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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), pp. 43-63

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](http://www.rai.ac.uk/)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3034427>

Accessed: 26/07/2012 10:50

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# FROM MISSION TO MOVEMENT: THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON PATTERNS OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Scholars have long argued that the missionization of Melanesia helped to transform tribal fragmentation and localism through the dogma that humans are all God's children - that humanity is a vast community composed not only of kinsmen, neighbours and affines, but also of strangers one might briefly encounter and many more one will never meet. This article puts forward an alternative hypothesis: namely, that it was the mode of transmission of Christianity, rather than its dogmas, which made it possible for Papua New Guineans to envisage large anonymous communities. In particular, through participation in routinized religious worship, the memories of Papua New Guineans were politicized in a radically new way, leading to the emergence of micronationalist movements under indigenous leadership.

Most of the earliest European settlers in what is now Papua New Guinea were missionaries and, for many indigenous villagers even up to the present time, the most enduring and intensive links with European culture have been mediated by proselytizing Christians.<sup>1</sup> The latter were by no means exclusively white; indeed, many of the early missionaries were Polynesians and, later, Melanesians from the more heavily Christianized areas. But whether or not the carriers of Christianity were themselves ethnically European, the mode of religiosity that they sought to spread was fundamentally alien to Papua New Guineans. In this regard, my principal concern is not with the thematic differences between indigenous and Christian cosmologies, but with a fundamental contrast in the nature of their codification and transmission.

Christianity codifies its revelations primarily in language, specifically a body of written texts. Its mode of transmission is repetitive, involving continual sermonizing and liturgical ritual. Worship is public and the intricacies of religious dogma are openly broadcast to all who would listen. I will argue that these factors are related to the way in which Christianity instantiates a vast, diffusely integrated Christian fellowship, bound to an elaborate ecclesiastical hierarchy, incorporating elements of centralization at various levels. These are among the chief elements of what might be called the 'doctrinal mode of religiosity' (Whitehouse 1995).

The doctrinal mode of religiosity did not exist in pre-contact Papua New

Guinea. Despite the great range of variation in beliefs and practices across the region, I will attempt to characterize positively certain widespread features of Melanesian religion, and their political implications. Nevertheless, the main thrust of my argument hinges on a negative claim: namely, the non-existence of a doctrinal mode of religiosity in the traditional cultural repertoire.

Because of its distinctive patterns of codification and transmission, the spread of Christianity in Papua New Guinea produced radical changes in the way representations of 'community' were conceptualized. In particular, the forms of cognitive processing entailed in the remembering and enactment of Christian ritual enabled, for the first time in Papua New Guinea, identification with large anonymous communities governed by a centrally regulated orthodoxy. This transformation was a necessary condition for the development of indigenous movements promoting 'micronationalist' programmes.

### *Modalities of codification*

Christianity, in common with a great many other religions, codifies its cardinal ideas in language, primarily in a body of written texts and a tradition of sermonizing and proselytism. In order to win converts and maintain the faith or commitment of those raised within its churches, Christianity relies to a very great extent on the power of the Word. To be sure, the iconography of Christian art and architecture, the ethos and aesthetics of its melodies, rituals, styles of dress, body practices and other non-verbal elements all contribute to the distinctive character of Christianity as a whole, and of its myriad different churches, sects and cultic off-shoots. But the Word stands out among other transmissive modalities because it supplies crucial aspects of the *meanings* of all of them. No Christian ritual, no painting, no hymn, no statue, no altar, no posture in church - in fact, no aspect of Christian culture in general - can be adequately understood without reference to a body of ideas codified in language. This is by no means true of all religions, including many of those in pre-contact Papua New Guinea (as we shall see).

Words are powerful in Christianity because they are used rhetorically to bind together a set of absolute presuppositions through the logic of question and answer (Collingwood 1940). Every religion, indeed every ideology, proceeds from a finite set of absolute presuppositions about the nature of the cosmos. Such presuppositions are often implicit and unchallenged. When they are explicitly acknowledged, they are usually defended simply on the grounds that 'this is how it is', 'it is naturally thus', 'God has ordained it', or 'it is the way of the ancestors'. To those who maintain that something is natural or given, further investigation of their assertions is absurd, and possibly offensive. Within Christianity, however, there has always been an abundance of reasonableness with regard to the ideas which lead back to its absolute presuppositions. Codes of etiquette, differences of status and many other factors may restrict the arenas within which questions about Christian doctrine may be posed and by whom, but Christian cosmology is structured around sequences of questions and answers, rhetorically expressed in the gospels, sermons and a range of other forms of language-based transmission. We may pick any topic at random and the answers to our questions (however naive they may be) spring readily to mind. Why did Christ allow

himself to be crucified? To atone for the sins of humanity. Why is humanity sinful? Because God endowed humanity with an ability to choose between good and evil. How can we choose to be good? By following the example and teachings of Christ. What are the teachings of Christ? And so we could go on and on, choosing between a wide variety of possible questions in response to each answer, and answers in response to each question. All questions, however, would eventually lead us back to absolute presuppositions beyond which further inquiry is impossible.

This is not to suggest that Christian orthodoxies are perfectly integrated logically. Contradictory absolute presuppositions, entailed, for instance, in the problem of theodicy, present a serious challenge to the faith of some Christians. Other absolute presuppositions, such as the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, may contradict common sense rather than each other. The simplest (and no doubt the commonest) policy is to convert problems into absolute presuppositions. How can a benevolent and omnipotent God allow the innocent to perish in natural disasters? A typical answer is that this is God's inscrutable will and all further questioning is ruled out. Moreover, logical weaknesses can be converted into personal moral victories to the extent that the faithful can overcome or deny their doubts.

Nevertheless, the persuasiveness of Christianity rests to some extent on the plausibility of its absolute presuppositions and the comprehensiveness with which it supplies answers to all possible questions that connect them. This is an indispensable element in the revelatory character of Christianity. The process of accepting particular absolute presuppositions (for instance, because they accord with deeply held values or ontological commitments) and the process of constantly recapitulating the strings of questions and answers through which they are integrated, is a prerequisite of what Christians describe as 'faith'. Faith may appear to spring from other sources and the way it is codified may be taken for granted, but without its system of interlocking rhetoric Christianity could not exist or, rather, would be a very different kind of religion.

An alternative modality of codification is presented by some of the religions of pre-contact Papua New Guinea. For instance, within many indigenous fertility and ancestor cults, particularly those based around systems of initiation, language played only a supporting or even negligible role in the transmission of religious insights. Revelations took the form of non-verbal metaphors, triggered through the peculiar artefacts and choreography of collective rituals. In the case of initiation rites, novices typically discovered that their assumptions about certain natural phenomena were substantially false, that processes of reproduction, growth and decay were constituted in ways that inverted and otherwise contradicted what was implied or asserted in everyday discourse. It followed that such cults, and their revelations, were secret. The uninitiated (usually women and children) ostensibly lived in ignorance of the esoteric mysteries of nature, and only initiates came close to understanding the dynamics of cosmic renewal.

Barth (1975; 1987) provides abundant examples of the sorts of metaphoric processes involved in the initiation rites of the Baktaman of inner New Guinea. Dew, for instance, which is rubbed on the bodies of novices in a variety of rites, is a concrete metaphor for growth because it is perceived by the Baktaman to form

apparently 'out of thin air' and thus instantiates a mysterious process of increase. By contrast, running water (as in rivers and streams) is used to desacralize novices, to wash away the forces of growth engendered in such phenomena as dew. But because the metaphoric properties of dew and running water are not articulated in language, they are never directly contrasted. As Barth convincingly demonstrates (1975: ch. 17), ideas about dew as a force of growth and about running water as an instrument of desacralization, are transmitted in entirely different contexts as distinct revelatory episodes and there is no opportunity to integrate them through strings of questions and answers, or even to bring these separate metaphors into a relation of binary opposition. Revelations are linked by tentative associations but not, I would argue, by the sorts of rhetorical arguments that are characteristic of ideologies codified in language.

In the case of Baktaman initiation, the rendering of revelations in language is strictly taboo, even in secretly whispered conversations. This is probably the case with a number of indigenous religions in Papua New Guinea (see Bateson 1932: 337; Gell 1975; Tuzin 1992: 253; Whitehouse 1992). It is clear, however, that at least some traditional rituals are accorded substantial exegesis, often in the form of a corpus of esoteric mythology (see Harrison 1990; Poole 1976; Young 1983). But these verbalized cosmologies are attached to a modality of revelation which is very different from that of Christianity. First, it is the non-verbal metaphors transmitted through ritual that provide the core revelations of many Melanesian religions, and exegesis plays only a supporting role (if it exists at all). This has to do partly with the fact that verbal transmission of religious knowledge often occurs only among a tiny minority of ritual experts. We must therefore investigate, first and foremost, the non-verbal meanings of rituals for the majority of participants; only then is it possible to consider the esoteric versions of these meanings, codified in language (Gell 1992: 139). Even if all ritual participants were well-acquainted with exegetical commentaries, the latter could not be regarded as a sufficient rendering of indigenous cosmology. Whereas Christian rituals possess meaning only in the light of doctrines, stories and other verbal and textual materials, the concrete metaphors of many Melanesian religions transmit meaning in their own right, which may or may not be successfully embellished through oral transmission. Secondly, the myths relating to indigenous Melanesian rituals are seldom organized into a rhetorical (i.e. argument-based) discourse of question and answer. This would be conceded even by Melanesianists who attach the greatest importance to exegesis (where it is available), such as Juillerat, who observes in relation to the secret myths of the Yafar:

Clearly then the local theology must belong to the realm of the unspoken; to expect a full and clear description of it from the people is *fundamentally incompatible with the actual nature of this type of religion*. My Yafar friends have never given me the creation myth as a connected narrative ... They have instead given me the isolated elements, perfectly coherent, but requiring to be related to each other (1980: 732-3, emphasis in the original).

Aspects of the two modalities of codification may be emergent in all religious traditions, but one or other of the two modalities is usually dominant, at least within specific domains of religious action. Throughout pre-contact Papua New Guinea, argument-centred doctrinal systems were seldom (if ever) dominant in religious life. Far more common was a modality in which revelations were transmitted non-verbally through collective ritual. In Christianity, by contrast,

the Word occupies a position of dominance because non-verbal transmissions cannot be understood in the absence of verbal and textual rhetoric. Nevertheless, within local Christian traditions, including for instance many Mediterranean regions (see Christian 1972; Faubion 1991; Stewart 1991), there are domains of operation in which non-verbal metaphors play a crucial role in revelatory experience, resulting in a complex interplay of alternative modalities of codification. I discuss a similar situation below, within certain new religious movements in Melanesia.

In addition to the two modalities of codification, there are others, including those which have little or no revelatory potential. For instance, much pre-contact Melanesian ritual codified ideas in archaic, foreign, or jabberwocky-like language that held limited meaning for practitioners; examples would include magical rites that were widely bartered and exchanged (Weiner 1992: 27), various ceremonies marking puberty and other changes in the life cycle (Maschio 1994), and so on. Such practices do not concern me here. This article is concerned with the ways in which particular *revelatory* practices, utilizing the two modalities of codification which I have identified, affect the dynamics of group formation.

#### *Codification, memory and group formation*

The codification of religious ideas is linked to patterns of group formation in some rather obvious ways, which have already been identified by a number of scholars and can be summarized briefly.

Religions such as Christianity that privilege the Word can be spread quite efficiently across a wide area by just one or a few religious leaders, whereas non-verbal imagery triggered through collective ritual is much harder to spread, implying the movement of whole ritual communities, or else a chain-like process of transmission between contiguous populations (Barth 1990; Morauta 1972; Schwartz 1962). Even when a set of non-verbal ritual images spreads quite widely, verbal accounts of their history and origins generally do not, and each local ritual community tends to see itself pitted against the others, often developing its own distinctive versions of the religious tradition (e.g. Williams 1928). In short, argument-centred doctrinal systems are comparatively easy to spread, producing large-scale religious communities; non-verbal revelations engendered in ritual spread in a fragmentary way, or not at all.

In addition to these contrasts in scale, the two modalities of codification are linked to different dynamics of social structuration. Verbally codified, rhetorical cosmology tends to confer authority on its individual purveyors (such as messiahs, prophets, disciples, gurus and priests). By contrast, ritual imagery is not mediated by religious teachers but engendered in collectively transmitted metaphors (cf. Barth 1990). Thus, there is a tendency towards hierarchical structure where doctrinal systems prevail but not in ritually-constituted traditions. Moreover, in large-scale doctrinal systems, the achievement of coherence and homogeneity of the tradition depends upon centralization and delegation of religious authority. Overall leaders of a religion, as the ultimate earthly source of authoritative dogma and practice, may address congregations at a central location or travel widely to visit the faithful, but it is most common for

the orthodoxy to be filtered through deputized, centrally appointed officials. From a small group of disciples, it is easy to see in the history of many such religions the elaboration of ecclesiastical hierarchies, usually increasing in complexity after the death of the original founder and the spread of the religion to ever wider populations. An important task of such delegated officials is to protect the centrally formulated orthodoxy from local infractions. Such are the broad organizational characteristics of Christianity.

Thus, the two modalities of codification may be linked to some extent with divergent political trajectories, the one large-scale, centralized and hierarchical, and the other small-scale, uncentralized and possibly exhibiting egalitarian tendencies. What is less obvious, however, is that these trajectories entail contrasting conceptualizations of community, arising from differences in the frequency of religious transmission and ways in which these transmissions are remembered.

Argument-centred doctrinal systems must be reviewed on a regular basis if they are to be recalled accurately. The process of being socialized into such a tradition, or of being converted, involves regular exposure to religious teachings which reveal, over time, a relatively coherent and logically integrated worldview. Even when these systems are quite thoroughly grasped by the adherent, their stable reproduction depends upon regular reiteration. Traditions of this type are therefore invariably routinized. Those that are not simply fragment and disappear, or are transformed into an entirely different type of tradition.

By contrast, traditions founded upon non-verbal ritual imagery tend to be reproduced through longer cycles of transmission. The revelatory quality of the imagery has to do with the violation of everyday knowledge (see above) and, in this rather trivial sense, it could not itself be an 'everyday' experience. But there are much more important points to make about routinized and sporadic forms of transmission, because these variables can profoundly affect the way communities are envisaged.

Psychologists describe recollections of specific events as manifestations of 'episodic' or 'autobiographical' memory. When I remember the resignation of the former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, or a fight which unexpectedly broke out at my local bus-stop, much of what goes through my mind concerns a distinctive episode or series of episodes. The same is true of the way people remember revelatory rituals, the specific moments when their understandings about the nature of the world were violated or transformed.

By contrast, experiences of repetitive and predictable events are encoded in what psychologists call 'semantic' memory, a set of scripts or 'schemas' specifying, for instance, how to behave on aeroplanes, in restaurants, or (for that matter) during Christian services. This type of memory does not relate to particular episodes. If you ask a Christian what happened in church on a given Sunday several years ago, he or she will be able to describe the standard sequence of events that occurs at every service, but could probably not recall the actual events on that day.

Since the distinction between episodic and semantic memory was first formulated (Tulving 1972), the two have been found to be processually connected. According to Cohen (1989: 114-15), 'Semantic knowledge is derived from episodic memories by a process of abstraction and generalization'. The

problem is that while some memories seem to 'dissolve' into general schemas, others remain distinct. Some episodic memories are so vivid, detailed and long-lasting that they seem to constitute a particular type of remembering. For instance, many Americans claim to remember every detail of the circumstances in which they learned of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and this phenomenon has been described by psychologists as 'flashbulb' memory (Brown & Kulik 1982).

A recent theory of 'flashbulb memory', which attempts to describe the processual relationship between episodic and semantic memory, has been proposed by Wright and Gaskell (1992). Earlier theories of flashbulb memory proposed that it is a special mechanism that comes into play when an event violates normal expectations. Wright and Gaskell, by contrast, argue that all events are processed in the same way but that what gives certain memories 'flashbulb' clarity is the processing of indiscriminate details as a result of the failure to attach unfamiliar events to existing schemas. Wright and Gaskell envisage a cognitive processing loop, a simplified version of which is presented below.

Routine and familiar episodes do not go around the loop, at least not for any significant duration, whereas abnormal events result in a process of 'going round in circles', searching feverishly for some aspect of the event that will at last trigger a suitable schema and render the experience intelligible. This would explain why people remember so many apparently irrelevant details about abnormal episodes, which they describe as retaining a peculiar 'vividness'.

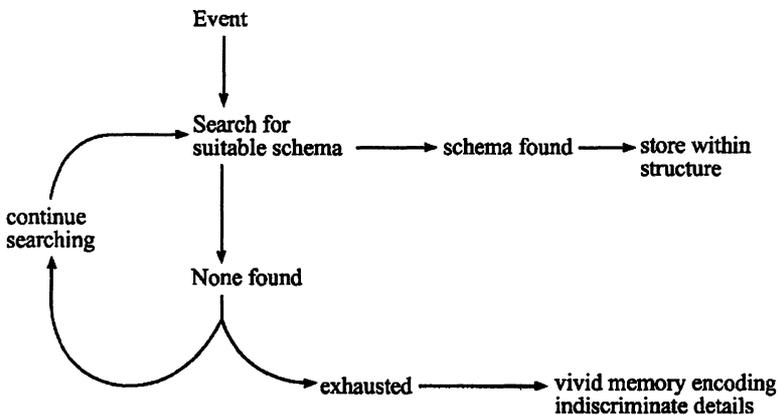


FIGURE 1. Wright's and Gaskell's (1992) model of the cognitive processing loop.

Wright and Gaskell add that 'abnormality' is not enough to produce the longevity associated with flashbulb memory. Something could be surprising but trivial and therefore eminently forgettable. Moreover, if all events that violate our existing schemas produced long-lasting and vivid memories, then clearly we would remember large portions of early childhood with flashbulb clarity. In fact, the opposite seems to occur. Since very young children lack appropriate semantic knowledge with which to make sense of many experiences, retrieval cues used in later life do not correspond to early encoding and recall becomes difficult or

impossible. Thus, most people have great difficulty remembering very much at all from early years of childhood (see Schachtel 1947; Winograd & Killinger 1983).

The solution proposed by Wright and Gaskell is that enduring and vivid episodic memories result in part from the fact that they have emotional value. They focus in particular on the role of such memories in conferring identity (1992: 286-8). Many of the episodes which very young children experience, and which fail to conform to existing schemas, have little emotional value either for the children themselves or for the adults around them. This is consistent with varying degrees of childhood amnesia.

In the study of religious codification and transmission, these arguments are of the greatest interest. The sorts of rituals that codify meaning non-verbally are not merely surprising to the participants, in so far as they challenge everyday assumptions, but also emotionally charged. Initiation rites, for instance, are very often intentionally terrifying and traumatic, a characteristic that has puzzled many scholars (see Whitehouse 1996c). In religious traditions of this type, revelation combines the violation of semantic knowledge with (often extreme) affective and sensory stimulation ranging from the pleasurable to painful. These are precisely the conditions in which flashbulb memories are activated (Herdt 1989; Whitehouse 1996c). Since the revelations triggered by such practices are unforgettable, the maintenance of a religious frame of mind among adherents does not require regular transmission. Indeed, precise repetition of a particular revelatory episode would, at best, be redundant and, at worst, rob the original experience of its uniqueness (Whitehouse 1992).

In relation to processes of group formation, it is crucially significant that affective experiences of collective ritual are remembered as distinctive, one-off episodes. One's episodic memories encode the specific identities of fellow participants or coevals with whom one underwent the ritual experience. The bonds uniting those who figure in each other's memories of emotionally intense, salient, formative and revelatory experiences are inherently particularistic. They cannot be extended to others who were not there, and they cannot exclude those who were.

The situation is very different in religions such as Christianity, in which rituals are highly routinized and therefore cognized as general schemas. Not only do repetitive experiences of the liturgy become fused into an abstract formula for 'how to do the ritual' but these schemas do not specify the identities of ritual participants. The congregation kneels, prays, stands, forms a line, receives the Eucharistic Host, and so on, but 'the congregation' is construed as an abstract entity. Individual members of the congregation do not constitute a fixed set over time. As the years pass, worshippers age, their appearances change, younger members grow up, older members die, new people are born into the parish and others depart. The particular identities of worshippers are therefore irrelevant to liturgical schemas.

In all human societies there are aspects of daily life which are remembered as general schemas rather than as distinctive episodes. Without schema-based memories it would be impossible to conceptualize anonymous others. One's social universe would consist only of particular persons and the seemingly endless series of episodes in which they figure. But in some societies, including

most (if not all) of those in pre-contact Melanesia, schema-based memories were not generated by activities which defined the *community*. Groups were defined primarily in terms of episodic memories of particular experiences of initiation, raiding, seances, mortuary rites and other types of sporadic ceremonial activity. In routinized religions, by contrast, membership of the community is based upon presumed continuities in the behaviour of anonymous others, conceptualized in semantic memory as a set of abstract schemas. What Anderson (1983) calls an 'imagined' community is literally that, although not simply in the terms he has in mind, because members of a nation, a world religion, or any other anonymous community *must* conceptualize their bonds at least partly in terms of abstract schemas encoding 'imagined' or fictitious others.

What I have been describing are two contrasting sets of dynamics. On the one hand, we have argument-based verbal and textual codification linked to routinization and the establishment of large-scale, hierarchical, centralized, anonymous communities. This constellation of dynamics may be glossed the 'doctrinal mode of religiosity'. On the other hand, we have the codification of non-verbal metaphors in collective ritual which is linked to sporadic transmission, intense cohesion, localism, particularism and fragmentation. These are among the main dynamics of what may be referred to as the 'imagistic mode of religiosity'. Within many religions, both modes of religiosity interpenetrate in complex ways, although a proper treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of the present discussion.<sup>2</sup> What is of particular interest here is that the doctrinal mode of religiosity was not to be found in pre-contact Melanesia. Doctrinal traditions may have become established at various times and locations in Melanesian prehistory, but I know of no recorded examples of indigenous religions that possessed all the constituent dynamics of the doctrinal mode of religiosity. Conversely, the forms of Christianity spread during the early stages of missionization did not possess an imagistic domain of operation, except as a result of local innovation. I do not claim that imagistic practices were ubiquitous in pre-contact Papua New Guinea, but they have often been a factor in indigenous engagements with Christianity and in the development of new religious movements throughout the country. In what follows, I examine the consequences of missionization in Melanesia, and the role of modes of religiosity in this process.

### *Early missionization and the politics of memory*

There is abundant evidence that, from the viewpoint of Melanesians encountering Christianity for the first time, the ideas and behaviour of missionaries presented little that was recognizably 'religious'. A common early response to missionary efforts was to agree to instruction or baptism merely in the hope of acquiring Western goods. As Wetherell puts it (1977: 165): 'Young people turned to the missionary, not because he was thought a safer guide to heaven than the village sorcerer, but because he had such things as fish-hooks'. Or, as one beleaguered missionary observed in 1936, 'I have known people to come up and ask for tobacco ... but never for the gospel' (quoted in Wetherell 1977: 159).

In the anthropological literature, this type of response to missionization has

often been attributed to 'Melanesian pragmatism' (Barker 1990b: 173). It seems to me, however, that there was nothing specifically Melanesian about this pragmatism towards early missionaries. Confronted with the sudden appearance of aliens bearing wealth and wielding power of a nature and magnitude previously unknown, what community would not seek to tap some of these resources, whether in Melanesia or any other part of the world? What throws the Melanesian response into relief, and gives it the appearance of a particular form of 'pragmatism', is the fact that it was hitched to a lack of indigenous understanding of the central aim of the missionaries, which was to transmit a corpus of textually codified doctrine. Missionary writers themselves often complained that 'the natives attached little value to mere dogmas' (Koskinen 1953: 92), but what few European observers, even up to the present time, have seriously considered is that the very nature of doctrinal religion was initially unintelligible to (rather than 'undervalued' by) the tribal peoples of Melanesia. For the latter, revelations could not be packaged in rhetorical strings of question-and-answer transmitted in sermons and holy books, and consequently the religious purposes of missionary work were more or less inscrutable. Christianity was therefore

'quite beyond their comprehension, just as were the sermons of repentance, justification by faith, holy living and dying, spiritual regeneration and the like' ... Before the conversion of the natives could take place, something had to happen that could make their minds more susceptible (Koskinen 1953: 22-3, quoting Henderson 1931).

The first task of missionaries in Melanesia was to establish a common tongue, to learn local languages and to teach European ones, as a means of providing indigenes with access to the gospel and, of course, to a variety of psalms, hymns and prayers. Having achieved a degree of fluency in local dialects, missionaries proselytized from the pulpit and presented potential converts with the basic routinized format of the liturgy. After years of listening, reading, rote-learning and participating in church services, villagers were baptized and described by their missionary teachers as 'converts'. But in many regions there is evidence that the doctrinal mode of religiosity was (for a long time and, in some areas, even up to the present) only superficially grasped.

In his erudite history of the Anglican church in Papua New Guinea, Wetherell describes how many older people initially reacted to missionary teaching with

withdrawal, passive resistance, and occasional feeble rearguard challenge ... Most elders did not resist with words but affected a wooden unconcern for the *tawaroro* [Christian church] ... A few old people on Dobu said, 'Our minds are dark: we do not understand; the children will understand, but we cannot' (1977: 159-60).

Thus, most of the energies and resources of the missions throughout Papua New Guinea came to be directed into the conversion of *children* through the provision of a lengthy education. But this too presented problems, of which perhaps the greatest was truancy (Wetherell 1977: 166). A somewhat more effective strategy, adopted by several early missions, was to remove children from their villages and install them in boarding schools where their lives could be regulated according to a fixed, almost monastic, regime. Wetherell describes the daily routine for such children as follows:

[The children] rose at six in the morning, sang a hymn and said a short service, and worked in the garden till breakfast at eight. After Matins, school took up the morning from nine until midday. The afternoon was divided between recreation and outdoor work; Evensong at 5.30,

dinner at 6.00 and bed at 9.00 (1977: 166).

Such regimes obviously facilitated extensive exposure to the general themes of Christian dogma (transmitted orally and through Bible reading), the routinized liturgy and other rituals, the hierarchical character of the church, the sombre ethos of worship and some sense of the scale of world religion. A similar strategy of converting individuals separated from their village environment was adopted with adults employed as labourers at mission stations and their associated plantations. When schoolchildren and labourers who had experienced the doctrinal mode of religiosity in such a sustained fashion eventually returned to their villages, they brought with them a set of understandings that were crucial to the political destiny of Melanesians.

The ideological content of these new understandings was, in one sense, of little relevance. At any rate, from the viewpoint of the present argument, it makes no difference that these people were converts to Christianity, rather than to Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, or any other doctrinal religion. What mattered was that the returners were capable of conceptualizing the social world, and their place within it, in a radically new way. This process must be understood at least partly in terms of people's experiences of routinized worship at school and in the mission station.

There can be little doubt that mission Christianity strove to routinize worship far more extensively than was usual in the lives of church-going Europeans during the same period. As Koskinen observes:

Church discipline was generally very severe. Attendance at divine service became compulsory. Prayer meetings were frequent ... The Sabbath became the pivot around which the activities of a converted community revolved, with not only church meetings but also family assemblies, best clothes and special meals (1953: 35-6).

The emphasis on routinization, strict adherence to doctrinal orthodoxy and rigid forms of discipline based on the Decalogue (Koskinen 1953: 35-6), was intended to instil what some missionaries described as a 'Christian habit of life' (Barker 1990b: 175). The attempt to establish daily 'habits' and routines at the mission station was premised on the same folk theory of memory, so popular in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that promoted collective rote learning in schools. Groups of children chanting in unison were expected to encode and remember knowledge more 'deeply' and enduringly than was possible by any other means. The continual repetition of Christian liturgy and other rituals, like the collective recitation of strings of utterances in the classroom, no doubt served to establish in the minds of converts a truly unforgettable repertoire of schemas for 'how to be' a Christian. It is not necessarily true, however, or even probable, that these procedures aided comprehension of the intricate webs of question-and-answer that comprise the corpus of Christian belief and doctrine. It was possible in this way to become adept at repeating prayers, biblical passages and other verbal formulae without reflecting upon their theological interconnexions, and thus to fail substantially to grasp the persuasiveness and revelatory potential of Christian ethics and cosmology. Such was probably the fate of many early Melanesian converts. But the schemas for how to *behave* at the mission station, which were minimally sufficient to confer identity as a Christian, constituted a radically new form of learning.

In so far as a convert could be defined as one who had mastered effectively the formulaic utterances and ritual procedures of the mission station, this established membership of a community of Christians extending indefinitely beyond the horizons of the natal clan or village. Through their involvement in life at the mission, Melanesian converts acquired general schemas for participation in church services, meal-time rituals, classroom routines and other repetitive sequences of events. These schemas consisted not of memories of specific episodes but of ideal models for the performance of different types of activity (see above). As each mission station took in new residents or visitors and bade farewell to others, the throng of faces at each church service continually changed. Consequently, people's memories of these rituals did not specify the unique identities of participants. The political implications of this cannot be underestimated. The Christian community, as constructed through people's memories of routinized activities, evoked in its schemas throngs of anonymous, unidentifiable worshippers - a mass of imaginary persons. One's identity, as part of this community, was conferred on the basis of presumed commonalities in the schematic and behavioural patterns of people one had never met, and did not even need to meet in order to be united with them (however diffusely) in a common fellowship of Christian worshippers.

Having acquired this fundamentally new conception of community, regardless of whether converts had also developed a coherent overview of Christian teachings, it was possible to grasp a range of universalistic Western discourses, not only those of the missions but of the colonial order more generally, and of some of the large-scale indigenous movements that subsequently became established.

The fact that early missionization set this process in motion is in no sense a 'new' observation. For instance, Hogbin writes:

Every [Christian] church asserts its universality, and those who belong to it offer the same kind of prayers to the one Deity. A mission native may continue to believe for many years that his chief obligations are to the members of his own society, but a basis is now provided for broadening the concept of brotherhood until it embraces not only the inhabitants of neighbouring settlements but also strangers (1958: 182).

To this, Barker adds:

Christianity, particularly in the early missionary stages, introduced its followers to an enlarged and vastly complicated world - indeed, cosmos ... [and the missionaries] introduced islanders to a language within which Christians could speak about their enlarged social and spiritual community (1990a: 16).

Thus, the effects of early missionization are well known. What is new about my argument concerns the means to this transformation. For the above commentators, the enlargement of indigenous conceptions of community was a result of encountering the universalistic themes of Christian ideology. Nevertheless, as I have attempted to show, Melanesians were not initially in a position to grasp universalistic ideas, any more than they were able to recognize as 'religious' practices based around humdrum behavioural repetition, reading and sermonizing. Universalistic ideology only made sense once the capacity for conceptualizing large anonymous communities had been established. Before something so abstract could be codified in dogma it had to have some conceptual reality, and this occurred through the mnemonic effects of routinized, identity-conferring ritual. Once the conceptual basis for an enlarged, potentially

international conception of humanity was in place, Melanesians were well on the way to adopting wholesale a doctrinal mode of religiosity. Often this occurred, however, not at the mission station but through the establishment of new religious movements under indigenous leadership.<sup>3</sup>

*The doctrinal mode of religiosity and indigenous movements*

Christian doctrine, as taught by missionaries, was not a particularly 'contagious' body of representations in Melanesia (Whitehouse 1995: ch. 7). In the first place, it was not obviously rooted in cosmological assumptions that Melanesians regarded as plausible or relevant. It did not seem to cohere as a total system, except in the minds of its experts (primarily an ethnically European clergy). When members of the laity asked questions, they often received incomplete or contradictory answers and many came to believe that crucial explanatory elements in the religious scheme were being kept hidden by missionaries, perhaps for nefarious reasons (such as the desire to reserve 'space' in heaven for white people, to the exclusion of Melanesians). Different denominations offered conflicting visions of religious truth and correct ritual procedure, and there appeared to be no reliable basis on which to select one vision over another.

The success of many large-scale politico-religious movements in Melanesia, such as many of the more enduring 'cargo cult' associations, lay in their capacity to avoid many of these pitfalls. For instance, in the cases of the Paliu Movement (Mead 1956; 1964; Otto 1992; Schwartz 1962; 1976; Wanek 1996), Yali's movement (Lawrence 1971; Morauta 1972) and the Pomio Kivung (Whitehouse 1992; 1995; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1996d), a coherent body of doctrine was made available to all and its authority guaranteed by virtue of the apotheosis of each of the movement's leaders and the confinement of their followings to geographically distinct regions. These new movements were highly routinized, encompassing large 'imagined' communities just like the missions. But their programmes of proselytization were more effective in transmitting and maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy. All these movements were centralized and hierarchical, being modelled on forms of organization observed in the missions and in colonial government. Many of those appointed to positions of authority within such movements had lived in mission stations or in similar circumstances, and were therefore already capable of envisaging the possibility of large, anonymous communities.<sup>4</sup> Through the routinized practices of these movements, all their members developed a new conception of 'community' as well.

The emphasis on routinization in large-scale indigenous religious movements was no less extreme than in many early missions. It even incorporated elements of military practice, such as roll calls, marching, drilling and parading (e.g. Lawrence 1971; Mead 1956; Schwartz 1962). Punctuality became virtually an obsession in these movements, with whistles, bells and other loud signals continually announcing that it was time to perform another round of daily rituals, meetings or practical tasks. Many new ritual forms were introduced, including idiosyncratic church services, the placing of offerings to ancestors, attendance at frequent meetings and various forms of recitation and prayer. The highly repetitive character of the new rituals distinguished them

from indigenous practices and linked them inextricably to those of church and mission. Through the performance of such rituals over time, followers came to conceptualize a basis for unity across a wide area, enabling them to recognize common identity with anonymous others they had never met. This radically new conception was thoroughly incorporated into the ideologies of these new movements. Paliau, Yali and Koriam, among other such leaders, elaborated clear goals for their followers, taken as a single unified community: self-government, salvation, 'modernization' and 'development' and so on. All such movements were expansionary, at least they tried to be, and claimed that their dogmas transcended ethnic differences.<sup>5</sup> In terms of their universalistic orientations, these movements were inspired by Christianity but the leaders were markedly more successful than most missionaries in transmitting a coherent, plausible and persuasive body of doctrine.

Paliau's doctrines, which became known as the 'New Way', were based on a text called the 'Long Story of God' (Schwartz 1962), Yali's were based on a reworking of evolutionary theory, Bible stories and local mythology (Lawrence 1971) and Koriam's on the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament (Whitehouse 1995). Through creative and selective synthesis of already popular ideas and assumptions, these new movements established doctrinal orthodoxies that were both persuasive and accessible to large numbers of people. The reproduction of these orthodoxies over time occurred through the attendance of all members at regular local meetings, modelled on Sunday schools and Bible-reading classes. Such meetings were directed and led by carefully selected officials, generally well-schooled in the limits of their movement's orthodoxy and cautious of innovation and heresy. The speeches of local officials reiterated the body of doctrine in schoolroom conditions, usually on a daily basis and seldom less frequently than twice a week. There were elements here of rote-learning on the part of many followers (see Whitehouse 1992a), but the effect was also to encourage followers to grasp the logical connexions between elements of doctrine, providing all worshippers with a general ethical framework for the interpretation of diverse events. Orators did not simply recite official doctrines but persuasively revealed the underpinnings of their authority (Whitehouse 1995: 81-4). The aims of such speeches were analogous to sermons, except that they did not refer to largely inaccessible texts (such as the Bible) but rather to ideas already familiar through other repetitive acts of verbal transmission (Whitehouse 1992: 785; 1995: 146).

### *The tedium effect and localized splintering*

A problematic side-effect of such extensive repetition is that rituals may eventually become boring to some people. Competent performance of sacred tasks consists merely of the enactment of entrenched habit - the body goes through the motions automatically and the mind wanders or is numbed by the predictability and familiarity of it all. Even the doctrines, no matter how enthusiastically and creatively they are represented by local orators, are obviously subject to unnecessary repetition. This syndrome, which might be called 'the tedium effect', proved to be a problem in the early spread of Christianity in Melanesia, just as it became a problem in the large indigenous

movements operating in the doctrinal mode. Evidence of this is easy to find in the literature on missions in the Pacific. Of the Anglican mission, Wetherell observes:

It was a pedestrian and monotonous movement, providing no heady and volatile excitement ... Many candidates [for baptism] dropped out before the instruction was complete (1977: 171).

Even those who completed the lengthy process of conversion were often subject to the tedium effect, as Koskinen (1953: 93) points out:

disappointment and tedium soon made their appearance ... The alluring accumulation of feeling, carrying all before it, of mass enthusiasm is generally shortlived.

The same points have often been made in relation to the large indigenous movements (e.g. Otto 1992; Schwartz 1962; Steinbauer 1979), indicating that this is not so much a problem with Christianity *per se* but with all highly routinized religions.

What has tended to happen in Christianized regions of Melanesia is that attempts have periodically been made, typically when the tedium effect has been most acute (see Schwartz 1962: 286-7; Whitehouse 1995), to transform humdrum religious practices into more dramatic, colourful and even ecstatic ones. Numerous examples of this tendency among early converts to Christianity have been recorded (e.g. Guiart 1951: 82; Koskinen 1953: 95; Wetherell 1977: 179). Stripped of its ethnocentric phraseology, the following observation conveys the gist of what was happening rather well:

In discouraging and suppressing so many of the innocent interests and activities of the islanders, the missionaries took far too much out of their lives and put far too little back to fill the void ... When deprived of their dances and games, the natural outlet for their joy of life, the natives soon began to perform them in secret (Koskinen 1953: 95).

In some regions, a sort of *modus vivendi* was achieved by separating the domains of village and mission station, enabling indigenous peoples to move freely in both. For instance, as Barker describes in Uiaku, the village became the locus of more climactic, periodic rituals focused around 'life crises', whereas, at the mission station,

interactions with the divine [continued to] take the form of public Christian worship at regular times. The priest conducts a relatively ornate (high church) service that is disciplined and sober (1990b: 181).

In other regions, the *modus vivendi* has taken others forms, such as the introduction of more 'entertaining' and emotionally stimulating forms of Christian worship (an idea with which early missionaries from several denominations experimented, and which has become particularly apparent with the spread of Pentecostal orders in recent decades - see Trompf 1991).

Within routinized indigenous movements, however, the enlivening of the doctrinal mode of religiosity has tended to involve a rather different trajectory. For instance, it is clear that during periods when the tedium effect has been most acute, small groups of followers of the Paliu Movement and the Pomio Kivung have tended to break away from the mainstream organizations for short periods of time, in order to perform rituals of a particularly ecstatic nature. In contrast with the apparently smooth reconciliation of the mission station and village in Uiaku, splinter groups in indigenous movements have tended to be condemned by mainstream followers and leadership (at least in their public rhetoric). Nevertheless, astute leaders tended to avoid intervention until splinter groups had run their course and their followers could be readily brought back into the

fold (Schwartz 1962; Whitehouse 1995).

An unintended consequence of splintering is often to stimulate commitment to the humdrum rituals and doctrines of the mainstream movement. This is because, unlike the situation described by Barker in Uiaaku, the imagistic practices of splinter groups are usually based on mainstream ideology. Rather than rejecting orthodox dogma, splinter groups *recodify* it as a body of loosely connected non-verbal metaphors. For instance, in a recent Pomio Kivung splinter group, mainstream ideas about sin, salvation and ancestors were expressed through the ritual imagery of a ring, formed out of human bodies and physical objects. The ring represented God's elect and the post at the centre (usually represented by the body of the splinter-group leader) corresponded to a post on which was carved the numbers of the Ten Commandments, and also the central post of traditional round houses (supporting the rafters). The community, here connoting the rafters, converged on the leader whom they believed would carry them (shouldering the burden of their sins) to salvation. This kind of imagery was not, however, accorded verbal exegesis. It was triggered non-verbally in moments of emotional and sensual arousal (see Whitehouse 1995: chs 4 & 5). Such rituals had the effect of stimulating intense cohesion within the small, face-to-face communities that performed them. Yet this sense of excitement and cohesion was, at least in some cases, projected onto the wider movement after the collapse of the splinter group itself.

Routinized movements, although providing the necessary conditions for *conceptualizing* large (and therefore abstract) communities, are not capable in themselves of producing intense cohesion for long periods of time. Depending on the revelatory power of their doctrines or policies, such movements may engender a very real and compelling experience of solidarity and excitement for limited periods, but this inevitably wanes with the onset of the tedium effect. Localized imagistic practices, however, engender a more enduring excitement, by re-codifying revelations in a surprising, emotionally arousing and memorable way. Thus, within the Pomio Kivung, the Paliu Movement and other similar organizations in Melanesia, long-term routinization has been punctuated by sporadic splintering, involving the temporary efflorescence of imagistic practices.<sup>6</sup> The memories instantiated by such practices relate to a small community of people who undergo the highs and lows of ecstatic or traumatic ritual together (just as in pre-contact imagistic practices). But because a larger abstract community is now a conceptual reality, these feelings of cohesion and renewed commitment may be projected onto it, with the result that the mainstream movement, over time, is strengthened or rejuvenated.

### *The political implications of indigenous movements*

It has often been argued that 'cargo cults' constitute a passing phase in the emergence of Melanesian nationalisms and other pragmatic forms of protest against colonial states.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Whitehouse 1994; 1995), this impression is misleading in three major respects. First, it is only a very visible minority of 'cargo cults' that have the effect of unifying large populations for the purposes of protest. In every case, these are movements dominated by the doctrinal mode of religiosity and thus modelled

on mission practices. The reason such movements have attracted scholarly attention, and have therefore come to be seen as archetypal cargo cults, is precisely because they are large-scale, enduring and vocal.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of cargo cults are probably small-scale and sporadic, passing unrecorded by anthropologists and government personnel, except as instances of temporary insanity, relegated to footnotes or accorded no more than a line or two in the stilted, unsympathetic prose of government patrol reports.<sup>8</sup> The timing and location of such cults are unpredictable; they are not willingly discussed during intervening periods, and often only in cautious and cryptic whispers when they are enacted; the imagery evoked in their rituals is mysterious and difficult for outsiders to penetrate; their effects are usually localized. Where such imagistic practices occur in isolation from a large, mainstream movement operating in the doctrinal mode, they tend to escape the close attention of European observers, even those who are ostensibly trained to document such occurrences. Occasionally, imagistic cults spread like waves across a wide area, and these phenomena have a much greater chance of being observed and documented by government officers, missionaries and anthropologists (see Schwartz 1962; Williams 1928). Unfortunately, however, Western commentators are often tempted to identify the 'doctrines' of such cults along with their 'unifying' effects (see Lanternari 1963b; Worsley 1957: 65-6), despite the evident non-existence of both (see Whitehouse 1994).

Whereas many Melanesians rapidly came to understand the doctrinal mode of religiosity imported by Europeans, the latter have had considerably less success in grasping the mode of religiosity indigenous to Melanesia. Religious cults founded on imagistic practices unite only small, face-to-face communities, often through successive waves of contact-transmission; they do not, in regions where the doctrinal mode of religiosity has yet to take root, have the capacity to unite large, proto-nationalist communities.

Secondly, the genuinely unifying movements, dominated by the doctrinal mode of religiosity, do not necessarily shed their millenarian and cargoist themes in exchange for nationalistic and secular ones. It is much more common for both to be sustained in tandem, as alternative and complementary strands of the movement's ideology (see Trompf 1991: ch. 9; Wanek 1996: part 7; Whitehouse 1995: ch. 8). The usual reason why scholars regard hopes of supernatural transformation as transient is that these hopes are manifestly unrealistic, but evaluating the success of millenarian programmes is a highly subjective process. There are many cultists in Papua New Guinea who will point to hard evidence that their leaders' prophecies have been realized, if only partially (Bailoenakia & Koimanrea 1983); moreover, failures and delays can always be rationalized, whether people's expectations are pinned on pragmatic or supernatural intervention. In short, there is no compelling reason to think that nationalism will necessarily replace millenarism, nor is there very much evidence that this is in fact the historical trajectory in Melanesia.

Finally, the populations unified by indigenous movements operating in the doctrinal mode are seldom large enough to encompass potential nation-states. Leaders of such movements frequently claim otherwise, but the fragmentation of a country such as Papua New Guinea into a series of tiny states founded around the followings of new religious movements remains an unlikely prospect (cf.

Spriggs 1991). If so, it is probably appropriate to describe the unifying social movements of Papua New Guinea as 'micronationalist' (May 1982). These 'micro-nations', which are all directly or indirectly an outcome of the doctrinal mode of religiosity, constitute the most encompassing political communities in contemporary Papua New Guinea. There is little evidence that they are soon to be transcended by popular forms of pan-New Guinean identity. The leaders of large-scale, routinized movements often participate in so-called 'national' politics, but they do so with the interests of their regional micronations firmly in mind, rather than as builders of a national identity coterminous with citizenship in the existing state.

### *Conclusion*

I have argued that the doctrinal mode of religiosity was lacking in pre-contact Melanesia. Indigenous traditions tended to be focused around imagistic practices, as a result of which communities were cognized as small-scale, cohesive and pitted against outsiders. Even in the absence of imagistic practices, there was no basis for conceptualizing large, anonymous communities or universalistic ideology. Through missionization, however, the mental processing of routinized ritual facilitated the conceptualization *in abstracto* of a vast fellowship of Christian worshippers, diffusely united on the basis of presumed commonalities in the procedures of worship.

As a result of this transformation, new indigenous movements began to spread, dominated by the doctrinal mode of religiosity. Within many such movements, the tedium effect, associated with extensive routinization, gave rise to periodic localized splintering, involving the reactivation of imagistic practices modelled on indigenous religious forms. Because these splinter groups were operating in the context of broader social movements, however, the cohesion and religious fervour which they engendered were readily projected onto the wider unity, rejuvenating support for mainstream ideology. The enduring popularity of such movements suggests that they have an ongoing role to play in the political destiny of Papua New Guinea. Not only have many such movements pioneered forms of local government and influenced national policy and constitutional reform, but many have campaigned for increasing autonomy as part of a micronationalist vision of (at least partial) secession from the state (Bailoenakia & Koiman 1983; Maloat 1970; Wanek 1996). From the universalistic aspirations of early missionaries and the tribal cohesion and parochialism of Melanesians has emerged the prospect of an uneasy compromise that is neither local nor truly national: too large to be based on the face-to-face community of clan or village, and too small to encompass the heterogeneous peoples of Papua New Guinea.

### NOTES

Drafts of this article were presented at the 1996 Conference of the European Society for Oceanists in Copenhagen, at the Departments of Social Anthropology at the Universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh in 1997 and at a 1997 workshop at the University of Manchester organized by Fenella Cannell and Maia Green. I should like to thank organizers and participants at these events for their constructive and insightful comments. For reading and commenting at length on early drafts I have a particular debt of gratitude to Pascal Boyer, Sini Cedercreutz, Simon Harrison, Michael

Houseman, Carlo Severi and the anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

<sup>1</sup> It should not be forgotten, of course, that planters and traders preceded missionaries in many parts of Papua New Guinea. Nevertheless, it was missionaries who led the way in establishing close and long-term relations between Europeans and indigenous peoples. Even much of the colonial administration of the region was effectively undertaken by the missions: the introduction of 'hygienic' practices and 'tidy' villages, the interpretation and dissemination of government laws and policies, and the provision of basic education and training (enabling the export economy to exploit indigenous labour more effectively). In all these areas, and many others too, missionaries were the leading intermediaries between Western and Melanesian social systems.

<sup>2</sup> I do, however, consider below some of the implications of interpenetrating modes of religiosity within new religious movements in Melanesia.

<sup>3</sup> It should be acknowledged that missionary activity in some regions, even up to the present time, has been limited and sporadic and the evangelist's dream of universal religious routinization in Melanesia is far from having been achieved. Largely for this reason, there are still many populations which do not experience a sense of belonging to a 'world religion' or a nation, or any such large anonymous community. Nor has the experience of extensive Christianization everywhere given rise to routinized indigenous movements. In many cases, church orthodoxies have been only slightly modified so that the appellation 'indigenous movement' hardly seems applicable. A case in point might be the Catholics of Karagur village (Kairuru Island, East Sepik Province), of whom Smith has observed (1980: 45):

Though there was no organized cargo cult in Koragur during my sojourn, some apparently have found convenient employment for their energies in the intense and ritualistic pursuit of a regimen of Catholic prayer and religious observance to which they attach extravagant hopes and expectations.

Thus, the dividing line between mission and movement is far from clear, and the arguments presented here might be taken to apply not only to named 'movements' but also to a range of indigenized versions of Christianity that have instantiated new forms of political association.

<sup>4</sup> Paliu himself had comparatively little direct experience of Christian practices prior to the establishment of his movement (Maloat 1970). It was largely through his work as a police officer that he became acquainted with the dynamics of the doctrinal mode. Similarly, experiences of working for the police and armed forces clearly shaped the careers of other new religious leaders, such as Tommy Kabu (Steinbauer 1979: 29-32) and Yali (Lawrence 1971: 117-26). Thus, conversion to Christianity was not the only stimulus to the political transformations described in this article. It was, however, arguably the most influential for the vast majority of rank-and-file followers of the new large-scale religious movements.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, however, that some indigenous movements have adopted a hostile stance towards particular ethnic groups. For instance, the Pomio Kivung repudiates certain customs of the neighbouring Tolai and regards as oppressive the dominance of the latter in commerce and government (Whitehouse 1995: 60-2). Nevertheless, the Pomio Kivung is clearly expansionary, cutting across the barriers of language and culture that formerly divided non-Tolai ethnic groups.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed analyses of these patterns, see Whitehouse 1995 (on the Pomio Kivung) and Schwartz 1962 (on the Paliu Movement).

<sup>7</sup> Examples include: Belshaw 1950; Bodrogi 1951; Brown 1966; Guiart 1951; Hogbin 1958; Lanternari 1963; Lawrence 1971; Mead 1964; Morauta 1972; Rowley 1965; Worsley 1957.

<sup>8</sup> This, at least, is the impression I have formed through archival research on the history of 'cargo cult' activity in East New Britain and through informal discussion with Melanesianists over a number of years. A systematic survey of 'unrecorded' cargo cults, based upon interrogation of a great many missionaries, anthropologists and government workers would be of great interest, although it would, of course, only provide a tentative indication of the extent to which such cults are under-represented in documentary sources.

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## Des missions aux mouvements: l'impact du Christianisme sur les formes d'association politique en Nouvelle Guinée Papouasienne

### Résumé

Les chercheurs ont soutenu depuis longtemps que l'avancée des missions en Mélanésie a aidé à transformer la fragmentation tribale et les particularismes locaux, au moyen du dogme que les humains sont tous les enfants de Dieu et que l'humanité est une vaste communauté composée non seulement de parents, de voisins et d'affins mais aussi d'étrangers connus lors de brèves rencontres et d'autres que l'on ne connaîtra jamais. Cet article propose une hypothèse alternative, selon laquelle c'est le mode de transmission du Christianisme, plutôt que ses dogmes, qui a créé la possibilité pour les habitants de Nouvelle Guinée Papouasienne d'envisager des grandes communautés anonymes. Par le fait de leur participation aux routines du culte religieux, en particulier, les souvenirs des habitants de Nouvelle Guinée Papouasienne ont été politisés d'une façon radicalement nouvelle, qui a conduit à l'émergence de mouvements micronationalistes dirigés par des indigènes.