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Moro and the Weather Coast

A Revitalization Movement in the Solomon Islands

Gülbün Çoker O'Connor



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*This book is dedicated to the memory of
William Davenport.*

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Series Editors' Preface

Moving Movements

*Andrew Strathern & Pamela J. Stewart**

The peoples of the Solomon Islands have become well known in the ethnographic literature through the work of many anthropologists. They also suffered severely, as did many other Pacific Islanders, in the Second World War, with the campaigns of the Allies against the Japanese. Life was disrupted, many died, reconstruction was difficult and slow. Small wonder, then, that in the midst of all this anomie and upheaval, numerous movements arose aiming to revitalize indigenous practices and to reach out and grasp the material wealth and power that the outsiders exhibited.

Because many of these movements were underpinned by indigenous ideas about ancestors and other powerful spirits that were thought to be present in the landscape and the territories of groups, movements for change were often described as 'cargo cults,' the essential idea being that local people thought that the situation in which they were poor and lacked wealth would be reversed and they would find the key to wealth by ritual means. Rituals and politics were invariably tied together. Such popular movements were often accompanied by phases of great excitement and anticipation of change, which later might fade away, taking with it the prestige and influence of cult leaders.

The situation of the leader Moro was classic in these regards. He began his career with a visionary experience of direct contact with spirits, from whom he derived an imperative to impel the people into various development activities. The acquisition of money was the object of these ventures, and money carried with it a powerful symbolism in addition to its immediate value in community exchanges.

Moro tried to keep Movement sums of money in a kind of 'bank.' He was reluctant for this banked money to be drawn upon for expenditures. We see here introduced ideas of savings, profit, and investment, all passed through the strainer of local presuppositions. The resulting mix did not blend well with the ideas of the expatriate civil servants in the British colonial service of the day. Moro and his followers thought that their development efforts would be greeted with approval by the colonial Administration, but this did not happen. The story is a familiar one of miscommunication and disappointment or incomprehension on all sides. It is instructive, however, to note how persistently and faithfully Moro tried to find avenues for entrepreneurship, running right through numerous failures and disappointments. More favorable circumstances might have led to a very different outcome, in which at least some of Moro's economic projects could have been successful. A very strong part of the story of Moro is provided by Dr. O'Connor in her accounts of the life-histories of Moro's economic struggles. Lost opportunities mingle with misunderstandings here between Moro and the Colonial power, but through it all, thanks to the historical record of this book, Moro emerges as a committed and energetic man trying to bring 'development' (i.e., 'cargo') to his area and facing numerous obstacles along the way.

We are very pleased to include this uniquely significant ethnographic history in our Ritual Studies Monographs Series.

Angkemam Research Unit Remote
September 2021
PJS and AJS

*Note**

Pamela J. Stewart (Strathern) and Andrew J. Strathern are a wife-and-husband research team who are based in the Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh and co-direct the Cromie Burn Research Unit. They are frequently invited international lecturers and have worked with a number of museums to assist them with their collections. Stewart and Strathern have published over 50 books, over 80 prefaces to influential books, over 200 articles, book chapters, and essays on their research in the Pacific, mainly Papua New Guinea (Mount Hagen, Duna, and Wiru areas primarily) and the South-West Pacific region (e.g., Samoa, Cook Islands, and Fiji); Asia (mainly Taiwan, and also including Mainland China, Inner Mongolia, and Japan); Europe (primarily Scotland, Ireland, Germany, and the European Union countries in general); and New Zealand and Australia. One of their strengths is that, unlike some others working in the Mount Hagen area among the Hagen people, they learned the language, Melpa, and used it to understand the lives of the local people. Their most recent co-authored books include *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip*

(Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Kinship in Action: Self and Group* (Prentice Hall, 2011); *Peace-Making and the Imagination: Papua New Guinea Perspectives* (University of Queensland Press with Penguin Australia, 2011); *Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion* (Bloomsbury Academic Publications, 2014); *Working in the Field: Anthropological Experiences Across the World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); *Breaking the Frames: Anthropological Co-nundrums* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); *Sacred Revenge in Oceania* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); *Sustainability, Conservation, and Creativity: Ethnographic Learning from Small-scale Practices* (Routledge Publishing, 2019); *Sustainability, Conservation, and Creativity: Ethnographic Learning from Small-scale Practices* (Routledge Publishing, 2019); *Language and Culture in Dialogue* (Routledge Publishing, 2021, originally published in 2019); *Heritage: Tradition and Contestation* (Carolina Academic Press, 2021); and *Scotland, Wales, and Ireland: Identity and History* (Carolina Academic Press, 2021). Their recent co-edited books include *Research Companion to Anthropology* (Routledge Publishing, 2016, originally published in 2015); *Exchange and Sacrifice* (Carolina Academic Press, 2008); *Religious and Ritual Change: Cosmologies and Histories* (Carolina Academic Press, 2009), including the updated and revised Chinese version (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing, 2010), and *The Palgrave Handbook of Anthropological Ritual Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). Stewart and Strathern's current research include the topics of *Cosmological Landscapes*; *Ritual Studies*; *Political Peace-making*; *Comparative Anthropological Studies of Disasters and Climatic Change*; *Language, Culture, and Cognitive Science*; and *Scottish and Irish Studies*. For many years they served as Associate Editor and General Editor (respectively) for the *Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania* book series and they are Co-Series Editors for the *Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia* and the *Indo-Pacific* book series. They also currently serve as Co-Editors of four book series: *Ritual Studies*, *Medical Anthropology*, *European Anthropology*, and *Disaster Anthropology*, and they are the long-standing Co-Editors of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* (on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ritualstudies). Their webpages, listing publications and other scholarly activities, are: <http://www.pitt.edu/~strather/> and <http://www.StewartStrathern.pitt.edu/>.

Preface

In 1958, I graduated from the American College for Girls in Istanbul, Turkey, and came to Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania to study political science. The plan was to return at the end of two years to study law at Istanbul University. I happened to audit a course in anthropology that defined the concept of culture and what fieldwork was about. That one course opened up a special worldview for me, and I knew what I wanted to do the rest of my life.

As a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, I met Professor William Davenport, who had just joined the Penn faculty from Yale University. He had been working in the eastern Solomon Islands and in 1964, he heard about Moro and visited the village of Makaruka, the headquarters of the Movement. At some point, he asked me whether I would like to study an ongoing political/religious movement in Guadalcanal, part of the Solomon Islands group. He thought since I had a background in political systems, research into a current political movement would be tailor-made for me.

After the fieldwork year in 1965–1966, I returned to Philadelphia. In 1970, I had a daughter around the time I received a grant to go back to Guadalcanal. One option was to take her to Makaruka with me and the other was to leave her behind in Philadelphia. I could do neither. The grant was postponed for a year with no change in my feelings. After receiving my degree, I got a job offer from a midwestern university. My husband, who is an Egyptologist, was well settled at Penn and loved his job. After an agonizing period of weighing options, I did not take up the offer that would have involved weekly commuting.

Throughout my thirties, I lived with a feeling of grief of having to give up a dream. Gradually, I came to accept that my life was shaped by the kind of

person I am. I ended up running the office of the Ombudsman at Penn which meant helping faculty, students, and administrators to solve problems they had with the university. I lived with the idea of this book for many years. This is the islanders' story, a snapshot of a very specific time in the lives of a special people and of my own.

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