BOUNDARIES AND IDENTITY

Islets and Enclaves

Isolated populations in enclaves or on small islands

NORMA McARTHUR

Melanesian linguistic diversity: a Melanesian choice?

D.C. LAYCOCK

Traditional enclaves in Melanesia

ROGER M. KEESING
ISOLATED POPULATIONS IN ENCLAVES OR ON SMALL ISLANDS

Norma McArthur

Although most of the papers that are presented in this volume deal specifically with one or other aspects of Melanesian populations - their languages, their cultures, etc. - my emphasis will be on the diversity in the sizes and rates of growth of populations as long as they remain small and isolated. The diversity in these patterns is not necessarily peculiar to Melanesia, but there are (or were) small islands which remained comparatively isolated for long periods and population groups on larger islands which retained an identity separate from their neighbours.

As long as a population remains small - and it is still too early in our simulation studies to decide when a population ceases to be 'small' - each individual counts for more than they would in a larger aggregate, and therefore the conventional techniques of demographic analysis are not applicable. While retaining the same demographic logic, one must adopt an approach which the statisticians describe as 'stochastic' or 'probabilistic', in which each individual is subjected to the probability of dying at the age he or she has attained in any year, and for the females the probability of their giving birth in that year. This latter of course implies that there is a male in the population with whom she can mate.

In the experimental situation that we create in the computer the rules about marriage might be varied, as might all the other rules. Rules of one kind or another lie at the root of our simulations, which are basically projections of very small populations under stipulated conditions. The patterns of mortality and fertility have been described elsewhere (McArthur, Saunders and Tweedie 1976), and in the results presented here they are what were described as 'Pacific models'. In this earlier paper the effects of changes in the mortality schedules were examined: here there are some modifications in fertility behaviour, with no changes in mortality and no restrictions on mating.

Given a prescribed probability for each demographic event for any one individual, the computer produces a random number between zero and one: if that number falls at or below the probability prescribed for a particular event to a particular individual, the event occurs; should the random number exceed the decreed probability for that individual in that year of age, all that happens is that the survivor becomes one year older.

The operational sequence begins by creating the births for the year, and then allocating sex to the children born, assuming that there is an even chance of a child being male or female. Whatever its sex, it enters
the population at age 0 and is given an identifying number by which it can be traced through the years to come. Each individual is then subjected to the probability of death stipulated for their age and sex, and the survivors are then aged by one year to create the population for the following year when the same sequence of operations is performed.

Because of the storage capacity allowed by the computer programme there are limits to the numbers of years and numbers of persons that might be traced, but there is a fascinating diversity among the populations produced under identical demographic conditions. In this experimental situation at least twenty populations need to be generated under each set of assumptions dictated to the computer, and each of them warns against any generalization whatsoever except that the survival of a population hinges on the survival of more or less balanced numbers of males and females born within a relatively short time.

In a set of experiments starting with a population of only three - two females aged eighteen and one male aged twenty - two hundred populations were generated in the computer, one hundred of them populations with no restrictions at all on the prescribed fertility schedule, and in the other one hundred the women who gave birth in one year were allowed an infertile year in the following year. In biological terms this interruption to the fertility schedule might be regarded as a lactation period which reduces the likelihood of conception. Both sets were run for up to a maximum of five hundred years, and the probability of success in establishing a viable population from such small initial numbers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Numbers of populations with each outcome under the two assumptions about fertility. (100 'runs' of up to 500 years for each.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Populations classified</th>
<th>No limit to fertility</th>
<th>Infertile year after each birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presumed success</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubtful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headed for extinction</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When there was no fertility constraint approximately three quarters of the populations were still viable after five hundred years and only one-quarter had become extinct. When fertility was constrained the success rate fell to less than one half, and probably fewer than one half would have survived for much more than five hundred years. This is a rather greater difference than would be expected from the average numbers of children born to the women in each series. For 2,172 women who had no infertile year, the average size of completed families was 6.7 children; for 1,227 women who completed their childbearing in a more relaxed fashion the average was 5.4, a reduction of only 20 per cent. The explanation for
this is that the probability of failing to conceive at each age is always greater than the complementary probability for conception.

In addition to the two hundred populations that were allowed to run for up to five hundred years, there were also twenty for each hypothesis about fertility which were printed out by age and sex at five year intervals up to a maximum of two hundred and fifty years. From these it is possible to detect and analyse the causes of the variability in growth, and why some populations head for extinction while others thrive. The proportions of the populations in these smaller samples were compatible with the success or failure rates in the larger samples described above, although by an oversight no direct comparison was possible because of the different time durations for the runs.

The course of growth and development of the individual populations can be illustrated dramatically graphically, but the kind of scale required is not easily reproduced in small format. Instead, Tables 2 and 3 present the population sizes attained at fifty year intervals from year fifty under each fertility hypothesis, ranked by their size at year fifty. The distribution of sizes then was not markedly different in either series, but with each successive time interval thereafter the differences between them tended to increase until the range of sizes two hundred and fifty years from their origin contrasted quite vividly.

The populations might be regrouped by size after one hundred years of existence when there was still no very great difference in the range of sizes under each hypothesis, but a century later five of the fifteen populations still surviving with unrestrained fertility exceeded the maximum size of any subjected to the fertility constraint. Fifty years later the differences in sizes, both within and between the two sets, are greater, but even so some of the populations which had experienced the limitation on fertility were as large or larger than some which did not.

In Table 2 the size range is from eighty-two to more than nine hundred amongst the fourteen populations which survived two hundred and fifty years from their origin under unchanging and identical conditions; in Table 3 the range for the twelve populations which survived this period, also under unchanging and identical conditions, is from five to two hundred and twenty-seven. There is not space to detail why some of the smaller populations at year fifty or year one hundred fared better than those that were larger at those dates, but it hinged very largely on the sexes of the children born some number of years previously and who survived so that there were sufficient partners available from the start of the female reproductive cycle.

As long as the number of births in any five year period remained small, there were runs of up to fifty years in some populations where, purely by chance, one or other sex predominated among the births and the survivors. As the populations increased in size and the number of births increased, the numbers of males and females born within a specified period became more nearly equal, again purely by chance. In small, isolated populations it need not necessarily be the Darwinian law of the survival of the fittest which prevails.
Table 2

Population sizes attained at 50 year intervals, with random mating and no limit to fertility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population size at year:</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>150</th>
<th>200</th>
<th>250</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>378</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>192</td>
<td>525</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>200</td>
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<td>74</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>&gt;938*</td>
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</table>

*Overflowed storage capacity of computer before 250 years
### Population sizes attained at 50 year intervals, with random mating and one infertile year after a birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>42</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTE

1This work is being done in collaboration with Drs I.W. Saunders and R.L. Tweedie of the Division of Mathematics and Statistics, CSIRO.

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MELANESIAN LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: A MELANESIAN CHOICE?

D.C. Laycock

The facts of the linguistic diversity of Melanesia are now commonplace — a quarter of the world's languages (Laycock 1969), spoken, over a land area much less than a hundredth of the inhabitable land surface of the world, by a fraction of the world's population that is too small to bother calculating. The reasons for this diversity are less well established, and perhaps still arguable; but some of the suggestions at least have been round for a century or more.

A common nineteenth century view, for instance — and a view far from extinct — was that 'our' languages (by which was meant, essentially, the large languages of Europe and the 'civilised world') were subject to normal processes of linguistic change, but that 'primitive' languages were unstable, not only because they were unwritten, but also because they were supposed to be abnormally subject to the effects of word-taboos, and dependent on the whims of chiefs and other prestigious persons. A good representative of this view was Max Müller, who cites (1875(I):58) the case of a missionary in Central America who, in 1833, was supposed to have found that the dictionary he had made ten years earlier was already 'antiquated and useless'.

With the development of descriptive linguistics, and associated relativistic views about the equivalence, in any value scale, of all human languages (and societies) such views became unfashionable, and new explanations for extreme linguistic diversity were sought. A popular first guess was a hypothesis based on isolation, terrain, and time; the languages of small communities cut off from their neighbours, for thousands of years, simply went on diverging at a normal rate, with no possibility of convergence. But this is too simple an explanation for Melanesia, where we find, typically, the largest languages (that is, the least diversity) in the most isolated areas (such as the Highlands of Papua New Guinea) and the greatest divergence in areas of easy terrain and extensive trading contacts (as in north coast Papua New Guinea, and island Melanesia).

Accordingly, I once speculated that the divergence, in areas such as the Sepik and Madang Provinces of Papua New Guinea, was caused in fact by the ease of migration, allowing groups to divide, cut through others, and force new combinations of remnant groups.

Multiple migration and isolation are still probably important factors, but I now suggest that the real reasons for Melanesian linguistic diversity are closer to the nineteenth century views — thereby setting linguistics
back 100 years. The opposition is not between 'civilised' and 'primitive' languages, or even between 'written' and 'unwritten' languages, but rather between 'large' and 'small' languages. In other words, the dynamics of linguistic change are very different in languages whose speakers number in the hundreds, or even thousands, as against languages whose speakers are numbered in the lakhs, myriads, or millions.\(^3\)

All linguistic communities, of whatever size, are always subject to simultaneous pressures towards convergence and divergence. Pressures towards convergence include standardization of a language (through writing, academies, and educated groups), centralized control, media, prestige, and excess of numbers (of one language or dialect as against the rest). The pressures towards divergence are the inbuilt mechanisms of linguistic change, that will, unchecked, make the speech of two communities, originally speaking the same language, unintelligible to each other in approximately 500 years. In Melanesia, virtually all the pressures towards convergence are absent. Prestige is hardly a factor in egalitarian societies at the same level of technological development — though there is slight evidence (Laycock 1979:95) that Austronesian languages, whose speakers brought technological innovations and wider trading contacts to Melanesia, may have had a slight edge on the Papuan languages. But this is relevant only for multilingualism, in determining which foreign languages are learnt; it does nothing to reduce the number of distinct languages. Similarly, the question of numbers seems relevant only in multilingualism; speakers of a particular dialect in Melanesia see no reason to adapt their speech in the direction of a mutually intelligible dialect just because it may have ten times as many speakers.

Also, in the absence of the influence of media and central control in traditional Melanesia, the only way for linguistic change to spread is by personal linguistic interaction — that is, people talking to other people. The maximum number of people in Melanesia who could have this personal linguistic interaction would seem to be about 8,000. In a geographically contiguous linguistic community, an adult male — and we are speaking of male-dominated societies — needs to keep track of only about 2,000 other adult males (discounting the 4,000 or more children, and the 2,000 adult women). Everyone in the society is then in some kin relation with someone the adult male knows personally, so there is always the possibility of personal linguistic interaction.

In practice, as we have seen above, the linguistic and social groupings in Melanesia are much smaller. I estimate, from the observation of Sepik languages, that the maximum number of persons in Papua New Guinea speaking exactly the same dialect of the same language is about 500. In every village of more than 500 people, there are at least two identifiable hamlet dialects; and every language which is spoken in more than one village tends to have a recognizable form of speech for each village.

The cause of this linguistic differentiation, at the dialect level, lie in Melanesian social organization and Melanesian attitudes to language. It has more than once been said to me around the Sepik that 'it wouldn't be any good if we all talked the same; we like to know where people come from'. In other words, linguistic diversity, of however minor a kind, is perpetuated, as a badge of identification. It is this attitude, I suggest,
that is at the heart of the multiplicity of languages and dialects in Melanesia.

An example can be taken from the large village of Malol, on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, whose inhabitants speak the Austronesian language of Sissano. In 1970 Malol had a population of 1,566, speaking three or four hamlet dialects. Informants told me that one of these dialects, that of Tainyapin hamlet, was a 'very strange' form of Sissano. However, a wordlist taken from Tainyapin speakers showed only two or three lexical items that differed from those of other dialects — and no phonological or grammatical differences. One of these words caught my attention: the word pala for 'dog', as against the rest of Sissano aun. The word for 'dog' in the inland Papuan language of One is also pala, and further enquiries established that the inhabitants of Tainyapin hamlet were in fact One refugees who had settled in Malol about the middle of the nineteenth century. What is significant is that since that time the group had completely adopted the Sissano language, but had retained just a few words from their original language — solely, I believe, as linguistic markers of their origin.

We can see the strength of linguistic identification also in the maintenance of small languages. The speakers of very small languages are always at least bilingual, speaking, for survival purposes, one or more of the large languages around them (the numbers game again). In most areas of the world, a small language, coupled with bilingualism, is a sure indication of impending language death; yet in Melanesia a few hundred persons can maintain a language against all pressures. The Sepik village of Yelogu, in the Washkuk Mountains above Ambunti, had in 1971 only seventy inhabitants, all of whom were bilingual in Kwoma, and who counted, for all social purposes, as part of the Kwoma community; but when they went home to their own village they spoke the totally different language of Kaung. Here we have a situation where a language is maintained for virtually no other purpose than that of linguistic identity — if the language died out tomorrow almost nothing in the lives of Yelogu people would be changed — and yet it continues to be maintained against all odds. (See also Laycock 1979.)

As Grace (1975) has pointed out, maintaining this degree of linguistic diversity is not without its cost, in terms of human effort and time. But he has also indicated, citing Leenhardt (1930) on New Caledonian languages, the cost is not as great as it may appear. In the case of languages of a single stock, whether these be Austronesian or Papuan, the languages differ more in their lexicon than in their phonological and grammatical organization — that is, they are very close to being the same language with a different set of labels. It is often possible to translate morpheme from one language to another. This means that the words of a different language can be used in the same way as synonyms in one's own language — for purposes of rhetoric, stylistic differentiation, or even obfuscation.

All of which means that language in Melanesia is, in its very diversity, being used constructively, to maintain social groupings at a small and manageable level — and, conversely, to keep other groups at a distance. Someone who speaks exactly as you do may or may not be a friend; but someone who speaks differently is always automatically an
outsider, no matter how close the degree of contact. The way is open to use language as a weapon: to refuse to speak a language that one knows well, in order to put one's interlocutor at a disadvantage, or to insist on speaking a particular language to include or exclude certain groups among one's hearers.

Because of this, Melanesians tend to have very strong feelings about language. On the one hand, they tend to solve their communication difficulties on purely pragmatic levels, using whatever shared languages — including pidgins — are available, to get the message across. They are tolerant of errors and linguistic differences which do not impede communication. On the other hand, however, they maintain and exploit linguistic differences for alliances and divisions that go far beyond the question of mere communication.

There is a deliberateness about the Melanesian exploitation of diversity that may also have parallels in the creation of that diversity. In addition to the normal mechanisms of linguistic change mentioned above, there is some evidence that additional differences are deliberately created. The clearest example is found in the Usiài dialect of Buin, in south Bougainville. Buin has currently about 17,000 speakers. It is a complex language, which has a strong gender system: pronouns, verb agreements, numerals, deictics, and common adjectives show concordance for gender, through three numbers (singular, dual, and plural). The Usiài dialect has about 1,000 speakers. In this dialect, we find all the gender agreements reversed — that is, all the masculines are feminine and all the feminines are masculine. There is no accepted mechanism for linguistic change which can cause a flip-flop of this kind and magnitude. I believe that at some stage in the past, some influential speaker of the Usiài dialect announced that from now on his people were not to speak like the rest of the Buins. Once the change was adopted, it would become the natural speech of the community within one or two generations.5

But it would take us too far here to explore all the indications of human tinkering with language in Melanesia. It is enough here to suggest that Melanesian linguistic diversity is not merely the by-product of accidents of history and geography, but is a positive Melanesian reaction to their environment — in other words, a Melanesian choice.

NOTES

1 The usual assumptions of linguistic change are:

(a) phonological change proceeds by small modifications, perceptible, if at all, only over several generations. Major restructuring of the system occurs when splits and mergers obscure important contrasts. Phonological change may be accelerated by contact with other languages.

(b) lexical replacement proceeds randomly at modest speed (approximately 19 per cent per millennium for basic vocabulary), and may occur as a
result of gradual semantic shifts. May be accelerated by culture change and by contact with other languages.

(c) grammatical changes arise when phonological or lexical changes mean that significant morphemes can no longer be kept apart.

2 One of these days I shall check up on the details of this story. After thirteen years' absence from south Bougainville I noticed that the Buin language had undergone a large number of changes - but nothing that would impair communication.

3 Sankoff (1977) calculated, from a sample of about 190 languages of Papua New Guinea, that 35.6 per cent had less than 500 speakers. I made a count of 607 Papuan languages, and found that 40 per cent had less than 500 speakers - while the average number of speakers of Papuan languages is less than 4000. The inclusion of Austronesian languages in the count would not change the figures greatly - and it is as well to remember that the numbers of speakers of different languages may have been much smaller in the past.

4 Kwoma itself has only about 3,000 speakers. There are perhaps 200 additional speakers of Kaunga outside the Kwoma-speaking area, but including them does not change the Yelogu situation greatly; inhabitants of Yelogu have much more interaction with Kwoma speakers than with other speakers of Kaunga.

5 Schwartz (1963) characterizes the Manus system of interrelationships as a network of 'roads'. Linguistic choices may be seen as a means of keeping the roads open - or closing them where necessary.

6 A final instructive footnote from Müller (1875), quoting 'Dr. Rae, The Polynesian, No. 23, 1862'. Only the remarks on 'degeneracy' and 'confined range of ideas' seem inappropriate today:

Most men of mark have a style of their own. If the community be large, and there be many who have made language their study, it is only such innovations as have real merit that become permanent. If it be small, a single eminent man, especially where writing is unknown, may make great changes. There being no one to challenge the propriety of his innovations, they become first fashionable and then lasting. The old and better vocabulary drops. If, for instance, England had been a small country, and scarce a writer of distinction in it but Carlyle, he without doubt would have much altered the language. As it is, though he has his imitators, it is little probable that he will have a perceptible influence over the common diction. Hence, where writing is unknown, if the community be broken up into small tribes, the language very rapidly changes, and for the worse. An offset from an Indian tribe in a few generations has a language unintelligible to the parent-stock. Hence the vast number of languages among the small hunting tribes of Indians in North and South America, which yet are all evidently of a common
origin, for their principles are identical. The larger, therefore, the community, the more permanent the language; the smaller, the less it is permanent, and the greater the degeneracy. The smaller the community, the more confined the range of ideas, consequently the smaller the vocabulary necessary, and the falling into abeyance of many words.

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TRADITIONALIST ENCLAVES IN MELANESIA

Roger M. Keesing

INTRODUCTION

New Guinea has long stirred Western popular imagination as a last frontier of the 'primitive' world, along which could be found tribes untouched by Western influence. But in truth virtually all of the most remote hinterlands peoples of Papua New Guinea have now been pulled peripherally into their young country and the world economy.

The traditionalist enclaves I will examine are not those communities in the most remote hinterlands of Papua New Guinea that continued into or through the 1970s to practise the customs of the past. Rather, they lie in what anthropologists call seaboard Melanesia - the Solomons, Vanuatu (until recently the New Hebrides), and the coastal and eastern island regions of Papua New Guinea. I will draw heavily on my own material from Malaita Island in the Solomons, but the patterns I will describe have analogues in parts of Vanuatu, notably the interiors of Santo and Malekula, and some parts of seaboard Papua New Guinea, notably the interior of New Britain and the Massim (Milne Bay Province).

What makes the continuing practice of traditional cultural patterns in these areas more intriguing than the cultural conservatism of the most isolated pockets of the Papua New Guinea interior is precisely that they have not been isolated from Western contact. They have been tied into the world economy for a century or more. The grandfathers of the Malaita people whose cultural conservatism I will sketch went to Queensland and Fiji from the 1870s to the turn of the century, in the famous - or infamous - labour trade. For three quarters of a century these Malaitans have been under concerted pressure from Christianity. Yet as jet airliners land, and affairs of a young nation are debated, a scant seventy-five miles away, the stubborn Kwaio of the central Malaita mountains continue to sacrifice pigs to their ancestors, stage mortuary feasts using strung shell valuables, and enact ancestral customs.

Why I will ask, have some Malanesians kept their commitment to their ancestors and their past, in the face of Christianity, copra and cash, and nowadays, tourists, transistors, and Toyotas?
TRADITIONALISM AND NEOTRADITIONALISM

In contemporary Melanesia, we find a dwindling number of people following the customs of their ancestors; and an increasing number talking about kasom.² Kasom as political symbol has been used in the rhetoric of secessionists, most recently on Espiritu Santo; it has been used by political leaders in appealing to national unity and the preservation of Melanesian values - and the votes of villagers. And it has been used by cultists - Moro of Guadalcanal, the Jonfrum leaders of Tanna, the Nagriamel cultists of Santo - who have created syncretic ideologies out of customary, Western and often millenarian elements. The rhetoric of kasom covers a spectrum between those committed to the new who want to deny that it must destroy the old, and those who seek to accommodate new ideas and political realities with a continuing commitment to old ways and values, and an ancient mode of village life. This latter end of the spectrum comes tangential to the kinds of traditionalism I will examine. Thus in the interior of Espiritu Santo, small pockets of die-hard traditionalists have continued to follow ancestral ways while around them Nagriamel cultists talk about these ways and construct elaborate codifications of kasom, in communities where introduced and indigenous ideas, Christian and pagan practice, cash and cowries, are woven together. In northern Malaita, in the Solomons, die-hard traditionalists share the largely empty mountains with peoples grouped into kasom villages according to the ideology of the post-Second World War Maasina Rule movement (Ross 1973:104), while on the coast their Christian cousins become increasingly Westernized and 'developed'. I have described how, in the mountains of central Malaita, people follow traditional customs for six days a week; and once a week, at a Maasina Rule-style meeting village, they organize in terms of 'chiefs' and 'common people' and use the rhetoric of kasom to demand autonomy from alien laws and invading Christianity (Keesing 1968, 1980b). The relationship between practising customs and talking about them in political rhetoric is, then, far from simple. In focusing on those pockets of seaboard Melanesia where dwindling populations remain committed to ancestral ways, I will inevitably deal with such peoples' political struggles to be allowed to live their lives as they have chosen. In these struggles, kasom inevitably becomes a political symbol, externalized and objectified. The Santo traditionalist may use the same symbols as Jimmy Stephens, but he is playing a different game for different stakes.

In relating what I am calling traditionalism - an unbroken, continuous enactment of the precolonial social and religious system (as inevitably transformed by pacification, steel tools, and introduced cultigens) - to various forms of neotraditionalism, a further theme in contemporary Melanesia is worth noting. This is the revival of elements of traditional culture in areas that had long been Christianized and substantially Westernized. The resurgence of interclan warfare in the Papua New Guinea highlands is the most spectacular return to ways of the past. But more interesting, in relation to my focus on traditionalism, is a resurgence of customary practice in parts of seaboard Melanesia. Thus, for example, many of the Manus Islanders described by Mead as having adopted 'New Lives for Old' (1956) have resurrected many elements of ancestral religion and traditional social organization (T. Schwartz, personal communication): old lives for new, we might say .... Partly this represents a counterreaction
against the subversion of Melanesian values of kinship and community in the process of capitalist development.

Here, the agents of neotraditionalism have not only been elders who once lived the old ways; they include university students schooled in the rhetoric of black nationalism and anticolonialism. This reemergence of old customary practices in long-Christian communities may also represent a Melanesianization of Christianity. Many communities in seaboard Melanesia that were dominated by conservative European missionaries through the first half of the century have in the last twenty or thirty years regained substantial control over their religious life, as missions have become indigenous churches. What had been patriarchally-tended flocks have been able to create their own syntheses of traditional feasting and even elements of old religious practice with a Christianity ironically rendered more Christian by Melanesians.

But the puzzle of those Melanesians who, across the decades, never adopted Christianity, never gave up their feasts and rituals and shell valuables, remains.

CONSERVATISM AND CHANGE: THE CASE OF MALAITA

The island of Malaita in the Solomons provides an ideal laboratory for studying the forces of cultural conservatism and anticolonial resistance, and the pressures of change that are finally overcoming them. For among the island's 65,000 people are sizeable populations that resisted Christianization and Westernization into the 1960s; and substantial pockets where such conservatism still prevails. Although we cannot simplistically assume that the forces of conservatism and change are the same in other parts of Melanesia, we can at least draw from such a case insights into the factors - historical, cultural, geographical, economic - that shape peoples' stances to new alternatives.

Malaita, about one hundred miles long and twenty-five miles across at the widest point, is striped by a series of language - and dialect zones (figure 1). A partly distinctive variant of a common social and religious system is found in each language group. However, the most striking differences among Malaita peoples from one end of the island to the other are found not in the realm of society and culture, but in ecological adaptation and economic system. Populations who share a fundamentally common language and culture have, in parts of Malaita, radically contrastive and complementary economic systems and occupy sharply separated ecological settings.

Two of the three peoples whose conservatism I will examine inhabit the shallow coral lagoons and strands of coastal Malaita, living in large and crowded settlements on islets or coral platforms built up from the lagoon floor. The third follow the pattern that in pre-European times prevailed over most of the island, living in tiny, dispersed homestead clusters scattered through the mountains.
LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS OF MALAITA

1 TO'ABAITA
2 BAELELEA
3 BAEGU
4 LAU
5 FATALEKA
6 KWARA'AE
7 LANJALANJA
8 KWAIO
9 KWAREKWAREO
10 KWAIKWAIO
11 'ARE'ARE
12 SA'A

Figure 1
I will briefly describe the nature of traditionalism in these three populations as they were when I first worked on Malaita in the early and mid-1960s. I will begin with the bush people, the Kwaio of the central mountains.

The traditionalism of modern Kwaio pagans can only be understood against a historical background of anticolonial struggle. A brief Kwaio-centric view of Malaita history will provide needed background.

During the nineteenth century labour trade, the Kwaio responded violently to the death of recruits taken under drastically harsh conditions to distant lands. In the 1880s Kwaio captured and looted two recruiting ships, massacred part of the crew of a third, and killed a number of European recruiters. When a missionary established a church on the Kwaio coast and began preaching against ancestors, he was assassinated. In the early 1920s the British administration imposed a head tax and sought to break the cycle of blood feuding. The Kwaio responded in 1927 by assassinating the architect of pacification, District Officer W.R. Bell, and massacring his British cadet and police patrol. The wantonly destructive punitive expedition that followed ended the possibility of armed resistance (Keesing and Corris, 1980). But in 1939, anticolonialism emerged in new guise in a cult movement: an ancestress, speaking through human intermediaries, prophesied the coming of Americans, destruction of Tulagi, and expulsion of the British colonial masters (Keesing 1978, 1980a). A few years later, in the wake of massive American presence on Guadalcanal, Kwaio joined with other Malaitans in Maasina Rule to form a united front against reimposition of prewar-style colonial rule. Organizing into hierarchies of clan and district 'chiefs', they demanded a loosening of direct rule and a recognition of customary law (Keesing 1978, Laracy 1979). This Maasina Rule movement was broken by heavy-handed repression, but it has reappeared in altered guise over the last twenty-five years in a series of 'custom movements' - in the Kwaio case, a continuing project to codify, hence legitimize and demand recognition of, customary law (Keesing 1967, 1980b).

The east central coast of Malaita rises steeply from the sea, with no coastal shelf. When I began research in the early 1960s, about half of the east Kwaio population had become Christian. Virtually all of these Christians lived in villages along the coast or on the lower coastal slopes; the bulk of the Christians had in pre-European times been what the Kwaio call 'downhill people', living on the coastal slopes and margins.

In the mountains, a population of some 2000 continued in the 1960s to practise a traditional way of life. Young men left home for plantation labour, as they had been doing for eighty years; and they brought home steel knives and axes, pipes, calicoes, and a trickle of other trade-store goods. But beyond this, cultural conservatism was striking. The old religion, focussed on propitiation of ancestral spirits by sacrifice of pigs, flourished. Mortuary feasts, with exchange of strung shell valuables, continued. These valuables, locally-manufactured, were the pervasive medium of exchange: cash was a rarity. Tiny scattered homesteads, shifted every few years, still followed the old pattern: men's house above, domestic houses in the middle, menstrual huts below - a spatial representation of Kwaio cosmolgy. Unmarried girls and women still
went nude, and married women wore only tiny pubic aprons, as they went about their daily tasks of subsistence cultivation, pig husbandry, and domestic work. Although blood feuding was no longer possible, men's houses were still constructed for defense, and men still went to feasts armed with bows and arrows, clubs, or spears; sporadic killings still occurred. And the old hostility to colonial intrusion and Christianity had not abated. When work began on a Seventh Day Adventist hospital on the Kwaio coast in 1965, the New Zealand medical missionary was killed by an unknown assassin. Relations with Christian Kwaio were strained, and the two communities were largely separate (Keesing 1967).

Up the east coast, where a fringing reef creates a large lagoon, speakers of Lau (one of a cluster of northern dialects) had over a span of several centuries worked out a striking adaptation. The Lau people lived in the lagoon, in large, tightly-packed villages built on artificial islands, platforms built from coral from the lagoon floor or extensions of sand spits. Almost entirely without garden land, the Lau people concentrated on fishing; they bartered fish and marine products for their bush 'neighbours' taro and yams, at coastal markets. In pre-European times 'bush' and 'saltwater' peoples had been in constant feud, and these markets were conducted under heavily armed guard and temporary truce.

Cultural conservatism in the Lau lagoon was as striking in the 1960s as it was in the Kwaio mountains, but in quite different ways. Several islet villages were still non-Christian. In these, men's and women's spheres were radically separated, ancestral sacrifice continued, and shell valuables were still in use for feasting and bridewealth. Yet this was no conservatism born of isolation: for almost a century, European ships had been plying the lagoon; missionaries of several denominations had been in Lau since the first years of the century. Only a few hundred yards from the men's houses and shrines were Seventh Day Adventist settlements. Sulufou, most populous lagoon island, had been Anglican for decades. Economically, Lau people had been tied much more directly into the cash economy than the Kwaio: locally-owned cutterboats pried the lagoon, men went regularly to the Solomons capital, Honiara; many worked as stevedores when overseas ships arrived, a pattern going back to the 1930s. The shell-and porpoise-teeth prestige economy and the cash economy flourished side by side.

In the Langalanga lagoon on the west coast of Malaita, a similarly specialized economic and ecological adaptation had emerged in recent centuries. Partly this depended, as in Lau, on bartering of fish for root-crops produced by bush peoples. But more important traditionally had been manufacture of strung shell discs, and their export across a wide area of the south and central Solomons. Canoes carrying shell valuables made to various local specifications returned laden with pigs and vegetables.

By the 1960s many of the Langalanga villages were Christian. Many of the communities previously sited on artificial or semi-artificial islands had been shifted to the mainland, with encouragement from missionaries anxious to promote a clean break with the pagan past, and inducement in the form of greater access to land for subsistence gardening and cash cropping. But as in Lau, traditionalist communities—notably the large central village of Laulas — remained committed to the ancestral religion. Exposed
to European visitors, missionaries, and the cash economy, these Langalanga traditionalists were more Westernized than the Kwaio across the central mountains. But shell valuables were still being made, using traditional methods, for a declining but still substantial market (Cooper 1971). As in Lau, commitment to the ancestral religion entailed separation from pollution by Christian women, hence complete spatial segregation between Christian and pagan communities.

MALAITA: THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS

In 1965, Malaita was part of a sleepy and remote British Protectorate where plumes and swords were paraded on Queen's Birthday and an almost caricature colonialism prevailed. With no internal air services, even outlying government stations seemed remote; the villagers saw occasional Chinese copra traders and were visited once or twice a year ritually by a District Officer. Education was limited, mainly the work of missions.

In the last fifteen years the Solomons have been transformed dramatically, moving to and beyond independence. Honiara is a bustling capital; Melanesians have mainly replaced the colonialists. By Pacific standards, the economy is booming. Villagers throughout the Solomons have gained access to primary education. Many have moved to urban centres. Development in the form of cash crops, cattle, and petty entrepreneurship has brought cash into formerly remote areas, many becoming more accessible through roads or airfields as well as commercial sea transport.

It would be surprising if the traditionalists of the 1960s continued their commitment to the ancestors amid new temptations and opportunities. Let us look first at the Lau of the northeast lagoons of Malaita.

Several key Lau villages have maintained their commitment to the ancestral religion, with the separations between male and female, Christian and pagan, that entails. However, participation in the cash economy has considerably expanded. The economic focus of the area has shifted from the lagoon islands to the coastal road (that links the Lau to the provincial centre of Auki, on the opposite coast) and to Honiara. Although older men still maintain ancestral rituals and sacrifice, and women follow pollution taboos, the younger generation has increasingly turned from the old ways. Children from the pagan islands now go to primary schools. Many younger people have apparently moved from the islands to settlements growing up along the road. Many have also moved to a large Lau settlement on the margins of Honiara, where fishing for the commercial market provides income. Participation in baitfishing for the government-Japanese joint fishing venture competes with old patterns of fishing in the lagoon. Although the ancestral religion lives on, this would seem to be its last generation: it has been eroded more by capitalism than Christianity.

The transformations of the last fifteen years have had a dramatic but quite different impact in the Langalanga lagoon, across the island. The same kinds of changes deriving from education, road access, and development schemes have hit Langalanga; but the differences are more striking. Laulasi, once the main bastion of conservatism, exemplifies one set of changes. A decade ago, expatriate entrepreneurs and Langalanga tradition-
Malaita
alists worked out a scheme whereby culture could be turned to profit: tourists flown to Auki are taken down the lagoon by 'war canoe' and treated to a day-long exhibition of dancing, 'custom', and shell money-making. Laulasi has become one of the notable tourist attractions of the South Pacific— with all the predictable consequences for the integrity of the ancestral religion and the fabric of community social life. Moreover, the expatriate entrepreneurs were Baha'is, and offered a ready-made religious accommodation between ancestors and capitalism. Only a dozen families on Laulasi, Connell (1977) reports, remained nominally pagan in the late 1970s.

The second and even more dramatic change in the Langalanga lagoon also centres on making money: but the dollars and kina come from the old export product, shell valuables. Production of shell valuables, which had been dwindling in the 1960s, has been spectacularly intensified through the 1970s. Langalanga villagers who a decade ago had been dabbling in copra or cocoa and subsistence gardening are now back in the shell game, with a vengeance. When the tourists descend, the old bow drills and grinding stones come out. In between, steel drills and imported grindstones have permitted a major intensification of production.

But where are the markets for these valuables? Some go to the tourists, in the lagoon and in Honiara and Auki. Some still go to other parts of Malaita, where bridewealth is paid in shell, either continuing old practices or reviving them as Christian missions become indigenous churches. But the main markets are far beyond Malaita: across the Papua New Guinea border in Bougainville. Here we have an interesting linkage between traditionalism—or neotraditionalism—in different areas. Connell (1977) describes how, as Bougainville has become increasingly developed through cash cropping and the giant copper mine, use of shell valuables made in Langalanga—for bridewealth, compensation, and other transactions that symbolize 'custom' and identity—has risen sharply. A heavy and continuous flow of valuables from Langalanga into Bougainville, carried by air or brought in by sea to avoid duty, has brought a flood of wealth into the once economically-stagnant lagoon. Production and export of valuables unites in similar enterprise what had been die-hard traditionalists on Laulasi and leaders at the top levels of government. The remaining pockets of Langalanga conservatism have, as in Lau, been broken down not by Christianity but by capitalism; curiously, here it is custom that has gone capitalist.

What, then, of the Kwaio mountaineers who through the years have risked so much in armed struggle and political resistance? Fourteen years ago a large Seventh Day Adventist hospital was opened on the Kwaio coast; it now has regular air service from Honiara and Auki. A trans-Malaita road only a few miles to the north of Kwaio country makes the central east coast much less isolated by land, as well as by air. With these changes, with so much emphasis on development on Malaita, and with the emergence of an independent government that would seem to have answered the post-war call of Malaitans for freedom from colonial subjugation, we might expect the Kwaio conservatives to have come down from their mountain fastnesses to join this new world.
A few have. But for most, the ancestral ways still offer more than the new alternatives and temptations. The fabric of traditional social life remains substantially unbroken, although something of a sexual revolution has come among the young several decades after the life-and-death sanctions of the elders were lifted away by colonial rule. Traditional mortuary feasts still go on, still using the shell valuables the Kwaio view as much more important than their meagre supplies of cash. Traditional dress — and undress — still prevail; bows and arrows, clubs and spears replace the ubiquitous long bushknives when Kwaio gather for feasts or litigaiton. Bamboo tubes still serve for water containers and cooking vessels; and, when discarded, as torches. Production centres around taro, sweet potatoes, and pigs: surplus is produced with shell valuables, feasting largesse, and ultimately prestige — not cash income — as the stakes.

What, then, about the air service to Honiara? Let me quote from a letter received by the Adventist hospital manager from pagan priests along the Kwaio–Kwara'ae border, by way of a Christian scribe:

I just want to let you know that I don't want your plain to fly over my village...from now on...for the following reasonable reasons:

1. The plain carry women with bloody babies.

2. He always fly over our most Holy Alters where we burnt offering to our devil.

3. It always cause death to our people because the devil get angry and kill people.

4. Many pigs are kill [because] the plains fly over our devil....

On Behalf of majority of headen people who are living here if you are Christians please don't set your flyth over our area for it cause us death.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely Ere ere Devil Priests

Even the medical services of the hospital are out of reach for many Kwaio non-Christians, particularly men, who would be massively polluted by a structure that incorporates a maternity ward.

What about the lure of cash, the temptations of hardware? Most Kwaio would like more money — and through it, more things — if they could get them without cost to the quality of traditional life. But those men who travel in the Solomons have seen the tremendous losses, in the bonds of kinship and community and the value of self-sufficiency, incurred by Solomon Islanders who have opted for the new ways. For most Kwaio, this trade-off is barely tempting. And even the new material goods, if they could be had, would be incorporated into the structure of old values and
ancient ways. Again an anecdote will illustrate. An aged pagan priest who is a master craftsman made for me a number of traditional ornamental combs. When I paid him in cash, he asked me to buy him a tape recorder and cassettes in Honiara instead. Why, I asked, did he want a tape recorder? His nephews, he explained, were heirs to his magic, his genealogical knowledge, and his ritual duties; but they were lazy pupils who couldn't keep it all in their heads. If he recorded it all on cassettes, they could not only perform their religious duties properly; they could stage the mortuary sequence after his death in just the right way.

What about the old political issues of taxation and the autonomy to follow customary law, now the Melanesian government rules in Honiara? The Kwaio traditionalists are still fighting the same battles, and more openly and politically than they have for fifty years. In defiance of the provincial and national governments the Kwaio are collecting their own taxes - at about a third of the provincial rates - and keeping the money themselves, under a council of traditional leaders. And on the issue of customary law, these leaders are defying the laws of the country in seizing jurisdiction of serious criminal cases and settling them through compensation in shell valuables.

Custom and community are alive and well in the Kwaio mountains; and not, as in Lau, among what is visibly a last generation of die-hards. When a dance is performed, or panpipes are blown, fathers and young sons join together in weaving ancient designs. Daughters are raised to follow the rules of the ancestors and teach them to their daughters.

WHY CULTURAL CONSERVATISM?

Why were Melanesian peoples such as the Lau, Langalanga, and Kwaio speakers of Malaita still following an ancestral religion and maintaining a traditional social order into the 1960s? And why have the Kwaio, and a few other Melanesian peoples, maintained this conservatism into the 1980s despite the striking changes in their countries?

A first point is that many, if not all, precolonial Melanesian societies had social systems that could potentially provide the foundations for a highly satisfying life even in the latter twentieth century. These positive features of Melanesian ways of life do not constitute an explanation for cultural conservatism where it has occurred. But understanding them is a prerequisite to interpreting stances that cannot be comprehended only in negative terms - the absence of geographical or economic factors that would encourage Westernization.

I have made the point recently in regard to the Kwaio (Reesing n.d.):

There are deep satisfactions in being able to produce with one's own hands, through work in family groups, virtually everything one needs to live. There are enormous satisfactions in living in a physical landscape filled with ancient landmarks, surrounded by history: gardening, living, worshipping in the settings where one's parents, one's grandparents, and one's great-grandparents spent their lives, and bound
to them by direct social bonds. There are satisfactions in following ancient ways and rules.... The means to prestige and prosperity - raising pigs, growing big gardens, earning or fabricating shell valuables - lie in people's own hands. If we can measure a standard of living in cultural and human terms, the traditional way is highly satisfying.

We could make the same point for the Trobriands, where canoes bearing prow boards of ancient design still carry kula exchange valuables across the seas, for the Lau lagoon of Malaita, or for the central mountains of New Britain or Santo: ways from the past can still be richly rewarding.

A second and essential point is that the modes of life being followed in traditionalist enclaves represent new cultural syntheses of the last hundred years, transformations of old social and economic systems, not simply perpetuations of the past. Most of the populations of seaboard Melanesia lived in a climate of internal blood feud and/or external threat: warfare and feud were endemic. The imposition of colonial peace has created a political climate where traditional social bonds and economic relationships could be maintained free from terror and murderous violence. What has replaced the warrior life for men has partly been plantation labour which, however exploitative, has partly freed young men from subordination to their elders, and has in many areas long been Melanesianized into a rite of passage. It has also been a means to steel tools, new cultigens, and other elements of a changed economic system. The life of Kwaio traditionalists, or their counterparts in other pockets of hinterlands Melanesia, is rewarding as much because of the changes in the old order as its preservation: striking conservatism masks deep change.

This raises a third point. Many communities in seaboard Melanesia that adopted Christianity decades ago similarly represent syntheses of old and new, where structures of kinship and community have been preserved and given new meaning, where Christianity has been Melanesianized and may represent a liberation from a local religious tradition that enmeshed people in fear of ghosts and sorcery, and oppressed and excluded women.

Whether villagers have embraced or rejected Christianity has depended on geographical, economic, and political factors, and the circumstances of missionization, as well as cultural factors. Where political organization was sharply hierarchical, chiefs could act as forces of conservatism (Mekeo or Kiriwina [Trobriands]) or as agents or rapid Christianization (South Malaita); the spatial dispersion and ordered anarchy of bush populations in the interiors or large islands (Kwaio, Kaulong-Sengseng of New Britain, Santo) has often been a sociopolitical obstacle to Christianization, as well as a physical barrier to missionary work.

It is against this background that we can begin to understand the geographical and economic circumstances promoting conservatism or change, can begin to assess the traditionalism on islands like Malaita and its differential transformation in the last fifteen years.
Bush peoples such as the Kwaio, living either in remote interiors or above precipitous (or crowded) coasts that offer no promising setting for a new life, may have been making the best trade-off in economic as well as social terms by maintaining their subsistence orientation and the traditional order of feasts, shell valuables, and sacrifice it sustains. Remote from roads and transport, without the coastal lands that could bring relative prosperity from copra or cocoa, opting for relative self-sufficiency cast in cultural terms may be sound strategy.

In an area such as the Massim (Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea), maintaining traditional exchange systems may at once preserve cultural values and identity and a fabric of social relationships, and maintain a delicate system of regional trade in resources that sustains economic viability partly free from neocolonial dependency (Macintyre and Young, this volume). Precolonial exchange systems may also be put to new uses, as surrogates for warfare, as media for escalating competition for resources and prestige, and as ways of incorporating and legitimizing new wealth into old cultural idioms and prestige systems. Cultural conservatism may be most striking not in small peripheral communities, in such regional systems, but in their most densely populated, ecologically rich, and strategically placed centres, such as Kiriwina in the Massim, which have long been focal points of cultural creativity (Schwartz 1963).

The Lau speakers of Malaita illustrate another variation on the same theme. Poorly placed to exploit the early avenues to cash on Malaita, especially copra, they have built on their traditional specializations as fishermen, traders and middlemen, to become one of the most mobile populations in the Solomons, and now to exploit the new urban niches in Honiara. Education and the lure of urban jobs are doing now what seventy-five years of missionary presence only partially achieved.

For the Langalanga too, old economic strategies provided a kind of preadaptation for new ones. Again the Langalanga were poorly placed economically, because of the lack of coastal land, to exploit copra, for decades the main source of income for Solomons coastal communities. Continuing the old orientation of fishing and exporting shell valuables to a dwindling market was, into the 1960s, an economically useful choice. And as in Lau it was a new external structure of opportunity - although here, ironically, one based on selling culture for cash through tourism and increased shell export - that provided means and incentive. And so the grandson of a man who once paddled his shell valuables to Guadalcanal or Ysabel now peddles his shell valuables in Bougainville by jet airliner.

But what, then, of Bougainville, or East New Britain, where shell valuables are used alongside kina, and custom and capitalism seem to be thriving together? Where copra, cocoa and mining have brought floods of cash, and the old village life has largely disappeared in favour of metal roofs, imported foods, and trucks, we can hardly speak of traditionalism. But why, then, the resurgence of symbols of the past? Why the payment of bridewealth or compensation in Langalanga shell strands or Tolai tambu? A partial answer is that Melanesians, from the most Westernized urban elites to the prosperous villagers who can now buy everything they once thought they wanted from the trade stores, see with genuine and deep regret the disintegration of old obligations of kinship and bonds of community, values
of sharing and caring, that were once the keystone of the moral order. They see with genuine regret, and with increasing knowledge that they may have lost at least as much as they have gained, the transformation of the lands where their forebears once worked into plantations, cattle properties, and roads. If cash is symbol of, as well as means to, the new opportunities and rewards, shell valuables and other cultural trappings have become symbols of old values, meanings, and social relationships. In paying bridewealth or compensation in shell valuables— or talking about kastom— Melanesians who have opted for the new can assert their continuing Melanesian-ness, their cultural identity and ties with the past and can deny the deep and widening contradictions in their lives. For them, the rhetoric of kastom has become a political stance toward the past and toward the future.

But so it is, as well, for traditionalists like the Kwaio pagans. Kwaio see that in other parts of the Solomons, peoples have lost their cultures, their roots in the land and the past. Alienated from their customs and their ancestors, these Solomons Islanders have become outsiders in their own homeland. As a Kwaio leader articulated the ideology of resistance:

Those people always say we [Kwaio]...don't have good sense, that we are backward [lit. 'the people at the rear']. But I say we are the wise ones, holding onto our land, holding on to our customs.

To follow the rules of the ancestors in the latter twentieth century in what its leaders piously pronounced to be a 'Christian country', is a mode of political struggle, as well as a way of life.

Those Melanesians who continue to practise their customs in traditionalist enclaves, those who are abandoning their customs for the lure of modernization, and those who are using symbols of custom to deny that they have left the past and their Melanesian heritage behind all have something important to tell us about the world we have created, and about ourselves, as well as about the old Melanesia, and the new.

NOTES

1 Field research among the Kwaio of Malaita was carried out in 1962-64 (supported by the United States National Institute of Mental Health), in 1966, in 1969-70 (supported by the United States National Science Foundation) and in 1974, 1977, and 1979 (supported by the Australian National University). Survey research on Lau and Langalanga, Malaita, was carried out in 1964 (supported by Harvard University).

2 A pervasive Melanesian Pidgin term for 'custom' though one that has different meanings from region to region, and in urban and village settings (Tonkinson 1980).
A term I dislike but use reluctantly, without pejorative implications. There is no good alternative: 'Non-Christians', which I also use, not only is clumsy, but describes the practice of a Melanesian religion in a Melanesian country in negative terms as if it were an aberration.

My data on the contemporary situation in Lau are limited. I was able to visit the area fleetingly in 1974-75 (the date span here is deceptive: I spent New Year's eve anchored off Fou'eda Island, after briefly visiting that community where I had done survey research in 1964, and the adjacent Seventh Day Adventist village of New Lands), and otherwise am relying on second-hand unpublished information.

As I noted earlier, well-educated urban Melanesians may also have political and economic motives for talking about kastom and using symbols of cultural identity: in doing so they can maintain village political constituencies, use ties of kinship for entrepreneurial advantage, maintain land rights, etc.

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