

**DREAMS, MADNESS, AND
FAIRY TALES IN NEW BRITAIN**

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Andrew Lattas

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

TRICKSTERS, INVERSIONS, AND RITUAL ENTREPRENEURS

*Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern**

Andrew Lattas's striking study of creative processes of change in the Province of New Britain in Papua New Guinea captures a kaleidoscopic mix of elements familiar to ethnographers in many other parts of the South-West Pacific ("Melanesia" in the usage Lattas employs). Familiar indeed the elements may be; but Lattas's ways of assembling, presenting, and reflecting on his materials lend a quality of surprise and added interest on every front of his study.

The first overall characteristic of this book is its consistent depth of ethnographic material, following from the author's involvement with the leaders whose ritually inflected enterprises ("cults") are its main focus. As ethnographer, Lattas has immersed himself fully in the experimental worlds of these leaders, recognizing both their eccentricities and the emblematic ways in which they reflected and produced the changes around them.

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From the beginning here, readers are drawn into the life-worlds of the people and are plunged into a tremendous mix of invention and pre-existing cosmological motifs. A general theme in the contemporary ethnography of the South-West Pacific is how local people have appropriated aspects of introduced changes and “domesticated” them, given them a local twist. This has been applied to the field of Christianity in the Pacific also (for a set of recent studies see Stewart and Strathern 2009). Andrew Lattas injects further energy into this domain by arguing that in his field area modernity has actually been absorbed into ancestry. And the specific way in which this has been done is again one that is familiar: the invading Outsiders (“Whites”) are conceived of as ultimately linked to the people’s own ancestors (see e.g. the Oksapmin mythological genealogy discussed by Brutti 2000). There is a further twist here, however. Since these Outsiders are seen not to have behaved as they should have done, the indigenous mythologists have created an inverted version of an alternate set of friendly White spirits who are underground and who can be contacted by the ritual leaders. The outsiders historically experienced are then seen as tricksters; true messages about wealth and well-being are to be found by accessing the alternate imagined underground world. The local leaders set themselves up as ritual entrepreneurs, manipulators and makers of cosmology tied deeply into the interpreted landscape of birds, trees, and rocks: prophets who can listen to the enigmatic sounds of the extra-human world and manage its meanings. The eccentric becomes the way to secret truth. Madness is seen as genius.

The idea that the surfaces of the external world are in some ways a trick, through which cosmological truth-seekers have to pilot their way in order to uncover the secrets beyond the surface, is one of the motifs that is widely shared in other Papua New Guinea locales. The motif is grounded both in longer-term local philosophies and in the enigmatic and troubling experiences with colonial and indeed post-colonial forces. We ourselves made close acquaintance with this extraordinary creative process in our fieldwork among the Duna people of the Southern Highlands Province in 1999, when the myth-narrative of a giant underground land-owner figure, the Tindi Auwene, was drawn into the local people’s experience of attempts by a mining company to drill through rock at the edge of the Strickland River (Stewart and Strathern 2002a: 151–172). The same drive to penetrate into secrets is found, however, in earlier folktales from many areas. In one narrative from Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea, men sitting together in a communal men’s house fall into debate regarding the character of the lands of the sun and moon. They nominate one man to go and find out. He travels down river inside a log and finds the moon’s daughter and the moon himself, her father. He behaves re-

spectfully and is rewarded with gifts. He declines, when he is taken up in the sky, to look down and see his own people and their settlement. He observes the correct rituals. But a brother of his, who is jealous and ill-behaved, tries to emulate his experiences and acquire wealth for himself; but he misuses the daughter and also looks down from the sky and bewails his situation when he sees his place, so the spirit figure (the moon) carrying him drops him and he dies. This Hagen folk tale carries a strong moral message, then, about reciprocity and good behavior, as well as exhibiting an imaginative probing of the world beyond immediate working experiences. The tale conveys a kernel of thought that is akin to elaborately ramified narratives and practices which richly inform Lattas's account from his field area (Vicedom 1977; myths no 4 and 5).

Spirits can be tricksters, but they hold the secrets of the cosmos. In the perceptions of the people with whom Lattas worked, Whites were absorbed into this scenario. Modernity itself was seen as a kind of trick to be unraveled, a challenge to the ingenuity and prophetic insight of interpretive imagination. Out of this farrago of desire and indigenous hermeneutic skills new cosmological worlds were built up, in which local people saw the Outsiders as holding certain secrets, but also saw themselves as controlling valuable inside esoteric knowledge of their own. Indigenous existing mythology, such as that on Moro, the creative Snake Man, was pressed into service in the pursuit of new truths that would ultimately reveal themselves to be ancient; and underground pools and water generally were seen as containing such truths, as well as new technologies such as telephones and planes. Moral ambivalence regarding the desired direction of society also lay at the heart of these indigenous experimental philosophies. The ritual leaders, whom Lattas appropriately names shamans, re-contextualized local names of places and spirit figures inhabiting them in order to "write" new meanings on the landscape. The liminality and transgressive quality of these leaders' ideas were a part of the pathway of searching for new meanings in life.

We see also in these narratives the transformative power of gifts to alter relations between people—perhaps the most pervasive of themes in South-West Pacific societies—and a local discourse on the problems of social change brought on by contact with Outsiders. In counterpoint to the positive power of the gift is the negative power of destructive sorcery, which consumes people rather than reproducing them, and the local shamans in Lattas's narrative perceived that sorcery had grown to be a greater problem than previously in their cultural life because the means of combating it with their own magic had been reduced or taken away from them. Their essential struggle was thus to regain control over their cosmos.

In its totality, then, Andrew Lattas's book is unique in its blend of materials from fantasy, folklore, ritual practice, and everyday life events. We have found, however, time and again in reading these pages of his manuscript and providing a series of comments to him on its developing drafts that his expositions resonate with much of our own work on the ethnography of Papua New Guinea. For example, there is the take, or retake, on the phenomenon called "Cargo cults" in the older literature (see Strathern and Stewart 2002: 66–71). There is the discussion on shamans and their modes of efficacious action (see Strathern and Stewart 2008); the review of indigenous modes of practice that incorporate Christian themes (see Strathern and Stewart 2009); the emphasis on dreams as a vehicle of the imagination (see Stewart and Strathern 2003); the question of the relationship with the dead and the placement of the dead in a cosmological landscape (Stewart and Strathern 2005); the horizons of millenarian ideas, fears, and desires (Stewart and Strathern 1997, Stewart and Strathern 2000a; and also, Chris Morgan's essay in our edited volume *Millennial Markers* 1997); the problematics of witchcraft and sorcery in social life (Stewart and Strathern 2004); and the insistence that individual creativity and agency, relational but also transgressive, is a persistent feature of action, contra what has become too easy a stereotype of the putative individual in "Melanesian" society (see Stewart and Strathern 2000b; Strathern and Stewart 2000).

Finally, here, the ingenious and concerted use which Lattas makes of folk narratives (similarly in some ways to Stewart and Strathern 2002b), marks his study clearly as the product of a developed awareness of the significance of this genre, not as a quaint byway or addendum to ethnography but integral to the project of the anthropological analysis of how people cope with, and imaginatively create, change.

We are happy indeed that this work is included in our Ritual Studies Monograph Series with Carolina Academic Press.

Cromie Burn Research Unit,
University of Pittsburgh
August 2009
PJS and AJS

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PREFACE

This book is about creativity and modernity in rural New Britain. It explores how modernity is lived; how it has been embraced, contested, and diverted into localizing practices. These have often sought to localize modernity's futurism, that is, its utopian transformative potential and promises. Like other parts of the Third World, in Melanesia, modernity's promises of progress have not been evenly realized.¹ In diverse ways, modernity has been accepted but also resisted and even reinvented (Foster 2002; Knauff 1999, 2002a, 2002b; LiPuma 2001). What seems like patchy and inept forms of acculturation are frequently the result of local socio-cultural structures intervening to remediate the terms of people's engagement with modern institutions, practices, values, and beliefs. In this book, I use "modernity" as a shorthand term for recent socio-cultural changes associated with the coming of Europeans, with the coming of *ol Waitskin* (all Whiteskins). Throughout Papua New Guinea, modernity has a strong racial dimension; its futurism is associated with Whiteness. The process of being encapsulated and progressively transformed, resided initially with *ol masta* (Whites) and today with Western institutions that are widely regarded as badly managed by *ol netif* (all natives) and, more especially, by an emerging educated national middle class. The latter is often given ironic honorific titles, such as *ol saveman* or *ol ABCman* (all the knowledgeable people) (Errington and Gewertz 1997). For many New Britain villagers, the modern world is what *ol Blakskin* (all Blackskins) never customarily had and what they still struggle to secure from Whites as the definitive bearers and harbingers of the future.

In terms of specific processes and institutions, for villagers, modernity has been the arrival of government, church, schools, cash crops, towns, com-

1. In this book, I use "Melanesia" as a comparative term to refer to socio-cultural groups in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. Though not strictly accurate, for this definition excludes Fiji and Irian Jaya, the term has an accepted narrower use among many anthropologists studying South West Pacific communities and their historical transformations.

modities, money, and Western technology. Villagers use the Pisin words *sens* (change) and *developmen* (development) as their shorthand terms to summarize the diverse aspects of modernization. More than a useful academic abstraction, modernity is a discernible process in everyday life, which villagers will relate to in unexpected ways through illnesses, cults, dreams, spirit-possession, hallucinations, myths, beliefs, and rumors. Through local practices, villagers strive to internalize, re-articulate, and also resist the new social order and its culture. Villagers' incorporation into modernity has never been passive but has involved them refiguring the assumptions, beliefs, identities, roles, expectations, and values, which are part of the collective imaginary that helps to create modernity. What Castoriadis (1987) calls an imaginary institution consists partly of people sharing a temporal-historical horizon, which today in modern Melanesia is articulated as the pursuit of growth and progress. Historically, the collective imaginary of Melanesian modernity has been closely bound up with the hegemonic institutions of government (*gavman*), church (*lotu*), and commerce (*bisnis*). They have promoted change as a process of surpassing the primitive past to enter a new, better world. Inherent in the temporal structure of modernity is a utopian promise that equates change and the future with transcendence. It is this promise, which has been creatively explored and experimented with in local, subordinate understandings of history, newness, and epochal change.

Throughout Melanesia, villagers contrast *taim bilong tumbuna* (the time of our grandparents, ancestors) to *taim bilong masta* (the time of Whites). McDowell (1985, 1988) argues that a strong sense of epochal time, what she calls "episodic time," has underpinned the proliferation of millenarian movements in Melanesia (Burridge 1960; Guiart 1951; Lawrence 1964; Worsley 1957). She relates popular understandings of history, which treats history as divided into radically distinct periods of before and after time, to modernity's rapid sweeping changes and also to customary temporal schemes that had their own ways of figuring radical transformations in society, culture, and identity (Biersack 1991; Kempf 1992; Stewart and Strathern 1997). For example, in New Britain, traditional myths often posit an original primordial time, which came to an abrupt end after men forcibly took masks, bullroarers, and other men's house secrets away from women. In traditional rituals, those stolen primordial artifacts are used to produce decisive changes to the social status and identity of initiates, by transforming weak, ignorant boys into powerful knowledgeable men (Lattas 1989; cf. Bamberger 1974). For McDowell, modern millenarian movements emerge from combining the temporal schemes of different social orders; with the ruptures, historical periodizations, and transformations of custom merging and transforming modernity's own ruptures, historical periodizations, and transformations.

Today, throughout New Britain, villagers criticize the perceived, deficient half measures of modern day institutions for having failed to produce decisive fundamental change. Villagers' sense of history is a strong sense of unfinishedness; of having been only partially improved through the knowledge, power, and practices of Whites and of needing more radical development and completion. Yet, when villagers voice such ambivalences and criticize *sens*, *developmenten* and *Waitskin*, they will rarely completely reject the institutions, values, beliefs, and practices of a modern world, but will rather posit the need for an alternative form of *sens*. For villagers, modernity is the hegemonic promise of material advancement and of intellectual-moral progress through participation in the Whiteman's society, culture, and personhood. Many villagers have publicly embraced development, whilst at the same time experimenting in distinctive ways with modernity's values, beliefs, practices, artifacts, institutions, relationships, forms of hope, and even with its critiques of natives (Billings 2002; Crapanzano 2004). Though full of innovative twists and turns, these experiments in modernity share many similarities in beliefs, values, and practices. Villagers have experimented and created in similar kinds of ways. The similarities are remarkable, for they occur in villages and movements widely separated from each other. This was something Worsley (1957) recognized and, like him, I analyze the recurring socio-cultural strategies through which Melanesians have struggled to control, own, and reinvent the conditions of their modernization.²

New Britain is a region known for its cargo cults, some of which are quite large and still active though in decline (Aquart 2001; Chowning 1990; Counts 1971, 1972; Lattas 1998, 2001, 2005a, 2006a, 2006b; Pech 1991; Pomponio, Counts and Harding 1994; Trompf 1990, 1991; Valentine 1955; Whitehouse 1995). In *Cultures of Secrecy*, I documented the history of changing cults in the Kaliai Bush. This new book is more comparative than historical. Whilst still drawing on Kaliai ethnography, it also draws on my new fieldwork in other regions of New Britain, namely Bali and Pomio, so as to explore the similarities and differences between the new practices, relationships, beliefs, and cultural schemes that villagers have developed to remediate their experience of change. This new book places cargo cults alongside a wider context of popu-

2. Worsley's (1957) work has been too quickly dismissed as containing a teleological progressive view of politics. This has been at the expense of appreciating the comparative cultural schemes and practices that he unearthed, concerning how Melanesians experimented with nationalism and citizenship as ways of appropriating the future. The criticisms of Worsley often ignore the wider social pressures to institutionalize and formalize cult movements and, in particular, how these processes assumed a millenarian quality.

lar beliefs, stories, values, and practices, which the cults took up and which can be analyzed, as Stewart and Strathern (2004) do, as part of the everyday folklore culture through which modernity is reapprehended (cf. Geschiere 1997; Lowrey 2006; Meyer 1999; Scheper-Hughes 1996). This folklore culture includes clandestine unofficial forms of Christianity but also dreams, visions, stories, rumors, sorcery, magic, madness, and fairy tales. In everyday life, these diverse mediums, genres, and experiences have often interacted to modify and elaborate on each other's contents and to articulate what Bloch (1995) calls popular forms of cultural anticipation. For Lefebvre (1984, 1991a), these are the everyday utopian and dystopian visions that inhabit people's everyday sense of the openness and closure of the present to an alternative future.

Another kind of history, heralding another kind of modernity, was posited by the popular culture that New Britain villagers developed and that contained its own moral explorations of contemporary power, knowledge, and wealth. This popular culture was more than just an attempt to reapprehend the modern world, for it also involved villagers exploring the possibilities for transcending their contemporary sense of capture, containment, and befoolment by Europeans and educated Melanesians. Here, villagers struggled to undo their class and racial anchoring of themselves by developing dreams, visions, stories, rumors, and cult practices that offered their own distinctive ways of exploring what Bruner (2005: 58) calls "departures from ordinariness." For example, rural villagers created and recited secret stories of fantastic overseas adventures by local individuals who entered the hidden world of Whites to find God and the dead, along with Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. Other stories told of wondrous home travels at local sites, where a submarine, ship, or car journeyed into the ground to arrive at an invisible wharf, factory, and city belonging to the dead. Then there were the stories and dreams of cameras that transferred knowledge, power and perspective from the underground dead. Some stories told of secret photos depicting the dead. Other stories told of secret photos taken by the dead, with some photos ending up in European hands, such as at an Australian government office from where they were stolen (Lattas 2000, 2006a). These folktales told of an illicitly acquired, empowering, local perspective that had to be stolen back from government and Europeans. Such stories were told in confidence by villagers to each other, creating in everyday life a clandestine transmission of homegrown native secrets, which displaced and re-enacted anew the stories' contents of clandestinely transmitted knowledge between a *masta* and his *wokboi*. The empowering secret perspective of the dead became a hidden white perspective that needed to be stolen back by secret village narratives.

In his thoughtful analysis of the politics of storytelling, Jackson (2002) argues that the creativity of storytelling allows people to take back knowledge, au-

tonomy, and local forms of sociality by borrowing and reworking dominant hegemonic codes, truths, and narratives. In New Britain, villagers appropriated and recontextualized dominant hegemonic structures by using folktales, which often explored themes such as captivity, transgression, theft, escape, movement, violence, and monstrosity in a modern world. Evoking awe, wonder and trepidation, these stories shared similar ways of authorizing belief in what appeared to defy belief. The stories challenged credibility as part of local attempts to redefine fields of presumptuousness. The destabilization and problematization of the assumptions of an existing coercive reality was part of the exploration of other potentialities. Here I agree with writers who argue that all everyday worlds generate and require images of alterity, that is, their own distinctive images of otherness, transgression, and unreality (M. Douglas 1966, 1970; Jackson 2002; Turner 1969). A concern with the alterity of what is singular or exceptional cannot be dismissed as just a feature of the “exotic reality” of millenarian cults, for it features regularly in the everyday dreams, anecdotes, and narratives of non-cult villagers, including mainstream Christians. It is the changing forms that alterity has assumed in New Britain that fascinates me, as it has fascinated villagers themselves. Villagers invented new departures from ordinariness to capture and rework the alterity of modernity; and more especially because modernity itself involves its own movements, its own departures into alterity, holding out the promising future alterity of development and civilization, as well as Heaven and Hell. In their stories, dreams, visions, and cults, New Britain villagers sought to uncover an alternative movement for their nation into the alternative world of the future by making this movement also a movement into the customary alternative world of the dead, the underground, and the past. Synergies were explored between different kinds of differences, different kinds of alterities, and different kinds of departures that involved different ways of voyaging or moving around.

In the current social sciences, the previous assumption of the homogenizing effects of modernization has been challenged by a new concern with multiple modernities (Hefner 1998; Tambiah 2000; Taylor 2002). This is a concern with how people remake the economic, political, social, and cultural structures of the modern world. Recent ethnographic work from Africa and South America has explored the specific narratives, beliefs, values, practices, and social relationships through which people on the periphery live out processes of social and cultural transformation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999a, 1999b; Hess 1991; Scheper-Hughes 1996; Taussig 1980, 1987). Modernity has been shown to be not a simple straightforward process of secularization and scientization, nor are its processes of Christianization clear-cut (Eves 2000b, 2003a; Jacka 2002, 2005; Meyers 1999; Robbins 2004; Stewart and Strathern 1997,

2000a; Trompf, 1990, 1991). Instead of an anticipated increase in secularism, modernity can be accompanied by a renewed interest in religion and the supernatural, in the invisible occult forces seen to be determining the terms and fate of human existence. Even for Western society, a new wave of cultural, historical, and anthropological studies has questioned whether we have ever been truly modern and secular (Laqueur 2006; Latour 1993; Lurhman 1989; Saler 2006). These studies question the view that modern Europeans suddenly switched to living entirely in demystified worlds of science and secular pragmatism. Instead, they propose a view of Western modernity as “enchanted” and as producing new forms of the occult, such as New Age philosophies or flying saucer cults (Battaglia 2005). Using ethnography from New Britain, I explore the wondrous possibilities of modernity in Papua New Guinea; how modernity’s own enchantments were appropriated within local creative practices whose inventiveness was not random or unstructured, but formed out of specific socio-cultural and historical contexts (Bourdieu 1984; de Certeau 1988; Trompf 2004).

Race, Modernity, and Cargo Cults

With the arrival of Europeans, Melanesians of different language and kin groups acquired a shared point of contrast for a new unified racial sense of themselves as *mipela Blakskin* (us Blackskins), *mipela kanaka* (us unsophisticated people) or *mipela Netif* (us natives). Villagers experienced their collective racial identity as embodied in their contrasting black skins, facial features, and hair but also in their different food, gardening, hunting, houses, magic, and rituals. Everyday objects and practices acquired a racial quality in that they were often devalued as belonging to black backwardness, to *ol tumbuna* and *buskanaka* (backward, uncivilized bush villagers), and thus were something to be transcended through a white future (Bashkow 2006; Jacka 2007a, 2007b; cf. Elias 1978). Villagers’ experience of *sens*, their experience of modernity as a form of epochal change, was formulated in racial terms as a struggle for racial transcendence. That which belonged to *ol Blakskin* came from the past, from *tumbuna*, whose *pasin* (habits, practices) were regularly disparagingly repudiated as *rabis* (rubbish), *samting nating* (insignificant), or *longlong save* (insane, absurd knowledge). More than a concern over the arrival of Europeans and new forms of futureness, *sens* was experienced as a movement into Whiteness that could generate, as Fanon (1968) has shown with respect to Algeria and the Caribbean, an ambivalent sense of being whitened, of becoming an imitation of the White-man as the true authentic version of advanced selfhood.

Social change (*taim bilong masta*) was often experienced as the uneasy arrival of Whiteness as a hierarchical principle of value in everyday life. Racial differences operated as racial values, which informed New Britain villagers' problematic understanding of themselves as *netif*. Europeans' soft bodies, luminous skins, material affluence, and perceived absence of work seemed to confirm their claims of superior knowledge, power, religion, morality, and society. This experience of racial hegemony was never internalized in ways that were simply passive (Lattas 1992b, 1998, 2007). Instead experiences of racial hegemony were reworked and contested in millenarian movements and in popular everyday culture. In this book, I am not concerned with race as a set of scientifically formulated biological differences in the capacity of different groups. Instead I investigate the ideological force, circulation, and reworking of Western racial typologies and hierarchies of value within everyday rural culture. I focus on popular, cultural constructions of race; how New Britain villagers used the everyday dichotomy of *Blakskin* and *Waitskin*, *masta* and *netif*, as a way of re-articulating the moral meanings and promises of modernity. Here villagers appropriated and localized Western racial categories, as moral categories of being; that is, as value structures for idealizing and problematizing native existence. Indeed, villagers even appropriated and localized Western racial critiques of Melanesian backwardness as bound up with deficiencies in native psychology, culture, and society. European colonial rule depended on the moral/intellectual authority that came from racial problematizing practices, with Europeans governing "backward" Kanakas using the legitimizing framework of improving villagers' material, social, cultural, and psychological existence. The ascribed need for modernization, for progress and development, was linked by colonial structures to a moral/intellectual critique of natives whose violence and material poverty were taken as indicative of an inherent failure by villagers to govern themselves successfully so as to produce peace, law and order, and pacified prosperous subjects. Traditional warfare, sorcery, cannibalism (for Bali), and widow killing practices were read racially by Europeans as indicative of deficiencies to be overcome through the pedagogic, pastoral, and disciplinary labors of state, church, and commerce. Ironically, villagers appropriated Western racial critiques of themselves, but as part of local attempts to appropriate Western utopian projects for civilizing and modernizing natives. The West's racial/moral problematization of native existence was localized by villagers seeking to empower themselves through localizing Western governmental technologies for correcting and improving subjects and society as the basis of managing and producing the future.

It was in their cults that New Britain villagers experimented radically with the utopian practices and promises of a Western modernization project, which

linked the government of society to the government of the self (Foucault 1977, 1982b). Cult followers experimented with regrouping Western projects for uplifting and transforming subjects through practices of moral self scrutiny, which were now remediated through local white spirits. Here, the alterity or foreignness of Whites and their culture was localized by being remirrored and resituated in the alterity of the underground. Whiteness was displaced onto the dead and wild bush spirits (*masalai* and *tambaran*), where Whiteness was reinvented.³ White foreignness had its otherness remade by being merged with local ways for figuring otherness, for figuring strangeness and difference. The alterity and distance of the Whiteman's world was merged with traditional Melanesian schemes for constituting alterity and distance—especially that of the underground dead and *masalai*. More than this, in cults throughout New Britain, the developmental transformational schemes of the West were merged and remediated through Melanesian transformational schemes. Development was developed differently. When cult followers copied and experimented with realizing other kinds of modernity, it was through other kinds of government, church, commerce, bureaucracy, and Western forms of technology. Their visible, surface, everyday forms were tied to invisible, truer, underground versions. Followers did more than just copy modernity's transformative promises, practices, institutions, and ideologies. Using the analytical concepts of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we can say that Whiteness and modernity were deterritorialized by being moved away from the control of surface Whites and an educated Melanesian elite. Whiteness and modernity were displaced and regrouped into underground territories and invisible persons, such as the dead and *masalai*. In being reterritorialized, Whiteness and modernity were reinvented. They became part of creative experiments where cult followers, for example, sought local ways to own and reimplement Western hegemonic projects for correcting and improving the self, society, and culture.

Rather than rejecting or denying Whiteness as a value, as a form of idealization of the self and society, followers embraced its hegemonic horizon, but displaced and remediated Whiteness through local invisible terrains and spirit

3. Bush Kaliai villagers distinguish between *masalai* (*pura*), *tambaran* (*mahrva*) and the souls (*ano*) of the dead. The latter mostly reside in invisible mountain villages and underground. *Masalai* are primordial ancestral beings who inhabit named sites. They have the power to change into something else, often a stone or snake, but even one's own spouse. They can hypnotize the living. Wagner (1986b) offers a good analysis of the *masalai* in a Melanesian culture. For the Kaliai, *tambaran* can refer to certain primordial, super human cannibals like Boku and his wife, Silimala. A *tambaran* can also be the angry cannibalistic ghost of a person who has suffered a violent death and their soul stays behind seeking revenge.

beings. The latter now became modern moral guardians and policemen with access to an alternative modern social order. Cult followers in Bali, Kaliai, and Pomio worked hard at remaking their everyday interactions, practices, relationships, thoughts, and values so as to embrace and internalize an idealized white persona as the basis of an alternative future society, which would be fully realized when followers shed their black skins to become a new race of Whiteskins. The hegemonic privilege of Whiteness was envied for embodying higher status, excellent material living standards, superior knowledge and technology, efficient institutions, scrupulous hygiene and cleanliness, better morality, and enhanced social order. Whiteness was taken on as a goal to be achieved, but through local strategies and tactics that diverted and remade the modern practices, relationships, institutions, and forms of knowledge offered by the West. Whiteness itself was remade in these local strategies of appropriation. Whiteness was taken up as a line of flight and, paradoxically, as a line of escape that offered the possibility of transcendence through its futureness. Through being deterritorialized and reterritorialized, Whiteness was remade, it was localized and made to offer new potentialities. Reassembled through relations with the past, the dead, masalai, and the underground, Whiteness was regrounded so as to articulate anew its embodiment of futureness and transcendence. True Whiteness would not be achieved through simple passive copying of Western political, religious, and commercial labors; what Pomio Kivung followers mock as *kopi-savi* (copy-knowledge). Instead, the West's transformative promises and pedagogic practices were merged with local transformative mimetic labors, which villagers customarily directed to the dead, masalai, and the underground. The hegemonic process of copying and becoming White and Western was displaced and remediated by the Melanesian mimetic transformative practices of ritual, magic, and divination so as to resituate the racial structures and transformative possibilities of modernity.

Cult followers were not alone in exploring alternative Melanesian ways to secure Whiteness and modernity, for this was an important aspect of the everyday dreams and folktales of non-cult villagers. Underpinning the various dreams, folktales, and cults were two recurring strategies for appropriating Whiteness and modernity. The first strategy Melanesianized the foreign, whilst the second whitened and modernized the local. In the first strategy, villagers familiarized European countries, Western institutions, and white people by understanding them to contain Melanesian deities, dead relatives, and *netif* customary practices. Rome and America were interpreted not just as Heaven but as the invisible world of a rejected Melanesian god and of local ancestors. Thus, white people from overseas might be suspected of being returned dead relatives, particularly if they were unusually friendly (Leavitt 2000). Even major

cult opponents, such as the coastal Kaliai big man and notorious sorcerer, Salinga, found it difficult to resist this conclusion. He suspected the nearby Australian manager of Iboki plantation to be a lost child because this Whiteman was uncommonly generous towards him with food, drink, and money.

The second strategy for appropriating Whiteness and modernity sought to Westernize or modernize local customary sites associated with the dead and masalai. Cult followers, but also other villagers, revisited local tabooed sites of alterity and whereas their parents heard and saw traditional *singsing* (ceremonies involving music and dance) performed by those underground, villagers now heard hidden cars and engines or saw electric lights. People's dreams provided more detailed accounts of the modern cities, factories, and wharves that were hidden there. Those dreams supplemented widely circulating folk stories, such as the story from the south coast of New Britain, telling of a young man who received a towel and soap from a local masalai site. In the late 1990s, when the Malaysian timber company started logging in the Kaliai Bush, its bulldozers, trucks, and chainsaws disturbed many sites belonging to masalai and the dead, such that villagers and workmen (many from distant areas of Papua New Guinea) ran into *weil masta* (wild Whiteman) and *weil misis* (wild White woman) in the bush. Even coastal Kaliai villagers, who had opposed and mocked the cargo cults of the bush, now saw and told stories of mysterious cars that traveled at night and without a driver. By implication, the driver was invisible and he and his car came from disturbed bush sites.

Discipline, Pastoral Control, and the Dead

It was cult followers who systematized the task of establishing an alternative social order, which could mirror, capture, and seduce the hidden alternative modernity that resided locally. Followers sometimes renamed and revealed local sites to be alternative versions of important "invisible" Western sites, such as the Red Sea, Jerusalem, Mount Sinai, Galilee, Brisbane, and even Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. Cult followers, in Bali and Pomio, found not just local underground cities and cargo but also hidden corporations, banks, churches, and government offices run by the dead (Lattas 2001, 2005a, 2006b). Bali and Pomio cult followers formed secret alliances with these underground institutions and their "western" personnel, as the basis of followers' own active involvement in modern surface world institutions. A hidden depth sustained followers' selective involvement in modernity. On the island of Bali, cult followers used the mirror world of underground corporations to take up cash crops and to start their own company producing copra and more recently cocoa (Lattas 2001,

2005a). In Pomio, Kivung followers rejected cash crops and instead used the mirror world of an underground government as their secret motive for taking up politics and government as a millenarian vehicle in the surface world (Aquart 2001; Lattas 2006a, 2009; Trompf 1990, 1991; Whitehouse 1995). Invariably, in the underground, all the different cults unearthed “truer” Melanesian versions of Christianity. Just as in the past, when the underground provided New Britain villagers with their traditional songs, dances, rituals and masks, so the underground provided contemporary cult followers with the new liturgy for their independent churches. It supplied the new prayers, songs, moral rules, baptism rituals, and confessional practices of cult churches. The underground provided more than just modern aesthetic forms, it supplied the cults with progressive ethical codes supported by modern pastoral powers. The latter involved often installing the dead and other spirits as moral guardians who remediated and enforced modern practices of moral surveillance, self-scrutiny, confession, and atonement (see photo 14). The cults copied Western pastoral technologies of self-formation, which powerfully linked the moral governance of society to the moral governance of the self. In particular, customary magico-ritual relations with the dead were reformulated and used to localize, amplify, and refigure modern disciplinary and pastoral pedagogic technologies.

In Pomio and the Kaliai Bush, some cult followers applied the civilizing projects of modernity not just to themselves, but also to their invisible customary spirits. There was ethical anxiety over *masalai* and the dead having wandered the local landscape before Church and government had arrived and so they had missed out on being Christianized and pacified, like the living in the surface world. To correct this, cult followers developed ritual practices that sought to pacify and civilize local spirits. In the Kaliai Bush, from the late 1960s until the mid 1980s, Censure’s followers offered apologies and gifts of pigs and shell money to compensate for crimes that the dead had suffered at the hands of those in the surface world. In Pomio, from the mid 1960s until the present, Kivung followers have continued to offer food to the dead and to give money so as to clean away the moral sins of the dead. In both Kaliai and Pomio cults, followers have nurtured an alternative civilizing project, which has regarded the domestication of customary, creative, spirit beings as necessary to bring their alternative, superior, white knowledge and power into the surface world to provide an alternative future (Aquart 2001; Lattas 1998). Cult songs and dances were used in a customary way to please, domesticate, and seduce underground spirits by giving them ceremonial debts. These rituals familiarized the living with previously hostile spirits, creating exchange ties that befriended and required the spirits to come and build a new modernity for the living. The rituals also were a circular form of moral pedagogy, where the living placated, tamed, civ-

ilized and morally re-educated the dead, so that the dead could become modern moral guardians over the living. The dead were installed as moral policemen, as the moral menders from the land, who could take the governmental place of God, the Catholic Church, kiaps, and the state.

New Britain cargo cults linked their appropriation of the pacification process to their reformulation of the modern goal of producing a tolerant multiracial society. Official projects for pacifying wild, hostile, native groups so as to incorporate their diversity into a modern, civilized, multiracial nation were expanded to include other customary, hostile, feared indigenous groups, namely, masalai and the dead. They should also become visible citizens in a truly, pluralistic, multiracial, nation state that practiced genuine tolerance of diversity.⁴ Spirit beings would be the nation's new, privileged, organizing, white elite. In place of educated Melanesian groups and their claims to the cultural authority of Whiteness, there would be the governing white alterity of the dead and masalai, no longer feared as dangerous wild monsters but embraced to lead a more tolerant nation.

In Australia, Deborah Rose (1994: 175) has skillfully analyzed contemporary Aboriginal myths, which localize the European historical figures of Captain Cook and Ned Kelly, making these Whitemen into local white ancestors. She argues that the stories of white ancestors are part of indigenous "people's search for a moral European." In her analysis of the Johnson cult on the island of New Hanover, Billings (2002) argues that in their critique of the Australian colonial administration and their corresponding idealization of Americans, Johnson cult followers did not reject colonial paternalism but sought an alternative more powerful and more moral form of white guardianship in Americans. As Papua New Guinea approached self-government and independence, in New Britain there emerged an outbreak of cults pledging loyalty towards a hidden, underground Whiteness. What looks like cult followers confused embracement and relocation of the colonial racial hierarchy was a response to emerging ethnic, religious, and class tensions between Melanesians, as certain educated Melanesian groups started to govern other Melanesian groups through state, church, and commercial institutions.⁵ For cult followers, masalai and

4. In the late 1960s, a Multi Racial Local Government Council was established in the Gazelle Peninsula. It was opposed by the Tolai Mataungan Association, but supported by the Kivung. Today, Kivung leaders still champion the need for a multiracial government. They criticize the Tolai as having sought a quick national independence to increase their political power and financial wealth.

5. In their patrol reports, Australian kiaps noted villagers' concerns about Independence and Europeans leaving. Though those reports partly mirrored the assumptions of

the dead offered an alternative, local, white, governing elite empowered with the symbolic capital of “true” Western knowledge and so able to challenge claims by educated Melanesians that they would govern and deliver *sens*. Many non-cult followers joined cult followers in positing and using the alternative modernity of the underground to dismiss educated Melanesian groups for their superficial grasp of the white knowledge (*save bilong masta*) that underpinned their authority.

Through local cults, dreams, visions and folklore, New Britain villagers explored alternative futures that regrounded the nation’s progress into the transformative powers of an autochthonous Whiteness. It was cult followers who systematized and institutionalized these experiments by creating communities that had clandestine covenants with underground Whitemen offering their own concealed, alternative church, government, and corporations. Indeed, these underground Whitemen offered very precise, detailed and very realistic subterranean versions of modernity that came complete with banks, bureaucratic offices, money, commodities, modern machinery, factories, schools, church liturgy, confessional rituals, moral codes, policemen, courts, and government administrative departments. When cult followers embraced surface world forms of development, such as when Bali cult followers set up their own company to cut and sell copra or when Pomio Kivung followers elected representatives to council government and to national and provincial parliaments, this participation in modernity was read via secret understandings, exchanges, and ritual obligations with underground white people. Hidden ancestors, local masalai and dead relatives offered an alternative truer form of white stewardship, with more promising forms of commerce, politics, and religion, which belonged and emerged from people’s past and their own home heritage sites. For Bali and Pomio cult followers, the capture of this concealed, more authentic modernity required not withdrawal, but active involvement in Western institutions. Cash crops and modern politics became something more than their visible surface forms, for they now were doubled up mimetic activities, which sought to realize anew the visible world by copying and seducing concealed, more genuine versions of it. Selective in-

kiaps, they were not just fabricated, for they did articulate villagers’ concerns about who would take the governmental place of Europeans. In Pomio, this was primarily anxiety over the Tolai. To this, Kaliai Bush villagers added their own fears of the growing modern power of nearby coastal Lusi and Kombe villagers. On Bali Island, Dakoa’s followers refused to take part in council government elections that initially favored the more educated villagers, such as Seventh Day Adventists.

volvement in modernity became a secret mimetic ritual for picturing and drawing forth an underground modernity. Its alternative, local, white people would reveal and deliver what surface Whites had hitherto monopolized, distorted, and secreted away.

The Politics of Situatedness

Traditionally, Melanesians formed their lived worlds out of ongoing dialogues and exchanges with the invisible dead and *masalai*. These extraordinary beings animated the hidden ground on which the visible world rested (Feld 1982; Strathern 1989; Wagner 1986b; Weiner 1991, 2001; Wood 2006). Many masks, songs, dances, rituals, names, magical spells, pigs, garden crops, and even women originally came from *masalai* and the dead. They provided many of the valuable material and symbolic resources in the surface world. In their everyday magical practices, villagers customarily turned to these invisible ancestral beings for help with gardens, hunting, illness, rain, too much sun, and lost pigs. The colonizing projects of Christianity advocated prayers to the invisible helping hand of God instead of spells seeking help from invisible guardian spirits. Samaga, who is known for his magic and is a respected big man from the bush *Kaliai* village of Molou, explained the change like this:

Before they said that things had their boss [spiritual guardian], for ginger and other things, like [hunting] dogs. The magic for dogs had its boss; the magic for tricking eels had its boss ... Now the church has come and people's minds have become clear and they say: "What man? There is no other man who could give something to you and me; there is just God."

God ought now to provide the outside world of power and plenitude. He should be the new authorizing figure of mystery whose removed presence defines the boundaries of a fallen reality (Heidegger 1977; Merleau-Ponty 1969).

The foreignness and transcendent, invisible nature of a Western God, when combined with Europeans arriving from foreign concealed countries over the horizon, meant that Europeans colonized not just the visible physical space around people, but also the world of the invisible. Throughout New Britain, this perceived European capture of the hidden creative force underpinning everyday life was resisted and subverted by cult leaders, shamans, storytellers, and those judged mad. They articulated popular concerns that the invisible not be totally Europeanized, that it be kept partly local and Melanesian. Accordingly, villagers frequently made God into a local ancestor or deity (Pom-

ponio, Counts, and Harding 1994). Occasionally, God was made to reside at a local site, which was then invariably modernized into a hidden city or even Heaven. More often, a local Melanesian deity was described as fleeing to distant European lands, along with dead relatives and parts of their Melanesian cultural heritage. Such local narratives sought to reclaim the unseen as a horizon of foreign possibilities and potentialities, as the new invisible ground for the future. Villagers familiarized and localized a hidden European God and hidden European countries in ways that re-empowered customary relations of mystery and revelation focused on invisible local sites, *masalai*, ancestors, and the dead. Villagers contested the suggestion that Whites alone controlled knowledge of the creative horizon of human existence; that Whites had a monopoly on the invisible and its empowering disclosures belonged exclusively to them along with the future.

Traditionally, New Britain villagers used hidden forms of otherness (the dead, *masalai*, and ancestral deities) to reproduce their socio-cultural world (Blythe 1995; Counts D.E.A. 1982; Goodale 1995; Maschio 1994; cf. Wagner 1986b). With the arrival of Europeans, these traditional figures of hidden alterity were often Westernized; they were hybridized to create hidden variegated realities, which provided alternative local access to the alterity of the Whiteman's lifestyle, knowledge, power, and personhood. Here I agree with Bourdieu's (1984: 1) focus on "the social conditions of the constitution of the mode of appropriation." People do not borrow randomly, but selectively and in certain kinds of ways bound up with their social existence. There was a logic and a politics within the criteria and practices employed to select, translate and synthesize the various aspects of traditional and Western culture. In particular, New Britain villagers often used customary, mimetic, magical schemes of assimilation, appropriation, and transformation when they copied, borrowed, and remade Western culture. In what Kapferer (2003: 23) calls "the phantasmagoric (virtual) space of magic," the incorporative customary power of representations was used to evoke and secure a desired, inaccessible reality. Customarily, magical, ritual acts often created a *piksa* (picture, *ano*) that consisted of a symbolic substitute for a truer, hidden reality. Close attention was paid to copying or mirroring the physical properties of a desired object, process, or state of affairs so it could be seduced, captured and realized through its copy (*ano*). For example, bush *Kaliai* magical practices used heavy dense stones to create heavy dense taro tubers or, alternatively, a magician could call out the name of a sago palm tree so future taro would grow large and have leaves with the same prized shape as a sago palm's. In the modern period, these magical, mimetic practices for achieving a desired reality were redeployed into copying government, church, and commercial practices and institutions. What's more, villagers did not just

copy modernity's sites of power and knowledge, but also its powerful techniques for producing copies.

Modernity's wondrous technological instruments for reproducing reality drew villagers' folklore stories and cult practices to cameras, photos, televisions, videos, wirelesses, and telephones. In their cults, followers were also drawn to writing, books, record keeping, offices, and secretaries, for they also promised powerful, new mimetic means for copying and reduplicating reality. Other modern mimetic activities that attracted cult followers were Western, pedagogic techniques of discipline, instruction, training, etiquette, and tutelage, where the transformative powers of mimesis resided in repetition (cf. Donzelot 1980; Foucault 1977). In particular, the imitation of Western speech, mannerisms, and actions promised to project followers outside of themselves and into a more powerful way for being modern. Seeking new, more powerful forms of magic and new, more powerful forms of modernity, villagers merged modern transformative mimetic techniques (technological, bureaucratic, and pedagogic) with customary transformative mimetic techniques, such as those offered by rituals, shamanism, divination, and magic (Strathern, A. 1996; Taussig 1993).

Unorthodox appropriations of Western culture were more widespread than the cults and occupied a prominent place in everyday dreams, visions, travel accounts, rumors, and folktales. Popular stories were often secretly told about the fortuitous adventures of local individuals, who through chance and good luck accessed wondrous, futuristic forms of travel and communication. This uncovering of superior modern ways of hearing, seeing, and moving around was part of a racial struggle to shift and empower the perspective for Melanesians knowing the world and themselves. Traditionally, villagers sought new knowledge and a transformation of their material circumstances through accessing local customary worlds of alterity. Prior to Europeans, the power to create something new came from dialogues with the hidden terrains of the dead and masalai, which villagers accessed using dreams, visions, possession, rituals, gift exchanges, and kinship ties. In the contemporary period, villagers modernized their customary practices for accessing traditional forms of otherness by incorporating Western forms of communication and travel, such as telephones, wirelesses, televisions, videos, ships, submarines, cars, and planes. Modern, technological, mediating devices were reimagined and redeployed to contact customary forms of alterity, namely the dead and masalai. This Melanesian reinvention of modern technology resituated villagers' dialogues with the alterity of their landscape and its embodiment of the alterity of their mythological past. It also resituated villagers' dialogues with the alterity of Western culture, exploring the possibilities of a hidden, alternative, Melane-

sian modernity. Indeed, villagers used modern technology to create local doorways between their customary invisible worlds of otherness (sites belonging to the dead and *masalai*) and the Whiteman's modern invisible worlds of otherness (Heaven, Hell, Rome, Australia, and America) (Kempf 2002; Wood 1998).

For many villagers, modernity was a hermeneutic puzzle and indeed a trick to be unraveled through combining customary divinatory practices with modern disclosing practices such as those provided by western forms of travel and communication. Resistance to the visible world of racial inequalities was articulated as a struggle to access hidden terrains, those belonging to the past and the future, tradition and Europeans and, more especially, where those different terrains secretly overlapped. Many cult opponents shared with cult followers an interest in contesting the visible world of racial poverty by spreading stories about local and overseas variegated worlds, which intermixed Black and White, *netif* and *masta*, local and foreign, past and future. These stories told of dreams, confidential communications and secret journeys by a villager into either a local or an overseas hybrid world. These were new lines of flight into alterity, from where villagers resurveyed the existing world so as to crisscross and conjoin anew its divisions. Partly, experiments in emplotment, the alternative geographies of existence that villagers assembled, provided new imaginary terrains that repositioned perspective and the ground for thinking.

It was especially through their unique appropriations of Western technology's powers of mobility, mimesis, and communication that New Britain villagers explored lines of escape into a locally constituted modernity. In bush Kaliai cults, these creative explorations took the form of timber and vines shaped into a camera or binoculars; holes in the ground operating as telephones; and special trees and flag poles acting as a wireless or radio. In Pomio, both cult and non-cult villagers will refer to divinatory dreams as their private television, for they show what cannot ordinarily be seen. In the Kivung movement itself, each family has been allocated a specially empowered glass jar called a "Television," which contains a dead relative who morally watches over the family. Throughout New Britain, folktales have added their own popular revelations about modernity via fantastic accounts of unusual travel machines, like the car that went under water, the submarine and ship that dived underground, and the ship that traveled on land.

Traditionally, in New Britain, dreams were an important way of accessing and authorizing new knowledge. Today, villagers use the nocturnal travels of the soul outside of the body to reveal and explore concealed modern terrains. In chapter two, I will analyze how one Kaliai shaman, Aliaso, used airplanes to extend the dream travels of his soul to invisible western lands. Other dream

accounts by cult followers, shamans, and ordinary villagers tell of cameras, videos, and televisions that extended the perceptual space of the dreamer's soul, allowing the soul to see from the empowered perspective of Europeans, the dead and even God. Folktales and dreams involving unconventional travels, communications, and mechanical ways of perceiving often told of modern instruments and vehicles being used in fantastic ways that border on becoming a Melanesian form of science fiction, except that the dreams and stories were not regarded as fictional. Yet, like science fiction, these accounts do explore the futuristic, transformative promise of modern technology by using it in new extraordinary ways. However, these accounts do so within local worldviews that have yet to embrace scientific rationality as the unqualified modality of enchantment for constituting a vision of hope. In folk stories, dreams, and cults, villagers have developed Melanesian utopian fantasies that use modern technology to recapture control of space, movement, communication, and knowledge as conduits for a racial empowerment, which invariably privileges local sites, deities, and ancestors. With the coming of Europeans, historical destiny was officially figured as the movement of the past into a technologically glorified future, so in desiring access to their own unorthodox forms of Western technology, villagers sought knowledge and control over that temporal movement which provided modernity's horizon for managing the present.

In providing access to other perceptions and spaces, modern technology revived belief in epochal change. It reinvigorated local forms of hope, in a context where the institutional production of hope underpinned church, state, and capitalist forms of hegemony. In appropriating modern technology, villagers sought new vehicles of transcendence. The alterity, disclosing powers, and transformative effects of modern technology were used to evoke new forms of religiosity, with Western technology itself becoming religionized in distinctively Melanesian ways (Noble 1999). This was especially so in New Britain cults where telephones, televisions, and wirelasses became revered channels for communicating with deceased relatives, deities, and ancestral sites. In embodying the alterity and distance of the future and of Whiteness, modern technology was used to reconnect the living with the alterity and distance of increasingly faint mythological powers. Modernity did not destroy people's interest in the customary otherness of their ancestral past, for in calling up new forms of outsidership associated with the alterity of a Westernized future, modernity renewed people's fascination with traditional forms of religiosity grounded in the hidden local alterity of the dead, *masalai*, and the surrounding landscape; all of which featured heavily in traditional myths of origin.

Margins, Transgression, and Uniqueness

Despite the monotony and repetitiveness of much of modern everyday life, the spectacles and wondrousness of modernity were used to renew people's interest in the outstanding heroes and singular events of myth, which in the past had violated established conventions and categories so as to transform the world. Spectacles of uniqueness had figured prominently in traditional myths of origin, so many villagers hypothesized that these customary forms of extraordinariness could again be mobilized in terms of their transgressive transformative potential to institute an alternative epoch; this time an alternative modernity. In her comparative analysis of religion, Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) noted the paradoxical role of the unique, strange, and ambiguous in the constitution of order and religiosity. That which is peculiar, defiled, or marginalized can acquire the qualities of a sacred creative force, for in subverting existing regimes of meaning, it holds out the promise of inaugurating a new order of existence. Also pursuing this argument in his theory of liminality and *communitas*, Victor Turner (1969, 1974) showed how symbolic schemes of outsideness and transgression could mediate the creative transformations not just of ritual, but also of history. I am interested in the new historical forms that liminality and *communitas* has assumed in New Britain. Modern images of exclusion, outsideness, and transgression were created to provide the mythological terms that could account for the current state of social inequalities whilst promising to take rural villagers beyond those inequalities.

It is the production of hope as the ground of a socio-cultural world, which was being reclaimed in the dreams, folktales, myths, and cult practices through which New Britain villagers re-explored the creative power of margins and transgressions. Villagers sought to communicate and become reconciled with what was invisible, but also with what was defiled, despised, and feared, for these also implied forms of distance. Traditionally, marginalized forms of lowliness operated like the invisible as a fertile ground of alterity that underpinned everyday customary livelihood. In Pomio, taro magic is still directed to the snotty nosed ancestress, Samunsa, who along with her limping grandchild received from Nutu or God the magical knowledge of *koinapaga*. Referred to as *silolo* (rubbish) people, this grandmother and grandchild were reportedly abused by Pomio villagers' forebears who despised their smelly, dirty, sore-infested skins. Later, jealous of the large teeming gardens they created using Nutu's knowledge, these two *rabis* people were killed by Pomio men. Today, this *silolo* grandmother and grandchild are central figures in the Pomio Kivung (Lattas 2009). Villagers' concern with modernizing the surface world has been displaced into a concern with keeping alive and relevant the increasingly repressed,

hidden, and local mythological side of reality. Villagers have struggled to sustain and remake a customary hermeneutic tradition that interpreted and called forth what resided underground, or was covered up by a deceptive surface of dirt, fear, and simplicity. A renewed attentiveness to the latent reproductive powers of what is suppressed and masked can be found in villagers' contemporary concerns with the invisibility of the past and future, overseas places and countries, masalai and dead relatives, but also with what is despised and dismissed.

Throughout New Britain, renewed attention has been paid to local myths about double skin heroes and other ancestors who feigned ugliness, filth, illness, madness, mutism, and simpleness, so as to conceal their knowledge, power, and creativity, and so as to test villagers' acceptance of strangeness and radical difference (Lattas 1992b, 1998: 85–88, 190). In West New Britain, I know of two major cult leaders who have refused to wash.⁶ Both claimed cargo and a new world would come from the dirt on their skins. In the Kaliai Bush, the late Censure reportedly had sex with a female masalai, a wild missus (*weil misis*), and rubbed their joint sexual secretions over his body. This gave him the knowledge and power that lay inside the ground and that Whites had hitherto monopolized (Lattas 1998). As he grew old and more godlike, Censure also gave knowledge back to the underground. According to Censure's son-in-law and cult lieutenant, Monongyo, Censure often performed cult rituals alone and the dirt buried in his skin would come to the surface in his sweat. This then became "food," that is knowledge, for spirit women from the underground who came to collect it (Lattas 1998: 215, 217–18).

He didn't wash and his skin would come up dirty and something like food would be on it. He would be there alone, working the Law [cult rituals] and tuhat [sweat] would come up. It was then that all the women of the underground would come to receive knowledge from him. They would fill up with it [sweat-food-knowledge] and leave.

On Bali Island, the cult leader Dakoa also claims the dirt on his skin is power. Dirt is "ground" that empowers him by bringing him closer to the dead and masalai who reside inside the ground and who control the cargo. Unlike Whites, who already have secret underground knowledge and can therefore wash regularly with hot water and soap, Dakoa cannot. He explained that be-

6. In Pomio, the spirit medium and Kivung leader, Margaret, will sometimes refuse to wash. Followers associate this with heat and power, and with certain transformations being realized by the underground upon the spirits that inhabit her body.

cause he can't see what hides in the ground, he has to attach the ground to himself. Dirt becomes his revered conduit.

You look at me, I don't wash, I don't dress up, because it would not be good if the power was not strong. I have to be truly black [dirty] and then I will go occasionally to wash my face, but everything else will be left. They [opponents] say my skin is dirty, but it is power and from it something good will come. It is the dirt belonging to me that will work everything with the ground. It is like this: all of the Whitemen, they have the knowledge and they can wash all the time. They stay clean, but this is not so with me. I can't see them yet [those in the ground], but I will see them through the power of my skin pulling them [to the living, into the surface world]. It will pull them so that we can have something [cargo]. It's true that we can't make them come up yet, so as to see them now, however, later we will be able to. Later, it will be all right. The power will come from the ground and for that reason I cannot wash ... When there is dirt on my skin, there is ground stuck to me; it becomes close to me and it can't stay a long way from me.

Dakoa marks out his singularity, cultivates his exceptionality, by juxtaposing himself not only to clean Europeans but also to his own followers to whom, in weekly cult meetings, he will emphasize their need to work cash crops so as to have money to purchase soap and neat clean clothes. For followers a tidy, clean, civilized *netif* will draw the underground "masters" (*masta*) to him or her.⁷ Yet Dakoa does the opposite, he draws the underground to himself by soiling his body, by regrounding his identity. Dakoa strives to make himself into a surface world *piksa* (picture), that is a double of concealed underground beings, namely, the dead who have gone into the ground to live and *masalai* who are often identified with stones and known locally on Bali as "*strong bilong graun*."

Madness, Suffering, and Modernity

In my focus on the creativity and agency of New Britain villagers, I disagree with the theoretical emphasis of the New Melanesian Ethnography, which con-

7. I sometimes translate *masta* as master(s), for I do not accept that English meanings of servitude and social hierarchy are not implied by the social use of the word. To use linguistic etymology to define meaning, such as by referring to the German origin of Pisin words, ignores translation in a predominant Anglo-Australian environment and the political ideological aspect of words.

siders individualism as just a Western phenomena, standing in stark contrast to a Melanesian focus on the relational or dividual self (Foster 1995a; Strathern, M. 1988; Weiner 1988). I agree with Strathern and Stewart's (1998, 2007: xiv–xvii) reservation that recent theoretical stress on the dividual has been to the neglect of individualizing aspects of personhood in Melanesia (see also Josephides 1991; Stewart and Strathern 2000b: 55–68). Drawing parallels with Orientalism, Strathern and Stewart see the theoretical emphasis of the New Melanesian Ethnography as bordering on primitivism, for it makes people more Other than they are. It denies customary ways of marking and differentiating the distinctive and unique individualizing aspects of Melanesian identity. In New Britain, contemporary cults and folklore have often creatively merged modern ways of individuating the self with traditional practices and mythic images where margins and transgressions can provide the customary basis for individuality. These contemporary syntheses search for new utopian practices, relationships, beliefs, values, desires, and forms of hope that can reinvent the alterity and transformative power of both custom and modernity. However, these contemporary struggles for creativity and distinctiveness should not be overly romanticized, for these struggles to tap into the creative power of what is unique and individual also generated ambiguities, contradictions, and anguish that took a heavy toll on those individuals who pushed to the limits their experiments with what it was possible to believe and become.

In chapter four, I analyze how certain innovative individuals became trapped in solitary, idiosyncratic worlds of meaning. There they drew inspiration and companionship from dreams and hallucinations where they met and conversed with the dead, as invisible white people. Occasionally, the unique worlds of such individuals were taken up by other villagers to become the shared world of a cult community whose followers experimented jointly with new ways for reordering their experiences, beliefs, narratives, identities, and social relationships. More often than not, these solitary idiosyncratic worlds of meaning were ignored by others or tolerated with a wait and see attitude. Their creators lived ostracized within world views whose strangeness and uniqueness were equated with “madness” often by those same anguished, tormented individuals as well as by government officials, missionaries, and other villagers. My personal acquaintance with such anguished individuals (both cult leaders and solitary experimenters) points to them not rejecting their “madness,” but embracing it as a domain of truthful suffering for which they sought compensation, from either God, the ancestors, the dead, or other villagers. The pain of mental anguish and social estrangement from others was revalued and renarrativized by these tormented individuals to link them with celebrated sufferers belonging to Melanesian and Christian mythology. As a universal human

experience grounded in embodiment, suffering seemed to offer an intercultural conduit for accessing and recombining diverse fields of identification, marginalization and domination. As a mythic scheme in both Melanesian and Western cultures, suffering offered a means of merging diverse ways of living and diverse ways of figuring the problematic relationships between power, truth, society, and the individual. The master narratives of grief, sorrow, pathos, and tragedy belonging to Christianity and Melanesian traditions were merged and re-enacted in the current suffering of alienated individuals who came to love and cultivate their madness, marginality, and suffering as their passport to truth, power, and a new world.

Despite many apprehensions, these tormented individuals fascinated other villagers with their claims to be the modern, embodied, archetypal representatives of suffering. Indeed, these troubled individuals often portrayed themselves as Christ-like figures, who through their pain could re-enact the promised return of Christ. As a second version of Christ, and more importantly as a black Christ, these individuals proclaimed themselves as able to redeem more fully Melanesian sins. They used their personal anguish to re-objectify and to re-embodiment the everyday anguish of ordinary Melanesians, of *ol graslain* (all grassline).⁸ Claiming to be the ultimate exemplars of racialized suffering and its mythological destiny, these individuals offered up their personal suffering as a conduit through which the suffering of ordinary Melanesians could be sacralized and redeemed by being merged with the creative suffering of Christian and Melanesian mythic heroes. Drawing on clandestine aspects of rural Christianity, these troubled individuals merged Christian crucifixion imagery of death and rebirth with traditional stories of scorned heroes: such as the double skin heroes who hid their lighter skin underneath an outer darker skin of putrid sores; or the knowledgeable heroes who hid their power underneath a cloak of feigned simplicity; or the snotty nosed ancestress with her limping grandchild who received God's taro and magical language. For communities and individuals, suffering provided a familiar theme of magical lowliness that spanned and drew together diverse traditions and contexts, which had their own formulations of alienation, torment, sorrow, and tragedy. The shared embodied aspects of suffering underpinned its intercultural uses, which in turn generated a utopian sense of transcending differences. Suffering served to tie together the myths of Christianity and Melanesia, but also all that this implied, namely, tying together custom and modernity, the past and the pres-

8. *Graslain* refers to those at the bottom of the social order. Borrowed from the plantation economy, it originally referred to laborers assigned the hot, arduous work of cutting grass.

ent, the living and the dead, the surface world and the underground, Europeans and Melanesians, and the visible and the invisible.

These personal and collective experiments with the meaning of suffering were experiments in identity and sociality, which sought to realize anew the bridging work of myth. Both Lévi-Strauss (1972, 1979) and Serres (1982, 1991) have analyzed myth as comprised of unique movements and events that connect together different differences. Myth articulates human creativity as the innovative task of accounting for and linking together the various cleavages comprising the world. Sorrowful suffering was embraced by cult leaders, shamans, the mad, and the lonely as part of local struggles to recreate the underpinning mythological terms of the world by bringing together in new ways its diverse divisions. Racial empowerment resided in re-enacting primordial mythic acts that creatively bridged different differences, that reterritorialized different identities and existences onto each other. There was a millenarianism inherent in the transcending work of escaping orthodox narratives and cultural perspectives through their selective articulation and recombination.

Secrecy, Gender, and Modernity

Like dreams, visions, madness, and cargo cults, in New Britain, folktales also articulated utopian concerns by telling of exceptional individuals who secured rare access to secret hybrid racial worlds. Invariably, they secured prohibited European knowledge via fortuitous circumstances, such as a chance overseas journey, a lucky meeting in the bush with a white dead relative or a white masalai, unusual dreams or visions, and the studying of strange coincidences of meaning between Melanesian and European cultures. Other folktales told of secret knowledge obtained as a gift from a special relation of friendship and long term debt between a native *wokboi* (worker) and his *masta* (white supervisor or employer) (Lattas 1989). From the Kaliai coast, Censure's family acquired the story of how a relative there, who had worked hard in Rabaul for his *kiap* (government officer), was rewarded with access to secret photos taken by the dead. The photos depicted Censure's followers performing cult ceremonies. Another story told by Censure's family was how a coastal Kaliai villager, who had worked hard on overseas ships, was rewarded by his European captain showing him how their ship could secretly travel on land and even underground, into local Kaliai mountains from where cargo secretly originated. A more widely known bush Kaliai story told by non-cult villagers was how the policeman, Aikele, received special knowledge by saving the life of his *kiap* from the arrows of wild natives on the mainland, who had yet to

be civilized by government and church. As his reward, Aikele was taken in a special submarine that traveled underground into local Kaliai mountains.

Fearing jail, villagers continue to hide such “true” stories from Europeans and educated Melanesians, who now work as kiaps, priests, doctors, teachers, and agricultural officers. Villagers have created new forms of camouflage, dissimulation, and selective disclosure as the basis of rural solidarity. Secret folktales articulate local resistance to being governed by a national, Melanesian middle class, with villagers valorizing their alternative white knowledge as not controlled by the befooling practices of government, church, and schools. Throughout New Britain, new secrets are cultivated as the suppressed truths of backward folk who revalue their rural poverty and marginality as them remaining loyal to their *kanaka* roots and *kaulong savi* (cow-long, i.e., naïve, backward knowledge). Here secrecy can assume a racial dimension as the authentic native truths of *buskanaka* (bush villagers) whose myths, magical practices, experiences, and history provide them with more knowledge than they are credited. A coastal Kaliai big man, who touched on the story of how God had originally belonged to the Kaliai and had run away, was reluctant to tell me any more. He explained: “these stories belong to us natives, we tell them to each other; it is best if they stay with us.” Here, shared secret stories are protected from a prying Whiteman, for they mark out native autonomy. In allowing villagers to escape what Whites want them to believe, secrecy also protects a clandestine Christianity that localizes God and the Fall.

In conversations, villagers will frequently racialize everyday misdemeanors as Melanesian traits inherited as a punishment for having chased away God. A propensity and proficiency in lies, secrets, and tricks is regarded as a racial punishment given by an ostracized Melanesian God to his intolerant kinsmen. This racial punishment is seen to be iconically embodied in the burden of a customary society of masks where men must repeatedly trick women and children into believing that men’s house tambarans are real monsters (Lattas 1992c).⁹ However, throughout New Britain, villagers will sometimes racialize secrecy and trickery in the opposite way, as something truly belonging to Europeans. Villagers will characterize Whites as the supreme tricksters and concealers of truth. Whites can more than show Melanesians a trick or two in practices of concealment and befoolment that Melanesian men covet as the customary basis of their artful identity and power. In all of my three fieldwork locations, the true secret knowledge that Whites hide from Melanesians was likened by men to their traditional men’s house secrets, which underpinned

9. Throughout New Britain, men’s house tambarans are wild bush spirits that include dancing masks and the cries made by the sounds of bullroarers, flutes, and coconut shells.

the inequalities between men and women, initiates and non-initiates, and older men and younger men (Herdt 2003; Herdt and Poole 1982; cf. Simmel 1906). In particular, men equated European secrecy with the fenced enclosures and secluded bush clearings where men secretly eat the food belonging to masks and where men secretly change into masks that women and children must accept as real. Referring to this, men characterized themselves as feminized by the masculinizing tricks of Europeans: *ol i wokim mipela olsem meri* (they manipulate us like women).

This linking together of the gender hierarchy with the racial hierarchy is a prominent feature of popular myths, which attribute the racial fall of Melanesians to women and their breach of male secrecy. In the north west of New Britain, the myths involve a serpent God known as Moro, whilst on Bali he is called Luangeh (Blythe 1995; Counts 1994; cf. Young 1983). Invariably, he is said to hide the lower, snake-like part of his body from his wives (often three) who live and sleep in separate houses. Each morning, after his wives left the village to go and collect food from bountiful gardens, this masalai deity would emerge from his house to sun his huge snake body. Its coils would hang from trees and house roofs. In the afternoon, prior to returning home, his wives were required to hit the base of a tree to warn their husband to re-enter his house. Whilst Moro or Luangeh resided with people, food came up by itself and women just collected it from gardens. This Melanesian paradise ended one day, when a wife pretended to leave her gardening-shell back in the village. She returned to spy on her husband's true body and informed the other wives: "We have not married a real man but a snake!" Angered by her disobedience and shamed by her name calling, the serpent God leaves his homeland, singing songs of sorrow (cf. Young, 1983). In the more secret version of this myth, which villagers tell each other and are reluctant to tell Europeans or educated Melanesians, the serpent God runs away to the land of Whites. He gives them his true knowledge. This is why today Whites are wealthy; why they have churches and schools that provide them with a superior moral education and with superior technical skills and knowledge for helping them to make cargo.

When Moro or Luangeh is humiliated and called "a snake," it is the power to name that is misused. In such myths, naming is shown to be not neutral and passive but a creative negative act, which calls forth new circumstances. The highlighting of differences transforms those differences into something else, creating more enduring negative inequalities. Name calling does more than accentuate existing cleavages, it transposes and ramifies them, creating more far reaching racial and national cleavages grounded in the removal of the creative alterity of God from Melanesians. The derogatory power to label and dismiss otherness, the inability to tolerate alterity, is revealed to underpin the

enduring cleavages of race.¹⁰ Though originally the serpent God hid Himself from others, from women, He still lived alongside Melanesians and conferred benefits to them. It is name calling that radically alienates villagers from their masalai God. I believe that revised versions of Moro and Luangeh myths emphasizing the creation of racial inequalities came to the fore during the colonial period and under the plantation economy, a period of time noted for its own name calling, that is, for its categories and labels which differentiated and shamed people; and decried their embodied form of human alterity. Colonial labels such as native, Kanaka, and *buskanaka* carried mild rebuke compared to villagers' accounts of kiaps and plantation owners calling them *longlong*, *kau-long* (mad, simple), black bastard and black arse. Rural villagers searched their myths for the origins of shame, for the origins of socially fragmenting linguistic categories and practices. They took up the humiliated hero or outcast in customary myths but now tied the origins of racial inequalities to the divisive effects of language.

A similar critique of language resides in the myths of the bush Kaliai cult led by Censure. The myths tell of a deity who uses to hide his knowledge and power by assuming the persona of a simpleton (a *longlong* man). He was described as a good man who played dumb. He pretended to be simple and mute to avoid talking to people and to avoid the divisiveness and acrimony of gossip. However, bush Kaliai men became jealous of his large gardens and chased him away, calling him a *longlong rabis* man. This cult story resonated with more widely known bush Kaliai stories about the double skin hero, Akrit, who is often equated with the trickster figure and ostracized hero, Titikolo. When performing Akrit's voice, men often employ a lisp, which partly serves to endear Akrit and render him childlike. Like a child, Akrit speaks falteringly and imperfectly, like someone outside the social world who is unfamiliar with its meanings and rules of communication. Akrit's lisp marks his words as not being exactly the same as other people's words. Indeed, Akrit is renowned as inhabiting an alternative world of meaning, which is seen to be most exemplified in him hiding his knowledge and his beautiful lighter skin underneath an offensive, smelly skin of putrid sores. It is no accident that in a colonial context of embodied racialized power, villagers elaborated on myths about traditional heroes marginalized because of their corporeal difference, incapacity or disgusting, frightful bodies. These corporeal forms of alterity supplied the alienated god or deity who created the alienating effects of race.

10. Calling Moro "a snake" resonates with another Kaliai myth of a productive young woman from the dead who married and resided with the living until she was shamed and called "a tambaran" by her mother-in-law (Counts 1980).

In all these myths of lost knowledge and creativity, the origins of racial inequality are attributed to the habitual faults of Melanesians—jealousy, quick temper, gossip mongering, and intolerance. The myths primordialize and racialize negative human qualities as responsible for Melanesians' downfall. But the role of these myths in the ideological reproduction of a racial hierarchy is not straightforward, it is undercut by the myths also articulating a critique of social judgements that treat bodies and appearances as paramount. It is no accident that with the coming of Europeans, New Britain villagers elaborated myths affirming the need to tolerate radical forms of bodily alterity, whether it be that of a terrifying human/snake monster, a mute simpleton, a tongue-tied lispng champion, or a smelly dirty hero covered in sores. Ostensibly, operating as moral cautionary tales, I interpret the myths as racial allegories, which revalue frightful or deviant bodies by revealing their hidden beauty and generative powers. There is an egalitarian subtext in these origin myths, but this egalitarianism should not be overdrawn or, rather, its limits should be recognized, for some myths articulate powerful moral critiques of women as responsible for a racial fall (Bamberger 1974). For example, in Moro and Luangeh myths, it is an original, secret world of self-contained, male power and fecundity that a woman breached and should have respected. The enormous damaging consequences of a woman returning to spy on her husband's hidden, snake body means that the myths posit the need for a certain complicity with secrets, with men's monstrous secrets, as necessary and beneficial. It would be tempting to view such stories of a Melanesian fall from an original magical garden as local, reworked versions of the Christian story of a fall from the Garden of Eden due to woman's disobedience. However, the first half of these myths about snake gods and lost plenitude seems to be quite old, for elderly men claim they heard the stories of Moro and Luangeh from their parents and grandparents. I believe that with the arrival of Christianity and Europeans, customary myths about loss were elaborated from a previous concern with gardens and gender to encompass the modern field of cargo and race. Customary, Melanesian, patriarchal moral codifications of women and transgression found support in Christian patriarchal myths about Eve and a lost Paradise Garden. More than this, Melanesian men used the new racial order with its material inequalities to reconsolidate local gender inequalities. The myths problematized anew the position of Melanesian women, whose primordial disobedience now produced not just a loss of fertile gardens but a racial fall responsible for the inequalities of colonialism and modernity.

On Bali Island and in the Kaliai Bush, many villagers believe their lost offended god did try to return to his homeland to forgive and share his true knowledge with his kinsmen, but Whites prevented this (Lawrence 1964; Wors-

ley 1957). Some say the Australians objected angrily that Moro or Luangeh's return would end the need for natives to work on Australian plantations and so the Australians killed him. However, like the Whiteman's Christ, with whom he is often identified, Moro or Luangeh came back to life. It is rumored that he has already returned to his homeland, but he awaits the right time to reveal himself. It will be when Melanesians have morally straightened themselves; he will then give them the utopian existence that Europeans have so far monopolized and that Melanesians lost. Such popular clandestine stories and beliefs inform the moral projects of New Britain cargo cults, but they are also shared with non-cult villagers, who participate in church, government, education, and cash crops. Many cult opponents also suspect Western institutions of not providing natives with the ultimate true knowledge and of offering only a small limited part of the powerful knowledge with which God ran away. A common mythological premise can sustain different participations in Western institutions, with cult followers and cult opponents having different motives and practices for seeking the limited knowledge now available since God ran away.

All through New Britain, many suspect the Whiteman's emphasis on churches, schools, government, and development is meant to distract Melanesians from uncovering their own truer road or doorway into modernity. Many regard Western criticisms of customary magic, dreams, burial practices and rituals as designed to stop villagers from creatively experimenting with the magical powers of their grandparents. Such villagers attribute their present poverty to a historical loss of previous empowering meanings. It is a catastrophe resulting from villagers having listened to Western criticisms and then rejecting or forgetting the important secret names, myths, or magical practices of their grandparents concerning the dead, *masalai*, and the underground. Many villagers have a strong sense of living in a time whose fullness has been suspended or withdrawn because of some missing truth or lost power (cf. Kaplan 1995). Many blame the coming of government and especially the church for moving the dead and *masalai* further away.¹¹ A decline in customary beliefs is said to have pushed further away not just customary ideas of the dead and *masalai*, but those actual beings. Thoughts and dialogues with those exceptional beings

11. As one bush Kaliai cult leader explained:

Now the Church has come up and has stopped them [dead coming up]. However, before when the church had not arrived and the government held us, then they all came up into the open. They would come and gather in one area, we would stand in another, we would talk and then we would go our separate ways. But now it is Andewa, Andewa [increased talk of Mount Andewa being the land of the dead]. I have heard talk that the Whiteman gets his cargo from Andewa.

kept them and their powers physically close. Using hallucinations, dreams, and speculative conjecture, some New Britain villagers have sought to re-establish those dialogues as a means of recovering customary knowledge that can provide alternative access to Whites and modernity. Some individuals and cults saw creative potential in creatively reusing western rituals, institutions, and artifacts which promised a new means for reordering the world. Similar hopes of access to an alternative modernity underpinned those who experimented with new languages for naming and reordering the world. Those languages were seen to be closer to the special language spoken by the dead or closer to the original creative language that God used when He was originally in New Britain.

The search for lost meanings and new realities has often involved a search for the alternative power of that which is singular and extraordinary, for that which transcends and can unravel the present order by standing outside it. Amongst cult leaders, shamans, and other individuals recognized for their inventive explorations of modernity and race, there was a desire not to be captured and controlled by the established rules that had bound others. As we have seen, some searched for the transformative powers of modernity in customary creative schemes bound up with the transgressive powers of the defiled, dirty, ugly, or discarded. Another customary creative scheme that figured prominently in popular stories and in cult ritual practices was the transformative power of gifts (Hyde 1983). In popular New Britain myths, the origins of racial inequalities were often figured as the ability of a small gift to create new relationships of friendship between outsiders. Indeed, modernity was acquired by Europeans through the power of a gift to bind and endear the autochthonous God whom Melanesians had rejected. Local myths attribute the origin of racial inequality not just to the ancestors having chased away God but also to the authentic generosity and friendship shown by a particular Whiteman towards this fugitive deity. Here, the transformative power of gifts was bound up not with equally exchanged gifts, but with the power of a true gift to create something new and larger than its own seemingly insignificant smallness.

Earlier I mentioned how, in Pomio, many believe God or Nutu originally gave the supreme magical power of *koinapaga* to two rubbish people (*silolo*). More specifically, Nutu was touched by how an old, decrepit grandmother thoughtfully gave Him a string of shell money, her humble meager treasure. This was to compensate Nutu for having helped her limping grandchild carry back the heavy taro that Nutu brought earlier in his mysterious canoe. In popular Pomio stories, the Kivung leader, Koriam, is said to have received his special knowledge of the *Tenpela Lo* (the Kivung's version of the Ten Commandments) after offering humble gifts of food, shelter, and fire to a mys-

terious Whiteman who came ashore in an unusual canoe. This Whiteman asked Koriam to stop calling him *masta* and instead to call him *brata* (brother). The creative power of true gifts features also in bush Kaliai myths involving the fugitive trickster god, Titikolo (Lattas 1992b, 1998 80–6; Thurston 1994; cf. Hyde 1998). In various myths, when he arrives in the land of white people, he disguises himself as a snake, crocodile, and destitute stranger. He then gives his knowledge to Whites on account of small gifts and kind acts volunteered by an ostracized Whiteman, a *rabis masta* (a rubbish Whiteman) who lives alone. This marginalized Whiteman sees beyond God's terrifying disguises and befriends him. He was not afraid when this Melanesian deity turned into a crocodile or a snake that coiled itself round his body. Some say the snake stuck its tongue into his mouth so that they kissed. Not afraid of frightful bodies, the *rabis masta* embraces and befriends radical alterity. In some accounts, the *rabis masta* has his own frightful, despised body covered with smelly sores. He is often described as an orphan, with some saying that he needed to steal food from other Whites to survive. And, yet, he offers his meager supplies to a jilted Melanesian deity. The humble generosity of this marginalized Whiteman allowed all Whites to receive the powerful knowledge of an offended Melanesian deity. Such stories romanticize the tolerance and kindness of the poor and despised. They reaffirm the moral value of a world of small gifts, which Melanesians on many occasions affirm as what truly distinguishes them from greedy selfish Whites whose everyday present practices deny the exceptional past grounds on which they received God's gift of knowledge. The mythological ostracized Whiteman is paradoxically a displaced racial version of Melanesians; for he mirrors back their ideal self, but via a relationship of racial distance that allows those values to be re-objectified.

In Titikolo myths, Whites received their knowledge and power through one of their own whom they banished and abused for his smelly sores and poverty. This marginalized Whiteman's kindness stands in opposition to those of race. The devalued, smelly skin and identity of the white rubbish man makes him similar to the bush Kaliai mythic hero Akrit, and also to everyday Melanesians whose skins are racially devalued. The mythic persona of the white rubbish man embodies a generosity or kindness of spirit that Melanesians try ideally to enact amongst themselves via everyday gifts of food, money, shelter, and labor. Living in coercive monetary worlds, which has required hard work on European plantations or on their own cash crops for little financial return, villagers have tried in their cults, folklore, and everyday practices to reclaim an alternative, more moral world of exchange than that provided by the money economy. Villagers will idealize and affirm an alternative Melanesian world of gifts, love, and kindness whose morality is juxtaposed to the individualism

and self-interest of the Whiteman's world of *bisnis*. In their cults, followers will try to institute idealized values, relationships and practices as a way of escaping the present and this often involves reinventing modernity's current forms of exchange. Cult followers will try to create between themselves new forms of exchange that emphasize gifts and that use modern money differently. In the Pomio Kivung, where cash crops and tradestores are criticized, money is channeled into moral confessional work known as the "business of the Ten Commandments." This moral use of money is intended "to buy out" an alternative modernity from the dead. On Bali, the donation of coconuts and labor by Dakoa's followers for cult copra production is said to be "love." This love and its money will draw the dead closer. All the cults with which I have done fieldwork have tried to use moral correctness and gifts in the surface world to unearth an underground currency that promises to be a more generous currency. It will have a higher value than the current depreciated currencies that Whites have installed for their benefit. The new money will confer permanent wealth for, though spent at a store, it will magically return to its original owner.

Along with uncovering a hidden alternative modern economy, cult followers strive also to unearth their own alternative modern government, King or God who will bring another kind of law, bureaucracy, morality, and system of justice to that of the present. In the three cult areas where I have done intensive fieldwork, villagers are morally ambivalent about themselves and their customs. Sometimes villagers will racialize themselves positively by talking about themselves (*mipela Blakskin*) as possessing more generous, sympathetic, and yielding sentiments to those of *yupela Waitskin* (you Whiteskins). Yet the same villagers will also denounce themselves for the immorality of their violent ancestral customs, such as cannibalism, widow killing, warfare, sorcery, and the terrifying masks of the men's house. Villagers will criticize their ancestors for not having listened to God, or for not having shown tolerance towards His tricks and trials of them. Villagers will characterize themselves as hot tempered brutes who are too prone to beating their wives and arguing with relatives and neighbors. Such present pigheaded (*bikhet*) practices are interpreted as re-enacting the ancestors' original disobedience and rejection of God. This sense of an inherited stained moral persona is partly an internalization and a revoicing of negative racial evaluations of Melanesians made by white kiaps, missionaries, and plantation owners. It is partly hegemonic submission, with villagers taking up the moral ideology of dominant Europeans, but in ways that allow villagers to remake and re-own the pedagogic logic informing their domination. In re-owning Western moral critiques of themselves, villagers strive to master modern structures of social control founded in a logic of moral progress. In his subtle analysis of cargo cult myths, Burridge (1960) argues that the

mythologization of colonial inequalities as a racial fall can empower Melanesians by assigning original causes to them. It makes them the true active agents of world history even if they were originally flawed moral agents. Here is the paradox of Melanesians empowering themselves by blaming themselves. As originators of a flawed world, Melanesians are nevertheless its secret underpinning primary ground; its unrecognized mythological governing force. Given their original actions created the world, then their behavior can again change the world. Its destiny lies in Melanesian hands, and especially in the moral work that villagers (and more especially, cult followers) perform upon themselves to redeem their fall as the basis of a new world history.

In *Cultures of Secrecy*, I chronicled the various experiments in pastoral practices by different bush Kaliai cults. I explored the history of villagers' experiments with social relationships, rules, beliefs, and practices for remaking themselves. In this book, I move away from documenting specific cults and their historical emergence to focus more on the underlying folklore culture and the background assumptions from which particular cults emerged and which continued long after specific cults ended. This underlying culture was not shattered by the collapse of a cult movement and the discrediting of its leaders and prophecies. Indeed, these resilient background beliefs were reinvoked by ex-followers when explaining their movement's failure and when comparing it with other successful movements (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Lévi-Strauss 1972). When Censure's cult declined in the late 1970s, many of his followers joined other bush Kaliai cults: those of Melo, Malour, Mapilu, Watna, and later a movement operating secretly inside the New Tribes Mission (Lattas 1996, 1998). Some bush Kaliai villagers are teased by relatives for going from one cult to another. Even villagers, who are skeptical of cult movements in their local area, may nevertheless speak positively of exceptional individuals elsewhere who have found money, cargo, forms of power, or who have contacted the dead, masalai, and God. To be critical of local cults and their leaders does not mean that villagers are skeptical that God was a Blackman, an ancestor, or that individuals can use magic to make money multiply.¹²

When explaining the failure and dissolution of their cults, ex-followers would often point to moral faults amongst themselves or in cult leaders. Such explanations reinforced the myths of moral problematization that underpinned cult movements and their pastoral practices. The deceptive practices and moral failings of particular cult leaders and followers were interpreted

12. In Pomio, some Catholic businessmen seek magical help for their tradestores from Kivung cult leaders, asking that they help profit to come up inside their store's commercial activities.

as re-enacting the original *bikhet* (pigheadedness) of Melanesians towards their God. The failure of cult prophecies did not lead ex-followers to jettison their underlying mythological assumptions about the moral origin of racial inequalities and how these could only be overcome through continual ethical vigilance. Today, those same mythic assumptions of a stained racial heritage underpin conversion to “born again” Christianity, such as to the New Tribes Mission in the Kaliai Bush (Lattas 1996, 1998). Theoretically, I agree with anthropologists and philosophers who speak of ontology and its historical articulations (Ernst 1978, 1991a; Heidegger 1971, 1977; Jackson 1989, 1995; Kapferer 1983, 1988, 1997; Mimica 1981, 1988; Sartre 1975). By definition, ontological suppositions and schemes are pervasive and, in this book, I document their generative presence in such seemingly disparate phenomena as people’s concerns with sorcery, shamanism, modern technology, madness, money, bureaucracy, and fictional tales about white people. Various domains of life were reworked in similar kinds of ways to explore and reinvent the moral meaning of modernity and race. This inventiveness was not random, isolated, or haphazard but had a cultural logic and a politics to it.

People did not create randomly, but within what Bourdieu (1969) calls an intellectual field, which for Foucault (1972, 2003) is made up of strategic possibilities forming a “system of regulated differences and dispersions” (see Bourdieu 1988). It would be a mistake to homogenize the diverse dreams, stories, beliefs, and practices of villagers into one core underlying meaning or strategy. Instead, there were many creative, crisscrossing strategies through which villagers strove to remap and transcend their present anchoring as racial rural subjects. Conscious of their captivity, of being entrapped both by the past and the modern world, people sought out dreams, visions, rumors, stories, and cult practices that experimented with the possibilities for experiencing and knowing the world. Even when their trials and adventures ended seemingly unsuccessfully by producing no radical change in material living standards, those failures still helped to maintain local forms of hope by sustaining and elaborating on shared secret knowledge that the world was not how it appeared.

I am interested in what organizes people’s inventiveness; in the socio-historical context and conceptual schemes that organize and generate creativity. In all cultures, there are practices and conventions for realizing and authorizing the newly created. Individuals do not just create haphazardly, without rhyme or reason. There are authorities to acknowledge and styles to follow or refer to—even if these are to be reworked. What’s more, and paradoxically so, that which appears novel or unique can have its own conventions for being figured, placed, and disclosed as novel or unique. Those cultural schemes give

the newly created its recognizable otherness, its recognizable transgressive quality and, in doing so, they use transgression and alterity as social vehicles of creativity. In anthropology, Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) and Victor Turner (1967, 1969) explored how transgression and the outside have their cultural schemes of reckoning which often involve schemes for figuring and positioning ambivalences, ambiguities, tabooeness, monstrosity, and pollution. Yet at the same time as creativity is contained, constrained and emerges out of a culture of transgression and alterity, which it may also be modifying, creativity cannot be seen to be overly ruled by rules. What is novel cannot appear as such if it is overly controlled by conventions. It must give the appearance of partly breaking custom and ordinariness, and here we have a paradox: conventions for figuring the unconventional; schemes and rules for constituting transgressions. Creativity is caught up in such paradoxes, where people follow but also reinvent the codes for figuring that breaking of conventions, which in turn works to situate the singular that will become originary. In cults, dreams, and folktales, villagers reinvented customary forms of the unique, the strange, and the indeterminate by entering into a dialogue with how they were figured in Western culture.

Shamans, cult followers, the mad, and ordinary villagers were drawn into extraordinary beliefs, practices and objects which seemed capable of mediating and objectifying a more ambiguous indeterminate existence where hope and the future could be sought anew. Here I agree with Bachelard's (1964, 1969, 1983) efforts to study the dynamics of human creativity not in the abstract (as purely formal processes) but via the material character of the objects within which thought poetically immerses itself and through whose material properties it gains its own conceptual possibilities. Creativity is formed partly by the nature of its subject matter, by the specific physical properties of the things it manipulates and which in turn partly provide its parameters and constitutive possibilities. To paraphrase Lévi-Strauss (1963: 104, 1966), certain things are good to think with. Like many other cultures, precontact Melanesian cultures were fascinated with underground terrains and pools of water (cf. Williams, R. H. 1990). Their depth sustained customary hermeneutic labors that were interested in concealed worlds and, in particular, in the copresence and yet invisibility of masalai and the dead who lived in a hidden, generative mirror world. It was no accident that contemporary cult followers, shamans, and the curious took up those same customary invisible terrains but merged them with a new found interest in the generative, mimetic possibilities of cameras, telephones, televisions, radios, bookkeeping, and offices. Western culture brought new forms of hope through church, government, and cash crops, but also through its doubling practices, instruments, and institutions.

Modernity's duplicating powers enchanted villagers along with modernity's technological power to bridge spatial distances. Perhaps, more accurately, Western mimetic techniques offered another bridging possibility, for it allowed villagers to realize anew the customary magical relationship of efficacy between a signified and its signifier, that is between a removed, hidden reality and its accessible *piksa* or virtual copies (see Taussig 1993, 1997).

This book explores popular articulations of hope in New Britain (Crapanzano 2004). Alongside cargo cults, it studies the dispersed, everyday forms that utopian practices assumed and it rejects recent quantitative approaches to hope, which use the language of NGO organizations to talk of building up "a capacity to hope" or "a capacity to aspire" in the poor and marginalized (Appadurai 2004). This new version of the culture of poverty argument assumes that hope is lacking amongst the downtrodden, that their culture and creativity fails them and this helps to create their oppression. This book treats hope and utopian aspirations as an inherent part of being human and it studies their articulation through various mediums such as myths, rituals, cults, dreams, hallucinations, folktales, rumors, and idle speculations. Invariably, villagers' diverse mediums of exploration reinforced, intermingled, and elaborated on each other. For example, dreams often repeated themes or motifs in stories of overseas journeys where different heroes explored distinct ways of transcending modernity's structures of inequality in race, wealth, power, and knowledge. In a variety of ways, villagers relived and remapped their rural, class, and racial subordination through unorthodox understandings of their captivity that involved exploring anew the potential for undoing their situation via certain extraordinary trials and disclosures. Villagers used diverse mediums to articulate their concerns with borders and boundaries, clandestine forms of travel and communication, and invisible worlds and foreign lands. Their desire to break out of the confines of their everyday world led villagers to reinvent dreams, storytelling, ways of seeing and knowing, forms of travel and mediums of communication. It is the production of worlds through mapping, duplication, and exploring their margins, which was reformulated in local experiments with modern and customary ways of perceiving and knowing. Even when those experiments were not apparently organized to furnish an alternative social order, which was what the cults sought to accomplish, those explorations still formed part of a folklore culture of hope whose secrets sustained a double vision and a duplicitous engagement with modernity, which kept alive hope of an alternative local modernity even if for the time being it was postponed and thwarted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is indebted to villagers in New Britain, Papua New Guinea, with whom I lived and worked for over four years. In December 1985, I began fieldwork amongst the bush Kaliai who became divided over whether to welcome, tolerate or reject my research into their beliefs and practices.¹ In 1995, my field studies shifted to two other ethnographic areas, namely Pomio in East New Britain and the island of Bali in West New Britain.² For comparative purposes, I draw on this new ethnography to document the pervasiveness of certain transformations in Melanesian culture and society. Most of this book's ethnography is from the bush Kaliai villagers of Aikon, Bolo, Doko Sagra, Meitavale, Molou, Onamanga, Robos, and Salke. They generously provided me with food, shelter, information and companionship. For the information and insights they provided into their culture, I owe special thanks to Aliaso, Bowle, Acut, Monongyo, Nakala, Posingen, Thereesa, Septireh, Samaga, and Paul. Occasionally, I have changed the names of informants to protect them from recriminations, which today can come from educated villagers as well as from government officers, teachers, doctors, priests, catechists, and the lay preachers and missionaries of the New Tribes Mission.

When discussing the stories (*vasingen*, i.e. myths of origin) and *wok* (work, i.e. ritual work) of local cults, bush Kaliai villagers would occasionally digress to describe similar beliefs and practices in nearby regions.³ Some accounts were fabulous and inaccurate, revealing more about local Kaliai understandings of cosmology, power, and cult leadership. What information villagers had about

1. I use "Kaliai Bush" in the same way as rural villagers do, as a shorthand, descriptive, proper name for the Kaliai hinterland. The term "bush Kaliai" is used as a shorthand term to sum up Anem, Aria, and Mouk speakers living in the Kaliai hinterland.

2. Throughout West New Britain, Bali is the common name used for Unea or Uneapa Island.

3. Italics are used to mark Melanesian Pisin words and bold to mark indigenous words. The latter are mostly in the Austronesian language of Mouk though some, as the context will make clear, are in the Austronesian Pomio language of Mengen.

other movements came primarily through marriage, visits to and from in-laws and from working on plantations. Some information came when bush Kaliai cult followers were jailed with cult followers from other areas at administrative posts like Hoskins, Gloucester, Kandrian, and Pomio whose surrounding populations had their own millenarian beliefs and practices. Since 1995, I have made over five fieldwork trips to Bali and Pomio. On Bali, I lived with the cult leader Dakoa and his family at the cult's headquarters at Nigalani. I slept and worked in the back room of a house that had a large front veranda where cult meetings were held. Most mornings, at around 7 o'clock, Dakoa would arrive and we would sit down to share breakfast and a cup of tea before cult meetings started. Alone, Dakoa and I would go over his movement's complex history, beliefs, practices, and expectations. Later, I would receive in this back room a steady stream of cult leaders, secretaries, prophets, and ordinary followers. Some were regulars like Dau, Devoku, Kalago, Kambeki, Moia, and Tsigomori. With a mixture of solemnity and impatience, they would line up to describe their latest dreams, visions, conversations, and ritual work with the underground. At their urging I visited their home villages—at Malangae, Nalagaro, Ninbodeh, Rukaboroko, Kumburi One, and Kumburi Two—and to those villagers I owe gratitude for their hospitality and willingness to share cult activities and secrets.

My interest in Dakoa's cult and the Pomio Kivung was stimulated by the fact that, unlike bush Kaliai cults, both are long running movements. Interestingly, both trace their start to 1964 and today both see themselves as homegrown Melanesian churches (see photo 1). Currently, though both are in decline, they each still retain large followings numbering a few thousand. Two ex-Pomio villagers, who married and now reside in the Kaliai Bush, aroused my curiosity about the Pomio Kivung. Simon who lives at Bolo village and Philip at Molou village would listen to their Kaliai in-laws recounting participation in local cults and would then be keen to discuss similar beliefs and practices in their respective Pomio home villages of Matong and Mile. Their rich information turned out to be accurate; and it inspired my first visit to Pomio in 1995. It was then that I asked Kivung leaders for permission to allow fieldwork by a Ph.D. student, Helen Aquart. She became very much accepted and loved in Pomio, by both Kivung and non-Kivung villagers. I am indebted to Dr. Helen Aquart for detailed information and perceptive insights into Mengen beliefs and practices. In Pomio, I worked mainly with coastal Mengen villages of Bain, Matong, Kaiton, and Salel whose Kivung members generously made available their cult office records, meetings, ceremonies and beliefs. Special thanks must go to Peter Avereh, Busa, Francis Koimanrea, Gimi, Joe, Mimi, Thomas, Otto, and the late Lopulia and Alois Koki. Over the last five years, I



Photo 1. A Dakoa cult church meeting; Luangeh is carved and painted on a post.

have made visits into the Pomio interior to study splinter Kivung groups belonging to Kol and Tomoip speakers and I especially thank their leaders, Augustine, Timoi, Ura, and Penekoh.

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At an intellectual level, I dedicate this book to a great teacher of anthropology in Australia, Tom Ernst. His wide scholarship, inspiring teaching, and deep thinking inspired me to work in Papua New Guinea. My research is also indebted to the moral and intellectual support of colleagues and friends: Gillian Cowlshaw, Michael Jackson, Vivienne Kondos, Jadran Mimica, and Barry Morris. Intellectually, I have always drawn inspiration from the creative in-

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