The Beetle or the Bug? Multispecies Politics in a West Papuan Oil Palm Plantation

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This paper examines how Indigenous Marind communities in the Indonesian-controlled region of West Papua conceptualize interspecies relations in monocrop oil palm ecologies. Many villagers identify with native species that, like Marind, are displaced or dispossessed to make way for plantations and their primarily non-Papuan labor force and operators. On the other hand, parasites that undermine oil palm’s growth become figures of hope for Marind who conceive resistance to the state and corporations as the only legitimate path to self-determination. Meanwhile, species that entertain mutualistic relations with oil palm point to cooperation and accommodation as an alternative strategy of survival. The paper invites attention to the conflictual horizons of justice offered by interspecies resistance and collaboration for Indigenous communities as they strive to reconcile their own aspirations for survival and self-determination under entrenched regimes of race and capital.

Dr. Sophie Chao is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Sydney’s School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry. Her research explores the intersections of capitalism, ecology, indigeneity, and health in Indonesian West Papua. Sophie holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Masters of Science in Social Anthropology from the University of Oxford. She completed her PhD at Macquarie University’s Anthropology Department in 2019, for which she received the Macquarie University Vice-Chancellor’s Commendation and the Australian Anthropological Society PhD Thesis Prize. Sophie previously worked as a Project Officer for the Indigenous rights organization Forest Peoples Programme. For more information, please visit morethanhumanworlds.com

When: Thursday, 30 July 2020 at 3pm
Where: K.G.06 (University of Waikato) or Zoom (Meeting ID: 719 684 2758 / Password: @nthr0

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