which are sites where entrepreneurs, armies, and governments actively reconfigure putatively "discovered" natural resources and landscapes, such as

forests, seas, and mountains, into corporate raw material. Central to this conjuring is the political construction—and subsequent naturalization—of resource frontiers as zones of wilderness in need of exploitation and transformation (cf. Tsing 2003). As ideology and language, the frontier connects diversely situated local and global actors through asymmetric relations of accumulation and dispossession (West 2016, 23, 27). This settler-colonial logic, Fijian historian Tracy Banivanua-Mar notes, further legitimates the displacement and enculturation of racialized Indigenous peoples as putative subjects of civilizational development (2012; see also Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds 2010).

69 The violations of Marinds' rights to consent, land, livelihoods, and food caused by MIFEE, together with the threat to their collective survival as a people posed by population dilution and migrant influx, were highlighted in three submissions from civil society organizations to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) under its Urgent Action and Early Warning Procedures in 2011, 2012, and 2013. They were further reiterated in two formal communiqués to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2011 and 2013. However, the Indonesian government has not responded to the concerns raised on the basis of these submissions by the CERD committee in 2011 and 2013, nor to the Special Rapporteurs' joint statement of 2012 regarding the potentially adverse effects of MIFEE on the food security of some 50,000 people (see Avtonomov 2013; de Schutter and Anaya 2012; Kemal 2011). For the original UN complaints and statements, see Chao (2013), Forest Peoples Programme (2013); Forest People's Programme, Sawit Watch, and Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (2012); and MacKay (2011a, 2011b).

70 I convey this reconstruction as a Eurasian female anthropologist striving to reconcile Anglo-European forms of research and interpretation with Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies and operating within a discipline that has historically reproduced (or been used to reproduce) the hegemonic and extractive processes of colonial settlement. While Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies have profoundly informed my thinking, being, and relating, the reconstruction I offer is not an Indigenous account in the sense elaborated by David Gegeo (2001) and others—namely, research undertaken by Indigenous scholars, on Indigenous terms, and both with and for Indigenous communities (see also Coburn et al. 2013; joannemariebarker and Teaiwa 1994). In engaging with Indigenous accounts produced by Pacific and Melanesian scholars throughout this book, I recognize the importance of Indigenous scholarship as a form of resistance against historically entrenched processes of colonization and their extractive forms of "knowledge capitalism" (Stewart-Harawira 2013). I depart from the prevalent positioning of Indigenous peoples within anthropology as research-subjects only, rather than as equal research collaborators and knowledge producers. I also push against the disciplinary framing of West Papua as part of "South East Asian Studies" or "Indonesian Studies," which itself constitutes an artefact of settler-colonialism. Instead, I approach West Papua first and foremost as an Indigenous and Melanesian place—one that endures despite the dispossessory and discriminatory violence of colonial rule.

71 Villages hold ambivalent meanings for many Marind (cf. Barker 1996; Stasch 2013). As I explore in chapter 4, villages are considered spaces for human dwelling (tempat orang tinggal) in that they are inhabited by Papuan and non-Papuan settlers. In this regard, villages stand in contrast to forests and groves, which are populated by Marind and their plant and animal kin. Marind also describe villages as official spaces (tempat resmi) because they are the locus of administrative institutions—for instance, schools, clinics, corporate headquarters, police stations, and military posts. Indeed, much of everyday life in the village tends to revolve around these institutions in the context of children's schooling, patients' visits to the clinic, villagers' meetings with government and company representatives, and more or less official visits from the police and military. The village is also where foods procured from the forest are cooked, shared, and consumed; where villagers gather to chat on the front porches of their homes; where Marind women sell forest vegetables and fruit to settler families; and where basic goods are purchased from settler-owned kiosks. But while the village offers Marind access to public services, it is also widely perceived as a site of control and surveillance from the State and corporations—one that is increasingly inhabited by non-Papuan settlers. The village, I was often told, is a lonely (sepi) place where there is little to do and where people easily get bored (jadi bosan). For reasons I will explore in the chapters to come, the vast majority of Upper Bian Marind prefer to spend their time in the forest. Indeed, many people only return to the village if they need to travel by road to urban areas, such as Merauke City and Jayapura. As a foreign researcher, limiting my time in the villages was also an issue of safety and precaution in that it enabled me to stay "under the radar" and avoid notice by the police, the military, or the corporations.

72 Here I refer to the antiracism protests of July–August 2019 that took place across the Indonesian archipelago. These protests were triggered by racist attacks on Papuan students in Java and prompted an intensified military clampdown in West Papua (see Chao 2019d, 2019f, 2021g). They also coincided with my last visit to the region, after which I was officially blacklisted by the Indonesian government because of my research and advocacy.

73 Anishinabe scholar Gerald Vizenor deploys the term *survivance* to foreground the ways in which systemic cultural genocide generates new spaces of synthesis and renewal that go far beyond the notion of basic survival. Survivance, Vizenor writes, means "a native sense of presence, the motion of sovereignty and the will to resist dominance. Survivance is not just survival but also resistance, not heroic or tragic, but the tease of tradition [that] outwits dominance and victimry" (2000, 93). The notion of "survivance" is closely linked to Kyle Powys Whyte's concept of "collective continuance," or the creative capacity of Indigenous communities to "make adjustments to current or predicted change in ways that contest settler-imposed hardships and other oppressions, establish quality diplomatic relationships, bolster robust living in the face of change, and observe balanced decision-making processes capable of dealing with difficult tradeoffs" (2018b, 69). On Indigenous resilience, creativity, and endurance in the Pacific, see, inter alia, Barker (2008); Durie

(2005); Hauʻofa (2008); Hviding and White (2015); Povinelli (2011); Simpson (2017); Stewart-Harawira (2018).

74 On Marind ritual and myth, see Ernst (1979); Knauft (1993); van Baal (1966).

75 Epeli Hauʻofa has criticized the perduring emphasis on warfare, headhunting, and ritual within anthropological research in the Pacific (2008, 3–10). This emphasis, Hauʻofa notes, perpetuates distorted stereotypes of Indigenous cultures as static and exotic and thereby denies Pacific peoples some of the most fundamental and dynamic aspects of their humanity. Paige West puts forth a similar argument in analyzing how the "representational rhetorics" of nature, culture, savagery, and discovery have dispossessed, and continue to dispossess, Papua New Guineans of their bodily, territorial, and epistemic sovereignty (2016, 63–86). Disarticulated representations of New Guineans produced by anthropologists, West writes, not only essentialize New Guinean peoples but also serve as weapons of dispossession for other institutions and actors (see also Durutalo 1992; Narokobi 1976; T. Teaiwa 2006).

76 As Paige West (2016) and Anna Tsing (2000) remind us, the "global versus local" is, in itself, a false dichotomy. Interconnections, circulations, and flows of people, things, ideas, and practices long predate the era of "globalization." They point instead to the simultaneity of the local and the global in their diversely situated and contested manifestations.

77 See also H. Davis and Todd (2017); Jolly (2018); Todd (2015). Kyle Powys Whyte's (2018a) reflection on climate change as a settler-colonial temporality speaks more broadly to the ways in which Western framings of time and history have furthered the erasure of Indigenous peoples, places, and practices. As Epeli Hauʻofa notes in the Pacific context, the hegemony of mainstream Western historiography fails to reflect Indigenous peoples' cyclical notions of time and consequently undermines their collective capacity to define and construct their pasts, presents, and futures in self-determined ways (2008, 60–79; see also Banivanua-Mar 2012; Lempert 2018; Obeyesekere 1992; Te Punga Somerville 2018; Tuhiwai Smith 2012; Winter 2019b).

78 I returned to the field in July 2019 with the support of an Engagement Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation to share my research findings with my host communities and to decide together on the content and structure of the book before you (see Chao 2019b).

79 This 2018 documentary, *Declaration of Land as Our Spiritual Mother*, is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74Z0-cNY8U8.

80 On the importance of politically engaged and reflexive anthropology as a form of reciprocity, a labor of translation, and a mode of communitarian research, see Biersack (2006a); Gegeo (2001); Greenough and Tsing (2003); Kirsch (2018); Tuhiwai Smith (2012); West (2019).

1. PRESSURE POINTS

1 December 1 marks the date in 1961 when West Papuans first raised their national flag, the Morning Star (Bintang Kejora), after being promised independence by the Dutch government. Eight years later, however, hopes for West Papuan independence were crushed by the Act of Free Choice, when 1,021 voters were appointed