LASKONA LIFE

History, Identity, and Modernity on Lambom Island, Papua New Guinea

David Barton Cooper

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Except as cited in the text, this work is the result of research carried out by the author.

David Cooper
Department of Anthropology
Division of Society and Environment
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
This thesis examines the contemporary lifeways of the Lak people of Lambom Island, New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. Drawing from the emerging anthropological discourse of modernity, the thesis aims to ethnographically portray a particular indigenous form of modernity as it exists among the people of Lambom. Beginning in Chapter 1 with an examination of the history of connections to wider world systems for the region, the thesis traces the particulars of the Lambom people’s manner of engaging the wider world from within the Lambom of the late 1990s. Lambom modernity is linked with their identity construct Laskona, a definitively relational term that plays on the tension between marginality and connection. In Chapters 2-5 this identity is examined in a range of contexts from Lambom relating to a pidgin taxonomy of domains of modern existence: bisnis, kastom, lotu, and gavman: business, custom, church, and government. When viewed from the perspective Laskona identity, the Lambom experience of modernity shows a breadth of continuities and contrasts across these taxonomic domains. In Chapter 6-8, the thesis traces the Laskona identity construct out from Lambom, through travels within the region, the experience of the urban setting in Kokopo, and finally within and beyond the region through an examination of the Lak engagement with a multinational logging company and an international conservation NGO. The thesis concludes by comparing the Lambom experience of modernity with other places across PNG. Central here are recent discussions surrounding the role of humiliation in the process of social change, which are analysed in light of the ethnography presented in the thesis.
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Map 1: Lak Electorate of Papua New Guinea
Introduction

LAMBOM ISLAND, LASKONA IDENTITY, HISTORY AND MODERNITY

Riddles and Short Cuts

The Lak people of Lambom play a game of riddles called Tik a Tik (Lak: literally “one to one”). A question is posed in the form of a descriptive image and a specific response identifying the actual thing in plain terms is elicited. I first witnessed this game early during my field stay being played by school children as they washed up along the seashore before class. The young boy asking the riddles only knew two Tik a Tik but that didn’t stop him from asking successive friends to guess the riddle as they arrived on the beach. The first Tik a Tik he asked was kurkur lon bon?, ‘tangled thing on the sea?’ The answer, provided by one of his mates if the questioned boy could not answer, was sipseıl, ‘sailing ship’. His other riddle was Tar on ep yai lamas?, ‘Red on the stick to husk coconuts?’, to which the correct response was Mans hilong Misus ‘A white woman’s lips’. When I asked the children to explain these riddles they expressed puzzlement: in their minds the meanings were self-evident. Finally a young man named Wali came to my assistance. He told me that the first riddle referred to the tangled nature of a ship’s rigging, kurkur being analogous to a tangled or fouled fishing line. The second Tik a Tik was a play on the similarity between the red stain on the end of a stick one uses to husk coconuts and white women’s habit of wearing lipstick.

Beyond the limited set that the children riddled with that morning, I was able to collect no more than eight Tik a Tik in total. One that leapt immediately to most people’s minds in addition to the first two was Katim i katong?, ‘North is south?’, with the answer being Glas, ‘Mirror’. Older more knowledgeable men recalled the riddle game with

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1 I later discovered that a tract of impassible mangrove was called in Lak Kamkurkur, literally “place entangled”.

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fondness and laughed as they tried to remember more Tik a Tik for me to write down. Most elders were certain that there were more than eight Tik a Tik, but no one was able to add to the number of riddles I gathered that first day.

One of the first things I noticed about Tik a Tik was that the questions were posed in the local language while the answers were typically given in pidgin (as in all three examples above). It was also apparent that the riddles dealt with guessing or identifying things that did not exist in Lak before contact with Europeans, in terms explicitly based within the realm of local experience. It is common wisdom to appreciate that child’s play is seldom just child’s play, especially if one considers the relation between answering a riddle and the purpose of its construction. In this sense it appears that the Lak have a basic interest in preparing their children to understand the exogenous in indigenous terms. Sahlins and others argue that this is to be expected since there is no other way for people to understand their experiences of the external. Only the truly incomprehensible slips out of a peoples’ collective consciousness. What I wish to focus upon here is the basic approach the Tik a Tik game takes to the exogenous, that of a puzzle or riddle for the Lak; and that this type of riddle juxtaposes concepts in the local language with answers in the idiom of pidgin. Current Lak concerns about their place in a wider world and their attempts to manage these concerns are the focus of this thesis. The exigencies of modernity are apparent to the Lak in various ways in their everyday lives. This thesis sets out to show how the Lak response to the puzzling nature of modern conditions on Lambom is, like Tik a Tik, an attempt to posit the riddle of their current existence in local terms, and answer these challenges to their lifeways in a manner that transcends both local and global contexts much like a pidgin language bridges local languages and those of outsiders.

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2 The only exception involved the use of the Tok Pisin word kapa (‘tin roof’) in the question ‘men from Buka sitting under a tin roof?’. The answer was papaya seeds. As the rest of the question was asked in Lak in any case, kapa could perhaps be regarded as a word that has been borrowed into Lak (as well as being a Tok Pisin word), since there is no other, Lak word for ‘tin roof’.

3 In the Malaita case Marranda (1971) argues: “the main intellectual effort in a riddling situation consists of a quick scanning of the coded messages to ‘discover’ the answer rather than an intellectual effort to ‘invent’ a novel answer. In this sense, riddling is always closer to an academic test than creative research (216).
One particular way of answering the problems posed by modernity for the Lak is the use of ‘short cuts’. Finding themselves in a world where cash is of importance for daily existence, in particular with regards to school fees, taxes, kerosene, travel to town, and the purchase of clothing, the Lak experience great pressure on their time and resources to meet traditional mortuary feasting requirements. This thesis examines the way in which cash cropping, marketing, and labour in Lak political economy have been accompanied by a steady compression, combination, and dismissal of aspects of traditional ritual concerns. The Lak response to the former has been to take ‘short cuts’ with regard to the latter. In essence Lak compress, combine, and edit out aspects of ritual work. This is in no means a straightforward process, as various ‘Short Cuts’ are attempted then evaluated as to their efficacy. Some work, some produce results that are seen as lacking. Nevertheless, there is agreement that the traditional ways must be adapted to current conditions. Through an examination of ‘Short Cuts’ I aim to show where the Lak place the essential aspects of their ritual concerns and the difficulties arising in trying to balance these with the demand of their modern lives.

Furthermore, I will argue against a view that would see such ‘Short Cuts’ as the loss of culture in the face of homogenizing globalization. The problem of this portrayal, drawing on tropes of Tristes Tropiques, has been pointed out by Sahlins: people are always involved in dynamic cultures that simply get on with the business of living. I will show through an examination of Lak history that the creative manipulation of their ritual complexes has been an ongoing concern; and that attempts to represent pristine, poetic cultural systems and logics avoids the fact that any particular such system or logic is the result of historical contingencies and part of the continuous flux of cultural meaning.

Now I will turn to a discussion of Lak environs and sociality. Following this I will summarize the ethnographic work done in Lak prior to my fieldwork, and then discuss the ethnography done within the south New Ireland region during the 1990s. I will then turn to a discussion of anthropological approaches to modernity, before concluding this introduction with an outline of the thesis.

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4 The term Short Cut contrasts with the Tok Pisin term Brukim Bus in the sense that the first focuses on finding an easier way, while the second focuses on a more direct way, regardless of expenditure of effort.
Social Organization and Lambom Environs

The Lak are a matrilineal people. Lak society is structured into a matri-filial moiety system. This form of dual organization that divides people into Smol Pisin and Bik Pisin moieties exists from the Gazelle peninsula in New Britain, extending through the Duke of York Islands, and from the south of New Ireland north to the central region of the province (Albert 1987:101). In Lak the moieties are exogamous, with the Smol Pisin group named Bongian and Bik Pisin called Koroe in the local language. Each of the names of the moieties also refers to a specific clan within each of the larger groups. Each moiety contains about a dozen clans spread across Lak, with different clans more prevalent in different villages. On Lambom within the Koroe moiety Koroe, Kaptu, and Kamrai are the most populous clans, with significant numbers for Buibui clan as well. Amongst the Bongian moiety, Kamlapar, Bongian, and Limut clan represent the bulk of their numbers, with Lio, and Silbat also present.

Leadership in Lak society is based on the earned status of big men. Status is gained through leadership in holding mortuary feasts for their sub-clan. Lak big men wield a type of leadership system that clearly resembles "other well-documented coastal Melanesian big-men" systems (Albert 1988:159). In the past a big man tended to encourage his children to marry into his own clan (i.e. that of the children’s father) but this is considered ‘old fashioned’ today and the current ethos is to follow one’s own preference. However it is expected that members of one’s clan, and particular one’s mother and her clan sisters will voice their opinion on the character of the intended spouse-to-be, and resist agreeing to bride price too quickly if they are reticent. Although village endogamy is the general practice the people of Lambom do welcome immigrants to the island. People married into the island are usually adopted into a clan of the alternate moiety of their spouse. This practice is usually formalized with a feast called ep tul ngis (Lak: good work), but in its place some Lak big men have attempted to settle the matter with cash payments. Currently there is one Tolai woman married into the island community who has not committed to a particular clan. Her father in law, a man of the Kamrai clan within Koroe moiety, had wanted her to be in his clan and had paid her bride price in Rabaul, but he had died before sponsoring an ep tul ngis for her. She has had three children in her more than a decade on the island and her husband got the
job as camp manager when the logging camp at nearby Metlik was established. During a visit to camp to collect a royalty payment in 1996 a man of the Buibui clan of Koroe moiety attempted to ‘buy’ her and her children for his clan by leaving five hundred kina on the table after a night of drinking at the manager’s house. The money was returned in the morning and the case remains unresolved. She told me that when her daughters were ready to marry and the issue arose of who was to receive the bride price she expected that the issue would be sorted out.

The Lak people practice swidden horticulture, commonly referred to as ‘slash and burn’ agriculture. On Lambom gardens produce for a year or two and are then left fallow, until undergrowth and trees recover the garden site, over a period of eight to twelve years. The primary garden crops are cassava, yams, coconuts, betel nut, bananas, and taro, with a range of greens mixed in as well. Lambom people consider their coconuts to be especially tasty to drink when green, as the island is quite rocky, and they argue this leaves their coconuts free of impurities. They do note their inability to grow very large taro or yams due to the same reason, leading to the common refrain: “ailan em ston tusol/this island is just solid rock”. Cash cropping, and in particular cutting copra is a going concern on Lambom.

As I deal with much of the above in more detail later in this thesis I will turn now to an examination of the physical environment and the village setting of Lambom. To the north of the main island of New Guinea lie the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, Manus, New Britain, and New Ireland. New Ireland is a narrow island, measuring between five and ten kilometres wide as one travels from the northern end to the southeast. At the southern extremity of New Ireland, the narrow three hundred kilometre island broadens into what is referred to as the southern bulge. Over fifty kilometres across, the bulge is mountainous terrain, sloping steeply to a narrow coastal strip. Along the coast live the two thousand or so residents of the Lak region, named for the language most of its inhabitants speak. The island of Lambom lies off the southernmost tip of Lak. Lambom Island is home to nearly a quarter of the region’s population. Though the island of Lambom is only three kilometres long and one wide, and covered by steep hills, over five hundred people live on the narrow strip of flat ground on the leeward side of the island. A recent schism brought on by the arrival of an evangelical church
has led to a hundred or so people leaving the island to live on the opposite shore of the mainland of New Ireland.

Lambom is not visibly different from many other villages in New Ireland or for that matter the rest of Papua New Guinea. Houses are constructed of bush material frames, clapboard siding, and tin sheet roofing. People dress pretty much the same as other rural New Guinea Islanders: men wearing laplaps, women meri blouses and laplaps, and youth’s singlets and shorts. What sets Lambom apart within the region is its size and density of settlement. Lambom has more than double the population of any other village in the Lak region, which encompasses most of the southern bulge of New Ireland.
The reef that circles the island gives the water close to shore a vivid turquoise colour that varies through a range of bright greens and sparkling blues. It is the source of most of the protein consumed on the island. The shore is fringed with coconut palms and large shade trees. From the beach Lambom rises steeply to a central ridge 120 metres high. The ground is rocky and crowded with trees: coconuts planted for harvesting, fruit trees, and a variety of beautiful tropical hardwoods. Gardens are ranged around the island. Most gardening is done in plots cleared by families along the gentle hill slopes of the island’s interior. Betel nut palms and papaw and banana trees are planted near gardens. The main crops are cassava and sweet potato, with taro, yams, and Singapore taro less prevalent, and pineapples as well as a variety of vegetables planted to supplement the staples.

Shaped like an inverted letter V, with crooked and stubby arms and a stretched out middle, the island is about three kilometres long and about two across at its widest point. The main village, collectively referred to as Camp, is situated on the only large stretch of mainly flat land that extends more than a few meters in from the seafront on the leeward side of the island. Camp comprises five adjacent hamlets, and most of the people of Lambom Island reside in the more than fifty houses built there. The vast majority of houses are rectangular, framed with rough-hewn planks cut with machetes. All the houses stand on posts at least one metre above the ground. Predominantly divided into two rooms, houses rarely exceed seven meters along any side, but there are some notable exceptions.

In the middle of camp stand the United Church and a dilapidated community centre that once served as the church. The ground is fairly level for almost 50 meters inland at the centre of Camp, before it begins to steeply rise. Both the northern and southern ends of Camp pinch in to offer only a few meters or so of flat land before rising more steeply. A dozen houses and cookhouses are built along the waterfront east of the path that follows the sea line and dissects the village from north to south. The rest of the houses crowd back along the flat ground, with several built along the slope, and a few perched precariously on built up mounds against a near 30-degree grade.

Separated from Camp, by a narrow path that winds 200 meters along a steep and rocky outcropping of shoreline, lies the hamlet of Lilina. Below this path, and sheltered by a
stand of banana trees, the stretch of seafront serves as the women’s wash area and toilet. Further south along the shore, the land again is wide and flat enough for six households to sit above the path along the narrow strip; finally widening out into the second habitable expanse of level ground on the island that makes up the school, a large sports field, the aid post, as well as the houses built for the teachers and health care workers.

The northern reaches of Camp and the southernmost extent of Lilina are marked off by the island’s two trium, areas dedicated to men’s cult business, forbidden to women and uninitiated young men. Separating Camp from the trium are a pal, with two men’s houses, one for each moiety, and three rumai dalwan, bachelor houses, while at Lilina a single rumai dalwan borders the trium. Men and boys use the beachfront adjacent to the bachelor houses for washing and answering nature’s call.

Huddled against the backdrop of steep hills, the village enjoys a vista across the passage to the mountainous mainland, a fine rainforest, rising abruptly to a series of peaks soaring to 1000m in height. A few households dot the narrow shoreline of the big island of New Ireland; the villages’ pigs are tended on the mainland. There also are the dozen or so houses that make up the new hamlet of Kababui, home to members of the Foursquare church. Kababui was settled after a fight and the exodus of members of the new church to the mainland. Several copra ovens are operated on strips of land belonging to clans or individuals. Most of the shore is planted with coconuts running up more than a hundred metres above the passage, and some gardens are cleared on the mainland as well. With the leeward shore of Lambom Island curving towards the mainland, from most places in the village you get the impression of being on the shores of mountain-bordered Lake.

Onto this landscape Lambom Islanders have projected a self-image as marginal people. Laskona identity asserts a distance from elsewhere and else-when, places that are eventful, that happen. This is a moral conundrum for Lak people. They see themselves as effective actors in their world, but their avowal of marginality, what they see as their position relative to others and other places in the world, calls this into question. Their current assertion that they occupy a marginal situation is always being addressed, strategies are put into play, shortcuts attempted to link Lambom to eventful places, places of moment.
Now it is apparent that laskona identity, constructed as a relational term, focuses on the connection to wider systems of sociality and political economy. It is a commentary upon this connection, a discourse of the Lak experience of the modernity of PNG. I turn now to a discussion of previous ethnography based in Lak.

The Lak in Ethnography

My aim here is to give a brief summary of the anthropological work carried out in the southern part of New Ireland province since the 1990s. To begin with I will examine the work done in the Lak region by the two ethnographers whose work was done in villages on the east coast of the main island of New Ireland.

Steve Albert was the first ethnographer to spend an extended period of time in the south of New Ireland. He spent ten months in 1985 in Lak visiting most of the villages in the region but based primarily in Matkamlagir and Siar on the east coast of Lak. His contribution to anthropology is represented by his unpublished doctoral thesis, two published papers drawn from that work, and two scholarly magazine articles. Albert’s thesis can best be described as a classical ethnographic monograph. His ethnography is classic in the sense that he faced: “the prospect of gathering data still unknown to the anthropological community.” (1987:1). Over two thirds of Albert’s thesis is dedicated to primarily descriptive ethnography. After a brief introduction of the Lak place in regards to neighboring cultures, Albert surveys the linguistic, geographic, ecological, historical, and cultural context particular to the Lak people of the south of New Ireland. What follows is an exhaustive examination of the beliefs, social organization, and ritual complex of the Lak people. With an eye towards placing the Lak people within the ethnographic record, Albert outlines two versions of the Lak origin myth, a set of ancillary myths, followed by a thorough list of spiritual beings, an outline of kin terminology and a the description of Lak matrilineal moiety organization. He lists all the clans he encountered during his stay, along with their origin stories, and examines the politics involved with clan leadership and Big Man status. His focus then turns to an

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5 His work on Lak Big men puts his ethnography into the context of the work of Godelier et al on Great men versus Big men; His paper on Lak ‘devils’ involved in the bullroarer cult examines the nature of cultural categories, form, and symbolism.
examination of the ritual complex and exchange system surrounding marriage and mortuary feasting.

The analysis in Albert’s thesis *The work of Marriage and of Death* consists of an examination of the symbolism involved in Lak ritual [1987]. Noting that the formal ritual involved with marriage exchange involved the erection of a platform draped with shell money and bound to tethered pigs mirrored one stage of the many discrete feasts involved with mortuary ritual, Albert sets out to analyze the symbolic implications of the overall Lak ritual feasting complex. His thesis elegantly shows how a concern with inter moiety exchange and its role in creating Lak social groups and sociality in marriage feasting runs full circle to a focus on finishing a person’s exchangeable elements in mortuary feasting in order to wipe the slate clean in order to allow the cycle to begin anew. His work thus sits firmly within the regional themes of ‘finishing the dead’ that are apparent in the published works of numerous ethnographies of the New Guinea Islands (Foster 1995, Battaglia 1990, Wagner 1986).

Kingston’s work in Siar village is predominantly represented by his unpublished thesis (1998). His work is a fine analysis of the ideology and imagery involved in Lak ritual, with a focus on mortuary rites and the recently re-emergent practice of female initiation through seclusion. Kingston argues that Lak ritual is a ‘total fact’ in the Maussian sense. Thus he argues that the carrying out of ritual is the paramount focus of Lak life as well as the motivating factor for peoples’ actions. In keeping with critiques (e.g., Fabian 1983, and Carrier ed. 1992) of such approaches for reifying cultures as objects “outside of time” and unencumbered by links with wider systems of political economy the brute facts of Lak recent history point to a problem here.

The Lak region and Siar village in particular, were in the midst of a contentious dispute between advocates of industrial logging and the establishment of an Integrated Conservation and Development project during the time of Kingston’s study. Millions of Kina had been paid in royalties to various clans during the early years of logging that coincide with Kingston’s ethnographic present. Other than a brief mention of this in his introduction, the implications of the events involved in this dispute are nowhere addressed in his thesis. Now if this were only a question of anthropological focus, a difference in interests between ethnographers, one could understand this. I would not
hazard to assert that my interests are the only ones of import to understand the specifics of Lak life in this particular time in their history. Nor would I deny the value of the insights Kingston presents from his apparently deep involvement with Lak ritual (an involvement much commented upon by my own informants). However, it is potentially misleading at the very least to ignore the effects of the appearance of the logging industry in Lak on the efflorescence of ritual underway during the mid to late 1990s in the Lak region. One could argue that what was going on was similar to the situation in Fiji in the 19th Century discussed by Sahlins, where an increase in scrimshaw led to an inflationary cycle where Fijians used this surplus to carry out actions that amounted to them being more Fijian more often (Sahlins 2005). But even here the role of Whalers in this period of expansiveness has to be taken into account. The case in Lak is more complicated, but involves a structure of the conjuncture that needs to be addressed. The existence of current engagements was evident from a letter I received from Albert prior to the beginning of my own fieldwork in 1996.

It appears the new but failing road system, built to support logging activity, has given the ritual system a shot in the arm. That is, people are moving up and down the coast with far greater ease. Sean has already seen more kastom than I did, including dal, the young girls’ initiation (Albert 1996 personal communication).

Albert’s assertion that the loggers’ road building provided the means that allowed for an increase in ritual activity seems straight-forward. As for the motivation for the increase in kastom that Albert points to, it is likely that the other forces besides an indigenous obsession with ritual are at play here. Ernst has described the situation amongst the Onabasalu where an increased interest in genealogy amongst the locals was stimulated by the maneuvering over land claims, and the potential for mining royalties that would ensue (1996). A similar jockeying for position between big men and their clans in Lak is tied to claims of land and the potential for royalties from the loggers. I will argue in this thesis that this is consistent with a general approach in Lak for people to attempt to transform the status quo, the pasin bilong tumbuna/ancestral ways, through a more efficacious engagement with wider systems of political economy. Thus, counter to the case that Sahlins makes for Fiji, the Lak efflorescence of ritual is not simply the Lak using exogenous resources to become more Lak; rather they are attempting to once again engage exogenous forces to transform and surpass their current economic
conditions. That this approach has an historical basis in Lak practice is the conclusion that is apparent from the *long duree* of Lak history I recount and analyze in Chapter Two.

**Ethnography in New Ireland in the 1990s**

A brief survey of recent anthropological work in the south of New Ireland is offered as a starting point from which to discern the sorts of questions that are being asked and answered with regards to this region. To begin I will address the work of two ethnographers who worked with the Sursurunga people who occupy the east coast of New Ireland to the north of Lak. I will then move to an examination of the work of another pair of ethnographers who worked amongst the Mandak people of the Lelet plateau, New Ireland’s last remaining inland population.

Before I get to the particulars of the work of my predecessors in the south of New Ireland a comment on the nature of anthropology in general is called for. The fact that such different approaches to the peoples studied here can lead to such different results is not meant to imply the primacy of one approach versus another. Rather it is reflective of the nature of our discipline, one in which the broad swath of sociality within any given culture or region affords individual ethnographers the opportunity to address an equally broad range of interests implicit in our discipline. As well, it is possible to see these differences as reflecting the underlying difficulty in coupling description and analysis, or attempting to move from the particular to the general in anthropological discourse (Goodenough 1970). Thus this reading of the most recent ethnography is offered as a prelude to my own interpretation of what an examination of a particular south New Ireland people can offer to current discourses in anthropology.

Alex Bolyanatz and Stephen Jackson both focused upon the mortuary feasting complexes of the Sursurunga people. A focus on such feasts and the concept of “finishing the dead” has become a hallmark of much of the recent and influential ethnography emerging from New Ireland (Wagner 1986, Foster 1995), that it in turn follows the pioneering ethnographic work of Powdermaker (1933) and Bell (1937), in Lesu and Tangga in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite their shared focus on mortuary feasting Bolyanatz and Jackson take radically different approaches to the topic.
Alex Bolyanatz did fieldwork in the early 1990s amongst the Lak’s immediate neighbors to the north, the Susurunga people. His focus is on the relationship between mortuary feasting and matrilineality emerges in his thesis and its published version *Mortuary feasting on New Ireland* (2000). Addressing what he argues is the root of the matrilineal puzzle; Bolyanatz argues that desires by fathers to evoke patrilineal descent need not be seen as subversive to matrilineality in general. He argues that in the Tanggan case that Foster (1990) delineates, where the introduction of coconut holdings provided the opportunity for men to move land rights from the realm of *kastom* and matriline to one of *bisnis* and paternal descent to children, one need not focus on the transfer of land rights as the distinguishing factor of matrilineal segments. Rather, Bolyanatz shows that regardless of the intent of those who carry out mortuary feasts, the result of the feasting complex is the production and reproduction of matrilineality. He couches this process as an activation of matrilineality.

While Bolyanatz is able to engage the classic anthropological chestnut of the matrilineal puzzle, his work is of limited applicability to the Lak puzzle that I aim to address in this thesis. His assertion that the intentions of those who take part in mortuary feasting have very little to do with the consequences of these feasts is noteworthy.

Jackson sees his work as being an attempt to utilize a holistic approach to social forms in New Ireland. Hoping to counter an atomistic approach that would focus on social segments in terms of their bound elements and the connections between them, he uses the concept of self-similarity to analyze his ethnographic material:

> My argument is that describing certain social phenomenon in New Ireland, in terms of scaling rather than using more traditional linear arguments of individual or separate traits appears more in tune with what Sursurungan villagers are actually doing. (1996:160)

Jackson’s work is idiosyncratic to say the least. Drawing upon mathematical insights from Leibniz to chaos theory and using the algebraic imagery of “Mandlebrot sets”, he sets about arguing that mortuary feasting is best perceived as a series of self-similar sets, differing in scale, but reflecting an underlying holism. He opposes this approach to a more standard, linear description of mortuary feasts that assumes distinct stages or atoms, and then sets about analyzing these in terms of relatedness and causality.
His material suggests some interesting connections between Sursurunga imagery regarding matrilineages and those found in Lak. The Sursurunga consider these clan segments as the base or root of the banana “kabin un” (164), the suckers that detach from the larger plant to be planted and grow into a new tree; the Lak use the term ‘kaptekan oon’ the hand of the banana, referring to the way a bunch of bananas emerge from one frond, analogous to the descendants of one woman. But here, as in his general argument regarding self-similarity and analogy, I believe Strathern gets to root of the matter succinctly:

Within Melanesia, we are dealing with societies that cannot be counted separately, because, despite the contrast between them, as versions of one another they are implicated in one another’s histories. The versions can be compared. But if they can be compared by reference to what they hold in common, it is precisely for this reason -- as outgrowths of and developments of one another. Specific forms come not from generalized ones but from other specific forms. (1988:342)

The utility of positing deep structures to assert holism versus atomism is obviated if one accepts that cultural forms commonly reflect patterns particular to a people or region. An approach which focuses on mathematical principles to describe patterns of similarity within cultural domains, in order to argue that such domains are not distinct but rather implicated within each other, seems to lead in a direction too removed from the implications of such meanings in daily life; a calculus of culture, with no potential derivatives for understanding the ways of others.

As for Jackson’s assertion that a holistic approach best represents what Sursurungan villagers are actually doing, it seems to me that the fact that there are distinct feasts, with specific names, separated in time, should count as an important aspect of what these people are doing. Regardless of the self-similarity and patterning that can be perceived from feast to feast, the people do seem to be using time, different activities, and actual names of these feasts to separate one from the other.

On the Lelet plateau of central New Ireland Richard Eves and Karen Sykes have examined the way the Mandak people there are dealing with the impact of various contingencies that have flowed to them as a result of their being part of the wider

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6 The fact that actual clans have migrated from Lak into Sursurunga in the past century, as evidenced by the Tokbal clan that Bolyanatz mentions (1998), should underscore that the Lak are implicated in Sursurunga history, in a form more tangible than just shared imagery.
community of Papua New Guinea. Eves focuses on the phenomenon of Pentecostalism and the way it is integrated into earlier Lelet frameworks of perceiving the world such as sorcery and ritual performance. Syke’s work addresses the impact of Schooling upon cash cropping and marketing by the Lelet in the town of Kavieng. Both these practices are implicated as well in the local example of the PNG wide phenomena of Raskol, this behavior in turn being analyzed within the context of social reproduction and hierarchy for the Lelet.

Richard Eves’ doctoral thesis and subsequent monograph *The Magical Body* is a fine grained analysis of Lelet ritual as evidenced in performance, dance, and the underlying complex of sorcery practices that underlie much of the more visible ritual he describes. Addressing classical philosophical and anthropological discourses of embodiment, Eves presents the beliefs and practices of the Lelet as grounding for his theoretical engagement with these discourses. In his more recent work his interests have moved to situating Lelet Pentecostalism within the realms of local knowledge and the effects of modernity upon Lelet practices. He also has examined the introduction from other parts of Papua New Guinea of various forms of dance and associated magic. In both cases the following statement is applicable to his approach:

I argue that part of the appeal of these cultural forms is that they open the door to new more potent forms of power, allowing the Lelet to widen their capacity to act as agents in the enlarged regional arena and power networks of the colonial and post colonial context. (2004:341)

For example he offers a nuanced explanation for why some cultural forms have become passé while others have been imported. With respect to *malagan* a form of mortuary masks and friezes considered emblematic of New Ireland art to many ethnographers as well as outside observers, Eves argues:

Several reasons can be advanced for its disappearance, such as the deprecation by the church of indigenous ceremonial and religious expression and entry into a cash economy, whereby people’s interests are deflected away from collective rituals to individual enterprise. No doubt these have been influential factors, but I suggest the reasons go deeper than this. A significant factor in the decline of the production of *malangan* has been their displacement by other forms of artistic expression, such as dances which have been acquired from other places... the displacement has come about through the availability of new more potent forms of power and an expanded field in which assertions of identity can be made. (2004:343)
Here we see the role of local distinctions with regard to the efficacy and reach of cultural forms rather than simplistic arguments of cultural loss or external pressures. External forces, in this case regional ones, can offer opportunities for cultural efflorescence, not simply act as corrosive agents to indigenous ideas. But such changes have implications. Though new practices have “resonances” with older forms, involving revelation and manifestations of fame, they also are more “malign” and by moving in a wider scene, they make the world a more dangerous place (358). As well, this wider scene in itself adapts and expands a regional framework that has existed for the Lelet, dissolving notions of exogenous and replacing this with a more tangible concept of region.

Karen Sykes dissertation *Raising Lelet* attempts to use the insights of Bourdieu to examine the role of education in creating hierarchy in the modern nation of Papua New Guinea. She finds Bourdieu’s approach incomplete due since nowhere does he address the role of academic failure or “for the analysis of practices of selection which are based in non-linguistic knowledge” (1995:385). She turns to the “processes by which Lelet Mandak youth make new social groups in New Ireland” (1995:386). These new social forms involve a variety of contexts involving national development, in particular the transportation and marketing of garden produce in the provincial capital of Kavieng. As well, Lelet school leavers get involved in *Raskol* activities, resorting to violence and crime in response to alienation from Lelet exchange networks and the wage economy in provincial urban centers. Her more recent work has turned to questions of patrilineal obligations for school fees and the role of differing consumption practices in the social construction of *Raskol* identity (2001; 1999).

I would like to conclude this brief survey of recent anthropology in the south of New Ireland by stating what I feel to be suggestive of the direction my study will take from the context of this work. From my reading of this regional set of ethnographies I believe the work on the Lelet offers some valuable pointers to those like myself interested in social change and modernity. From Eves’ work I draw upon his insistence that any analysis of change needs to begin with a grounded perspective of the local. Whether one examines sorcery beliefs and practices or Pentecostalism, all social forms are implicated in each other not just as analogues of form, but as expressions of the content of Lelet cultural conceptions of the world. From Sykes, I will follow the ramifications of
engagement with national institutions such as school, and the displacements contingent upon schooling, for local structures of hierarchy, generational stresses, and social reproduction.

**Laskona Lament: a Modern Identity**

When I arrived on Lambom to begin my fieldwork in September of 1996 there was a new phrase that was being used to designate the Lak region: *Laskona*. The entire Lak region is now widely referred to by residents of New Ireland as *Laskona*, a Tok Pisin term which literally means ‘last corner’, and implies the geographic actualities of being at ‘Land’s End’. The origins of this sobriquet were quite recent. I had not heard it mentioned when I had visited two years earlier. The earliest modern ethnographer of this area Steve Albert noted that Lak people mentioned they were at the last place in 1986\(^7\), but the term *Laskona* is ubiquitous today. Besides being used in so many utterances the phrase was also being inscribed on a wide range of objects on Lambom. *Laskona* appears written on baskets, screened on shirts, and is used as a locator of regional origin when people travel to Kokopo town in nearby New Britain. One old fellow said that it was a smart name. Young men feel it is very stylish and hip—*stail nating*—to be *Laskona*. The use of the term as an affirmative identity plays upon the general meaning of the term *las* in a series of other similarly stylish phrases. *Laskona* implies being rural and isolated, and has similar connotations to those of another Lak term, *tan marit* (Lak, lit. ‘man of the deep woods’). The term also conveys the power of the countryside, playing upon this notion of authentic, pure bush knowledge and origin. *Nuk tari sah/save i stap* (Lak, Tok Pisin: ‘know how/ability is present’) the idea of the positive power of rural isolation. It has connotations that imply the power of the pure bush, both through physical labour and esoteric knowledge of sorcery. We put on our *tar* (Lak: ‘red ochre’) and carry big baskets in town, and the local people fear us. *Ol i save kain save bilong ol mangi Laskona* (TOK PISIN: ‘They know what kind of skills last-corner guys have’). This appellation turns backwardness into a positive attribute, while still asserting neglect and handicap. Lambom may be last in line for store-bought food, development, government services, but there is a valorisation of self reliance, an idea that ‘we are marginal but capable nonetheless’. The popularity of the phrase *bel al tok bakup* (Lak:

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\(^7\) Personal communication
‘don’t have backup’), a common motto used in conjunction with various Laskona constructs, points to the pride of standing on one’s own, and of the ability to make do without support --- what you see is what you face, and that is enough.

Despite the focus on neglect and isolation, the term Laskona is, in essence, one of relation and contrast, implying a link to others. The question implied is: the last of whom or what? What is being isolated? How is the experience of living in ples nating (TOK PISIN: a nothing place/an insignificant village), being Laskona, different from living in places less peripheral? It is not a denial of connection, but an affirmation of it, highlighting the link, and serving as an editorial commentary, as it were, regarding the link: “We share a common situation but we are the orphans, the tarangu (TOK PISIN: ‘pitiful’) child, the neglected, last in line when the goodies are handed out.” Yet we cannot discount the importance of the literal aspects of the term. During a discussion regarding place names, I was writing on a photocopy of a topographical map and several youth enquired as to the map’s accuracy. Seeing that Lambom was further south than the village of Bakok, the guys were quite pleased; it seems they had been having an ongoing debate with the young men from that village about who lived closest to ‘land’s end’. They valued and took pride in being Laskona tru, being at the ultimate end of the line.

Though people from Lambom assert marginality and remoteness in their portrayal of themselves, they inhabit a virtual metropolis as far as villages in the region go. As intimated by the government official with whom I consulted in Kavieng, there must be some pull operating here for so many people to congregate on such a small island in such a vast, sparsely populated region. In essence I will attempt to explain the fundamental paradox of a self-identity predicated on marginality in a village whose size and very existence implies a locus of sociality, and a desire for a place that happens, one which is more centrally involved in the flows of things and ideas of the wider world. As I shall show in the next chapter, Lak people have always seen access to things and forces from beyond the horizon as a means to be effective agents in their sociality. I will examine their ideas of place and past to show these continuities as both part of engagement with world historical forces and local cultural logic.

A paradox arises here. Though the Lak assert the marginality of their position in a wider world as seen from Lambom, much of what I found regarding their political economy
during my fieldwork pointed to the opposite: they were enmeshed in webs of connection. Another related discrepancy is that at the same time they lament their marginality, they celebrate positive aspects of Laskona identity. It is my argument in this thesis that Lak marginality talk reflects not only a literal desire for wider contact with the world beyond their horizon, but a contact that produces results more befitting Lak people’s own perceptions of themselves as effective agents in the world at large. In decrying their isolation, they are actually giving voice to a discourse that morally evaluates the nature of their connections. This understanding of the term laskona is reinforced by the story of its origin I eventually heard. One man told me that he had first seen the phrase laskona painted on the side of the truck that the community had received from the local landowners’ company when logging roads finally reached Metlik plantation at the extreme southern tip of the New Ireland mainland at the end of 1995. In essence, at the moment that a new connection to the rest of the province came into existence, Lak people constructed an identity that highlighted the nature of that connection. They were literally at the end of the road. Lak had waited for this connection for a long time, and the people of the region quickly adopted the designation and it spread to the point of being ubiquitous throughout Lak.

Onto this landscape Lambom Islanders have projected a self-image as marginal people. Laskona identity asserts a distance from elsewhere and else-when, places that are eventful, that happen. This is a moral conundrum for Lak people. They see themselves as effective actors in their world, but their avowal of marginality, what they see as their position relative to others and other places in the world, calls this into question. Their current assertion that they occupy a marginal situation is always being addressed, strategies are put into play, shortcuts attempted to link Lambom to eventful places, places of moment.

Now it is apparent that laskona identity, constructed as a relational quality, focuses on the connection to wider systems of sociality and political economy. It is a commentary upon this connection, a discourse of the Lak experience of the modernity of PNG. I turn now to a discussion of how to approach an examination of Lambom within these connections to wider systems.
Laskona Modernity

...if the world is becoming a Culture of cultures, then what needs to be studied ethnographically is the indigenization of modernity...Western Capitalism is planetary in its scope, but it is not a universal logic of cultural change. (Sahlins 1993:21)

If aspects of global capitalism and the political economy of the nation state present problems of identity and world view for the people of Lambom, the concepts used to frame these issues within the discourse of anthropology are no less vexing. It is obvious that ethnographers have been addressing similar issues of marginality and modernity from a variety of places around the world. Ferguson finds a similar sentiment from the African copperbelt and states that “it is useful to remember that this disconnection, like connection, implies a relation and not the absence of a relation” (1999:236). The context that he writes from is one of failed industrialization, where a mining industry and its associated commercial ventures regressed and ultimately disappeared. This inspired a moral interpretation for the failure of local industry, a sense of what Ferguson terms Abjection:

Abjection refers to a process of being thrown aside, expelled, or discarded. But its literal meaning also applies not just being thrown out being thrown down -- thus expulsion but also debasement and humiliation. This complex of meanings, sad to report, captures quite precisely the sense I found among the Copperbelt Mineworkers -- a sense that the promises of modernization had been betrayed, and that they were being thrown out of the circle of full humanity, thrown back into the ranks of the “second class,” cast outward and downward into the worlds of rags and huts where the color bar had always told “Africans” they belonged. (Ferguson 1999:236)

Thus in the African case, when people complained about the decline in their hopes and chances, “they were not simply lamenting the lack of connection but articulating a specific experience of disconnection, just as they inevitably described their material poverty, not simply as a lack but as a loss” (238). This led him to suggest that “we might usefully distinguish between being unconnected (an original condition) and being disconnected (the historical result of an active process of disconnection)” (238).

On Lambom this distinction affords us an opportunity to portray the particulars of disconnection in a somewhat different context. In the African case an intense period of development and industrialization was started, carried on long enough to offer people
material opportunities to transform their lives and lands, before it all ground to a halt. For Lak industrialization never approached this scale even during the recent period of logging in the region. However it would be inaccurate to consider Lambom an “unconnected” place. Rather than unconnected or disconnected, I believe the evidence from Lak shows a place where the connections are transitory, fluctuating over time in a manner not always comprehensible to the Lak, and beyond their control, no matter how hard they try to exert it. Turning once more to Ferguson, a course forward for my analysis would take as a starting point the understanding that:

Disconnection, like abjection, implies an act of relation, and the state of having been disconnected requires to be understood as the product of specific structures and processes of disconnection. (238)

In line with this injunction what I propose to do in this thesis is elucidate and investigate the nature of the structures and processes, both local and extra-local, of Lak disconnection. In trying to accomplish this task, a problem that has to be faced is that of getting at how to talk about modernity, in anthropology today a contentious endeavour.

The problem here is that talk of modernity is an epistemologically and politically loaded discourse in the social sciences and humanities. Whether this is merely a question of definition and context at the level of analysis for scholars of modernity is contentious. Some scholars point to modernity as part of the developmentalist framework of first world powers, one linked to teleologies of social progress (Comaroff and Commaroff 1993, Knauft ed 2002); others point to the looseness of the term when applied in contexts far-removed from its etymological groundings in western discourse. Subsequent discussions of alternative or plural or vernacular modernities seem unable to get beyond these battles. If one uses earlier anthropological frameworks the debate seems to be at the level of analysis, whereas at the level of description there is little doubt that localities both marginal and peripheral are dealing with the effects of globally ordered political economies, commodity transactions, and changing relations of production related to these. Thus the way forward may involve a ‘sidestep’, something ethnographers are coming to terms with in trying to make sense of what happens in real places and particular times and contexts.

In this sense Ferguson poses the problem in direct terms:

...how we can reconfigure the intellectual field in such a way as to restore global inequality to its status as a “problem” without reintroducing the teleologies and ethnocentrisms of the development metanarrative. (Ferguson 249-50)
For a wider audience fired to understand the world system in popular terms from the writings of Jared Diamond, and to the anthropologist it emerges from the work of Lawrence, Burridge, and Worsely on Cargo Cults, it is also Yali’s question. And as Ferguson points out, if political questions unsettle certain “post-development” thinkers, one cannot escape the fact that inequality is a reality and one that predates the development discourse regardless of that discourses shortcoming:

The subordinate position ascribed to the third world in development discourse was therefore not a figment of the imagination or a mere Eurocentric illusion but reflected an intractable political-economic reality that could not, and cannot, be wished or relabeled away. Third-world people who have sometimes viewed themselves as located at “the end of the queue” are therefore not victims of a self-destructive mystification, and they hardly require to be scolded for “pathetic self-pity." (248).

So the question remains how to get beyond despondency based theories of change. The answer is to try and approach this question from the point of view of our subjects, in their terms, and from their places.

Specifically, the answer to this question lies in an attempt to understand and engage with local concepts that are used to organize the particular engagements with wider system in specific contexts, in other words:

...to find translation equivalents of a “modernity” concept, for a source of authentic native terms that can be proposed as emic concepts, and for a form of data that is useful for understanding locally produced semantic and discursive fields relating to concepts of modernity (Spitulnik 2002:195).

For Lambom I argue that the local concepts best suited to unpacking modernity are those expressed by the Tok Pisin terms *kastom, bisnis, lotu* and *gavman*. These terms are part of a taxonomy of spheres of social life that has emerged in many places in PNG as well as Melanesia in general, and roughly map onto the English terms custom, business, church, and government (Otto 1992; Foster 1995:25-6). I aim to illuminate how these categories provide the people of Lambom with a means by which to construct a local discourse and ordering of the phenomena of modernity. If modernity takes different forms and is understood in different ways depending upon the particulars of history and culture of specific locales, it is also perceived in different ways depending upon the framework through which it is perceived. So if Lambom exhibits its own distinct way of understanding modernity, it also comprehends modernity in a different
light according to whether it is experienced through the domains of *kastom*, *bisnis*, *lotu*, or *gavman*.

As they move beyond Lambom, Lak people come into contact with an additional range of contexts from which to perceive modernity and their own identity in relation to it. In order to extend the local perception of modernity beyond the island's immediate horizons I will use a multi-sited approach. This will allow a physical perspective to the notions of disconnection from wider systems, allowing the processes and structures unique to the Lak case to emerge.

Marcus has pointed to the failure of ethnographers who “have not generally represented the ways in which closely observed cultural worlds are embedded in larger, more impersonal systems” (Marcus 1986:166). We are left with a view of such larger systems as "externally impinging on and bounding little worlds, but not as integral to them" (ibid: 166). Such representations leave no space for descriptions of the creative ways in which global forces were being interpreted and acted upon through particular systems of meaning.

Another way to address modernity and disconnection draws upon the trope of marginality most popularly apparent in the work of Anna Tsing in Indonesia. Tsing points to the historic dimension of disconnection in suggesting that: ‘marginality is an ongoing relationship with power, not a recent feature of “contact” and “acculturation”‘ (Tsing 1993:90). This is important for the Lak case, where in my first chapter I will show through the historical depth of Lambom alternating periods of connection and disconnection. Likewise in Borneo, the Meratus deny they have been historically isolated or unconnected:

Instead, they invoke a long, continuous succession of rule in which contemporary state policies are a minor variant. Their responses to state initiatives draw on this history -- arguing for its relevance, even as their arguments go on an unrecognized by government officials. (1993:41).

For the Lak people, recent events related to logging in their region have led both government and non-governmental organizations to question the Lak ability to take a long range view for their own benefit and development (McCallum 1996). A careful

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8 As discussed in Chapter Eight on logging.
examination of Lak history proves the inherent misconception of such views of the Lak experience of connection to wider systems. These connections have historic depth and follow a locally apparent structure best described as oscillating, sometimes intense and visible, sometimes tenuous and less tangible. So while it may serve outsiders to see the Lak as naive due to historical isolation, the reality of the situation shows that their experience is anything but isolated, and Lak responses are historically informed.

Here I believe is a pathway out of the modernity and malcontent trope. I will argue that just as there are different responses to unrequited emotions, there are other responses to disconnection besides those that focus on abjection. In essence, if the Lak are akin to a failed suitor in their relation to wider systems of political economy or modernity, their response is not passive, or self-deprecating. Rather they combine the persistence of those who know there are plenty of fish in the sea. This relates to a common Lak phrase: *Al toh i sa/I will just try*, a saying most commonly used by fishermen, but also used in a wide variety of contexts. It is essentially a statement of perseverance in the face of uncertain results. In the context of fishing on Lambom this persistent attitude has a range of options attached to it: This might mean using different methods of fishing, a spear gun versus a line and hook. Or trolling in an outboard dinghy rather than still fishing in a canoe. It might mean fishing in the evening, rather than at the crack of dawn. It might mean using different bait. Or it might simply mean finding a different location in order to find the fish. In essence, this thesis argues that the exigencies of modernity for the Lak are best understood in their terms as a riddle that needs to be constantly worked on. No one answer can finish the evolving puzzles the Lak face. Some people are better at answering these riddles than others; some give up while others are unable to give up. Sometimes a riddle depends upon thinking that subverts the puzzle at a fundamental level, other times a slight shift upon earlier solutions can lead to a temporary working understanding that leads to acceptable results. In this way the Lak experience, while unique and particular, is not dissimilar to those of other peoples trying to relate to systems of political economy that are present in the worlds they inhabit.
Outline of the thesis

My thesis begins with an examination of the historical background to Lambom notions of identity. Chapter One is a survey of past experiences of contact between local peoples and agents of a wider world system within the south-west region of New Ireland. I present a reading of the past for Lambom that establishes the importance of contact events for understanding current ways of dealing with their particular experience of interaction with a modern world system. This past provides context for an initial contrast on Lambom with the way things are now.

Turning to the contemporary scene on Lambom, I ground current processes of identity within the context of various Lak domains of modernity in the next four chapters. I discuss the anthropological pedigree of these domains in a brief introduction to this set of chapters. These chapters focus on Lambom through the local categorizations of modernity of the contrasting domains of *bisnis*, *kastom*, *lotu*, and *gavman*. Each of these domains provides a context from which modernity is viewed and each is cross-cut by influences from the others. However the categories remain salient and each of these domains reflects the local way of ordering Lak experiences of modernity. If there are alternative modernities dependent upon place and culture, likewise there are alternate ways in which modernity coalesces from a village-based perspective.

Subsistence practices are addressed in Chapter Two along with an analysis of the local cash economy. An emerging divergence in cash income is having a range of effects on village sociality as well as forcing choices regarding the priorities that households must establish in daily life practices. Chapter Three addresses the contested nature of the concept of *kastom*. Due to the constraints arising from the importance of cash for the requirements of village life, ‘shortcuts’ are being tested in an attempt to fulfil the obligations of mortuary feasting within a limited ability to meet traditional demands. Every *kastom* event is an attempt to innovate and balance the requirements of *kastom*, and the current capacity available to meet these strictures. As well, the very appropriateness of aspects of *kastom* is being called into question based on whether they fit within the precepts of Christian life. Chapter Four contextualizes the debate on *kastom* within the evolving clash between the traditional United Church and the more millennial fervour of the recently established evangelical Foursquare gospel church. The
schism resulting from the arrival of the new church has repercussions beyond the realm of religious practices, and its effects in dividing the community present an existential crisis for the people of Lambom. Here I will address the recent work of Robbins and Eves on Christianity to situate the Lak experience within the Melanesian context. Chapter Five examines the part gavman plays in Lambom modern life. The usual situation of neglect with regards to government services is contrasted with the heightened attention Lambom received during the election of 1997 when both Sir Julius Chan and Sir Michael Somare visited the island.

The second part of my thesis traces people and ideas out from Lambom, by focussing on the activities of local people as travellers to and from Lambom, as visitors to town, and finally as participants in the logging industry both within Lak and beyond. Chapter Six examines how travel from Lambom is situated within a range of practices and agencies. Novel forms of identity such as Dinghy operator emerge as new forms for the expression of masculinity for young men. As well, travel to a rugby tournament in the provincial town of Namatanai provides for this identity to be projected into a wider regional context. Chapter Seven focuses on the main engagement for most Lambom people with the urban setting, experiences of the town Kokopo. Here I examine not only the way travellers from Lambom interact in the urban economy, but how this context informs their understanding of themselves as Laskona. As well, the experience of Lambom people resident in Kokopo is examined. The life of an emerging middle class family and the more tenuous situation of a working class family are contrasted. In my final chapter I examine the links between the various sites related to the logging industry in Lak. I examine the division of a logging royalty payment on Lambom, the experiences of young men within the region at the logging camp at Metlik, and the distant landowners’ company activities in Kavieng. In addition, the local experience of the logging industry in Lak involved an attempt by a UN backed NGO to establish an Integrated Conservation and Development (ICAD) project in the region. The failure of this project, as well as its interactions with Lak people is also examined in this chapter.

I conclude this thesis by summarizing the ways in which Laskona identity plays out in a variety of contexts within Lambom and tracing this identity into wider contexts. Here I will examine the issues at play in the discourse of Modernity within the anthropology of Melanesia. I will discuss and analyse the modernity concepts used by various
anthropologists of PNG and how the Lak experience fits and extends the questions raised by ethnographers of the region. By focusing on the structures and processes involved in creating a reaction to change relating to the imagery of humiliation, I will offer the view from Lambom in order to suggest an ethnographically based understanding of modernity, one that can highlight the differences and similarities all peoples face in coming to terms with forces that might originate elsewhere but are always experienced in a particular somewhere, or sometimes at the places in between the meaningful sites of a specific people.
Chapter One

A HAPPENING PLACE

In this chapter I address how Lak people’s past engagement with the wider world has shaped their notions of their place within it. The view that places such as Lambom are the result of engagements with world historic forces of commerce and colonialism is consistent with the emerging canon of what has been termed the New Melanesian History (Foster 1995). No longer can villages be essentialized as ‘out of time’ or spatially cut off from the rest of the world. The current consensus is that:

Actual villages are not the anachronistic museums of authentic tradition imagined in urbanite nostalgia, within as well as beyond the regions, but historical products of more or less lengthy indigenous engagements with commerce, Christianity, migrations, and colonialism. (Douglas 2003:7)

If academics have only recently come to such a view, it is nothing new to the people of southern New Ireland: they believe they have always been engaged with the wider world. On Lambom the following story is told of the origin of the world.

In the beginning there was an old woman named Wanswilik and she worked in her garden at Matataii. She cut her finger as she worked, and cleaned the blood off with a taro leaf that she left on a tree nearby. Later, when she returned, she found Swilik. Swilik did the same thing and created his brother Kapatarai. Swilik was the smart one. He killed the wild pig that ate people. He was chased up a tree right across from Lambom on the mainland. No one came when he called for help, only three dogs came when he called for help. As they chased the pig Swilik killed it. He then made a stream for the dogs to drink from as reward for their help. This stream is called Malum Pol (Lak: ‘water for dog’). Swilik and Kapatarai ate greens that Wanswilik cooked but complained that they did not taste good. Wanswilik gave them greens again and this time they were salty but very bitter. Swilik and Kapatarai decided to follow Wanswilik, and hiding, they saw that she urinated on their greens but lifted a stone that covered saltwater which she put on her own food. Swilik lifted the stone and the water started pouring out. He tried to replace the stone but the water shot the stone into the air. He tried putting several more stones but they were shot into the air as well. There was a flood and the ocean was created. These stones became the islands around Cape St George. The first was Lambom, then Lamassa, then
other smaller islands. Swilik then built a ship under a mountain while Kapatarai made a Mon (a large ocean going canoe) on the shore. Swilik made Tubuan to help him pull his ship to the sea, Kapatarai made Talun. They then decided to leave. Swilik took all the things from his workshop and locked it up. He locked up iron and lap laps and glass. He called the people together and divided them into Bikpisin and Smolpisin ['Large Bird' and 'Small Bird' moieties], and into clans inside each of these marks. He pulled shell money from the stones near Matatai so people could get married. Swilik became white and Kapatarai remained black. They sailed away but Swilik promised to return. He did return and brought the good things back with him. Swilik is Jesus and Kapatarai is Satan.⁹

In essence the tale of Swilik is a mythic portrayal of engagement with the wider world. In the local view his actions reincorporate European material goods within their own world. Thus these tales are a myth of transformation of the material world as well as the social.

My aim in this chapter is not to construct an authoritative history for the Lak people of Lambom, but rather to critically mine the written accounts produced by Europeans and relate these to tales the Lak tell about their past. I do this with three aims. First, I aim to present as much as is ‘known’ about this place—to examine the broadest palette of events from which local people have painted their view of the past. Second, I mean to establish the historical depth and character of their contact with outsiders in order to identify the texture and tone of these contacts, the changes and continuities across time. Finally, I will outline a trajectory of more sophisticated responses on the part of the people of southwest New Ireland through their history. The aim here is not only to highlight the agency of the people residing at Lambom in the past, but to establish the importance that contact with forces beyond their immediate place has in Lak sociality.

After this examination of the past, I will briefly turn to notions of place as expressed on Lambom Island. Memory of their history is crucially linked with the physical world surrounding Lambom. It is on their immediate landscape that they map their history, encoding tales within the matrix of place-names. I will offer a brief outline of how their past is written onto their lands, and a sketch of the content of this inscription. I will

⁹Peekel (1934:20) recounts a version of this story he collected from a man from Siar with the added designation of Swilik as the sun, and Kapatarai as the moon. Albert (1987: 75-91) relates a longer version of this myth without most of the Lambom references. His version includes more events, including a series of added episodes from the brothers’ youth, concerning which his informants had varying opinions on whether they fit into a canonical version.
conclude this chapter with a comparison of the Lak experience with other peoples of the immediate region. Finally, issues that arise within the historiography of this region will be discussed in order to explicate the general approach to history I take in this chapter.

Is there history in the New Guinea Islands?

For at least one New Ireland ethnographer the very concept of history itself is suspect. Wagner (1986) has argued that the nearby Barok of central New Ireland create a canon of imagery, as revealed through the practice of mortuary rites, and that this imagery constitutes a local analogue of history. Enacting mortuary *Kastom* reveals practices that reproduce the conditions that underpin social relations. The rites themselves generate the sociality of clan identity, and exchange. In Wagner’s view Barok have no history as we would understand the term. Thus notions of chronology and chronicle, tales of events fashioned into a corpus, may not be the form that is taken by what we think of as history.

Lambom’s experience is different. The stories told about Swilik are their history according to many of the people who told them. The Swilik story begins with a before time which is much different than the present, then charts the changes that have led to current Lak circumstances. There is a chronological structuring to these tales ending with Swilik’s return that brought the good things back to the Lak. The Lak are not unique in this respect: much like elsewhere in Melanesia (Kirsch 2001; Kahn 1996) notions of chronology are part of the discourse local peoples use to order their telling of their pasts.

As compared to many other places in the Islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, and in New Guinea in general, there is relatively long and rich documentation of the events that Lambom people have drawn upon in constructing their past. For the Lak, Swilik may have come back with the European whalers, or other voyagers, or the colonialists whose visits I outline in this chapter. He may have come back more than once; one episode relates the story of a helicopter returning with the keys to his workshop where he sealed up all the cargo. Nowadays there is widespread agreement across Lak that Swilik is Jesus. The pioneering missionary George Brown may have presaged his coming; the
Reverend Brown is certainly revered for bringing the light of the Gospel to their place of darkness (see Errington and Gewertz (1995) for an example of this in nearby Duke of York Islands).

In other contexts, Lak conceptions of the past emerge through various modes of expression: place names and the stories they inscribe and evoke, part of this marking the events described in the mythic corpus revolving around the two adversarial brothers; chronological lists of successive big men and the places they travelled through Lak; the reminiscences of senior people told for amusement as well as edification; and the recent and limited innovation of clans writing their histories in notebooks (secret volumes consisting of lists of feasts, land sales, and natural events, all listed in chronological order). Each of these modes is used in particular contexts, for a variety of purposes. Some are in the realm of the general knowledge among people living on Lambom, and others are restricted to clan leaders and actively guarded. There is no general repository of 'the way it was', accessible to anyone who would inquire, or within the memory of any one individual. But there are men, acting in their own interests and their clan’s (usually regarding land rights) who actively seek to broaden their own understanding of the past.

Land disputes are often the impetus for the airing of a clan’s otherwise-restricted knowledge. Thus younger men with aspirations of clan leadership will endeavour to be present when a clan meets to strategize prior to a land claim. This involves preparing the story that the clan will tell and deciding how much of their corpus must be revealed, and when, in order to assert convincingly the validity of their claim. At the same time men perceived to have good listening skills and memories are readied and designated by elders, or reflecting personal ambitions on their own initiative, sent to listen carefully to the other clan’s story in order to poach parts of it. The relevant quarry includes men’s names from genealogies of leaders, sequences of travel across the landscape and places mentioned, and in particular the named *bil taim* (Lak lit: No place): sites of long abandoned men’s houses. These bits of lore can then be the target of debunking, checked against future retellings for consistency, or bits can creatively be added to one’s own clan’s narrative. The goal is to support one’s own case by resonating with, paralleling, or usurping parts of others’ discourse. Thus the decision about what parts of a clan’s history to reveal, and when to reveal it, is a strategic decision. I have been told
that it is better to put forward a partial, less-convincing case at a particular time, than to reveal to capable rivals the wherewithal to trump one’s stronger or best case later.

So here I propose to proceed as would a knowledgeable Lak person with an interest in the past, by poaching as widely as possible in an attempt to present the broadest case I can from the raw materials of events and attitudes that Lak people have used to construct their past. In doing so I seek to explain and analyse their current view of their place in the world. For talking about their past, Lak people have access to details of landscape, clan tales and lists of ancestral wanderings. I can draw upon libraries and archives, books and documents. I do not wish to imply that written accounts by Europeans and other outsiders are of a more tangible veracity. Rather they give an opportunity to discern the underlying attitudes, and selection of events worthy of inscription, by particular writers from specific cultural milieux. In drawing upon these accounts of the past, and considering them in relation to those of Lak people, my aim is to explicate the entangled nature and historical grounding of current Lak conceptions of their place in a wider world.

Taim Bipo/The Past

Archaeological knowledge about southern New Ireland is limited due to very little research having been conducted on this part of the island up until the present. Obsidian was found “with heavy concentrations at the current villages on Lambom and Lamassa Islands” (White 1997:141). The size of the obsidian flakes suggests that they were recycled and re-used. Flakes cut and then recut into the smallest possible pieces imply scarcity, with the possessors of obsidian getting the most out of every piece, and resharpening these until only the smallest pieces were thrown away. This in turn implies that these sites in Lak were peripheral to wider trade networks in the Admiralty and Bismarck archipelagos:

Obsidian has been imported into southern New Ireland for at least 3000 years and probably since the Pleistocene, but, to extrapolate from our survey, the amount surviving is no more than a couple of canoe loads (White 1997: 145).
As well, examples of Lapita pottery were found on the south end of Lambom Island, this “suggests this site was in use some 2500-3000 years ago” (ibid 144-5).

Originally and predominantly inhabitants of the mountainous interior, the occupants of the southern bulge of New Ireland were encouraged by German colonial authorities to relocate to the coast. Although this was a standard policy used by the Germans elsewhere in the islands (Firth 1982), it is questionable to portray the Lak move to the coast as fundamentally a response to this impetus. Rather, this relocation continued a process that had been in effect for some time, extending earlier usages of coastal areas by the interior peoples. The nature and rationale for this process becomes apparent when seen within the context of their experiences of contact and trade with a variety of European sailing ships as outlined below.

Albert presents a reconstruction of Lak prehistory, which he calls an: “Ethnology of the Pre-contact Period” (1987:62-72). Looking at a wide range of early records of various observers of custom, exchange, and language, he links mortuary ritual, men’s secret cult practices, the ubiquity of Matri-Moieties, warfare, burial practices, and trading relations to present a picture of quite intense interaction over a wide region of the southern interior, both coasts, as well as the adjacent islands. He summarizes:

The picture that emerges is one of continual interaction between coastal and interior groups, and thus great transmission of cultural elements, even before the arrival of Europeans. (1987:69)

Albert argues for a view that highlights the dynamic nature and flux within extant cultures at this time, as well as their general openness to transmissions across cultural lines. The cultures of southern New Ireland during this time are best described as opportunistic and open to innovations gathered elsewhere; the subsequent contacts with Europeans confirm this outlook. The south was a jumble of mixed clans and kin groups, interacting at several levels. In particular the dynamism of this region and New Guinea in general, belies the “unfortunate impression that the velocity and direction of change there have been determined wholly by intrusive forces” (Ogan and Wesley-Smith 1992:38). The point is that “global capitalism impacted on something. World capitalism came to a living, vibrant, changing social order, possessed of its own stresses, strains and motive forces” (Donaldson 1982:438 cited in Ogan and Wesley-Smith 1992:38). In this light the period of initial contact with Europeans and the subsequent uneven
experience of colonialism in southern New Ireland must be considered a continuation, rather than a revolutionary break with earlier times. The transmission of objects and cultural elements was a well-established practice for the people of this region.

While Albert’s investigation into the history of the Lak region is wide-ranging and substantial, what I add here are the specifics of contact events at the extreme southern and western parts of Lak. The communities on the west coast of Lak represent the home of the majority of the region’s population, and in particular I focus on the Lambom island community. The events I relate below involve European contact with the communities of Likliki (Metlik), Lambom and Lamassa, a set of villages that have a longer and more continuous history of interaction with Europeans than the rest of Lak. This is primarily due to this coast’s location adjacent to the shipping lanes of St George Channel, and in the case of Lambom and Lamassa, the presence there of sheltered harbours and safe anchorages. The routes taken by the Europeans through these waters made the south-western coasts of the Lak region the most likely sites of contact between the passing ships and the natives who lived there.

Experiencing Voyages of Discovery

Like all history, the record of European contact with the south west of New Ireland is by nature partial and situated. It is partial in that only certain people created this record, and situated within the particular interested cultural and personal perspectives that the writers represented. My aim is to read such texts in order to characterize the way Lak people experienced the outsiders, as well as the way the outsiders understood them. We do not end up with a history of these contact events, but the tenor of their idiom. The particulars of events can be likened to a plotline; my focus is on themes and the interactions of characters that emerge. All of what follows from our historical records must be qualified. They are glimpses of a time and place, seen through the lens of Westerners of a certain sort, literate and far-travelled for their time, but certainly reflecting culture, class, experience, personal acuity, and personality. Different voyages themselves frame different events within their specific contexts. Dampier was a buccaneer backed by private interests to recreate Drake’s circumnavigation a century earlier. Bougainville and Carteret voyaged in the tradition of Cook, “their voyages
represented a mix of scientific curiosity, national pride, and commercial acquisitiveness” (Williams 2002:276). Dumont D’urville sailed for similar reasons, with the attempt to discover what had happened to Lapouressesse as an added task. It must be remembered that it was not until the early nineteenth century that longitude was accurately gauged with the invention of accurate time pieces that worked at sea (Sobel 1995).

Various writers during these times brought not only their cultural perspective and mode of framing but personal idiosyncrasies as well, and these can be read in the writings they produced. When reading the voyagers’ accounts we must be sensitive to these predispositions not only as a mode of framing events, but as a filter that operated to decide what events were worthy of inscription. Sampling from what and how the people of New Ireland are portrayed shows a range of responses from the parties involved. This excursion through the written record of early contact (limited as it is) is a critical reading aiming to identify, typify, and characterize peoples’ actions in the events inscribed. I intersperse Lak memories of this history throughout this outline of the past where they are applicable.

The Lak experience with European voyages of discovery began in the late seventeenth century. Dampier first came to these waters in 1700 and named the southern tip of New Ireland Cape St George and the sea to the west of the point St. Georges Bay.

He remarked upon the appearance of canoes east of Cape St. George on March 10, 1700. Having encountered canoes off St John Island he coasted the New Ireland mainland between Cape St Marie (now called Cape Siar) and the headland to the south, Cape St George. Rounding Cape St George Dampier had the following encounter:

The 9th in the Morning a huge black Man came off to us in a Canoa [sic], but would not come aboard. He made the same signs of friendship to us, as the rest we had met with; yet seem’d to differ in his Language, not using any of those Words which the others did. We saw neither Smoaks [sic] nor Plantations near this Head-land. (Dampier 1939:204)

The man he met spoke a different language than the natives of the offshore islands of Feni and Tanga. Dampier speculated that there was a divide between the tribes of these areas. Later that day he encountered more canoes:
In the afternoon, as we plied near the Shore, 3 canoas [sic] came off to us; one had 4 Men in her, the others 2 apiece. That with the 4 Men, came pretty nigh us, and shew'd us a Coco-nut and Water in a Bamboo, making Signs that there was enough ashore where they lived; they pointed out the place where they would have us go, and so went away. We saw a small round pretty high Island, about a League to the North of this Head-land, within which there was a large deep Bay, whither the Canoas went; and we strove to get thither before Night, but could not...Before Night we opened the Head-land fair, and I named it Cape St. George...The Island of this Cape, I called St George's Isle...Note, No Dutch Draughts goes so far as this Cape, by 10 Leagues. (Dampier 1939:204-5)

The actions of the men in the canoe are interesting. Their apparent understanding of what goods the Europeans may have wanted implies that this might have not been a first contact, or that the natives of this place, near the subsequent villages of Likliki and Metlik, knew of earlier voyages up the east coast of New Ireland.

Carteret entered the passage between Lambom and New Ireland in 1767 in search of vegetables for his sick crew, a place to mend a leak and to clean the bottom of his ship. He anchored at an area he named Irish and English Cove (today known as Lavonai Cove), which was to be the site of the aborted colony of New France a century later. He describes his initial foray into the region:

... as soon as we were moored (in English Cove) I sent some people on shore, on a kind of little Island, at the bottom of the Cove, made by the runs of fresh water, that came down from the mountain; to Cutt away the wood, & clear the place, to put ashore our casks & do our other work... I sent the Cutter to Cutt down 7 Coco-Nut-Trees, which we had left on Wallis’s Island, they had no Nuts, but it was for the tops, or Cabbage part of them (Wallis 181-2).

He catalogued the flora of the region, noting a range of species of trees, but for his purposes a distressingly few coconut bearing palms at this time. There were none when Bougainville visited a few months later, as Carteret had cut them all down. As well Carteret could find no edible vegetables, though he admits most of what he saw was unknown to him (Wallis 186). As for the fauna, he notes birds he considers pigeons, doves, rooks and parrots. His journals report that his crew saw a couple of dogs that ran away, and lots of centipedes, scorpions, and a few snakes (187). As for natives:

Altho [sic] we saw no inhabitants there may have been some here not long before, for as I was walking about and near the run of water, that came down the hill I met one of their old abitation [sic] from which they could not have
been gone many days, by great number of sea fish shells which seemd [sic] to been very latly[ sic] taken out of the Water, and some half Burnt S[t]icks, but it looked more like the abitation of a wild bist [sic] then of a human b[e]ling (187).

These ‘abitations’ were most likely temporary fishing or hunting huts, used by people whose villages where up in the hills or elsewhere hidden from the coastline.

Continuing his search for some food Carteret sent a cutter off north to Lamassa the next day and they visited the harbour that was to be named after him:

In a fine little Harbour, about three leags[sic] distance to the Westward, from here, where they said there were between three, & foure hundred of those Trees, well loaded with Nuts; & that many of them were differently marked, and that were some few Huts about them, but no Inhabitants; this was plain proof to me that they could not be far off, ... & now made Everybody keep well on their guard, for fear of Surprise, as it was not improbable, as soon as the Natives should find out how their Trees had been cutt down, but they might endeavour to find out, & revenge themselves, on those who had done it (Wallis 182-3).

Carteret and his crew saw these trees with marks on their trunks, yet cut them down simply because they had no other way to get the cabbage and nuts they sorely needed. Carteret realized the potential for provoking the natives by doing this. These trees came from the mainland opposite the island he named Coconut Island. The local word for coconut is *lamas*, and this community is named Lamassa today. The marks on the trees could have been taboo marks, indicating that the nuts were being reserved for an upcoming customary event, as is common in the *ngorngor* (a form of taboo) marking still used today. They also might have represented moiety ownership marks, something posited by Wallis in her notes accompanying Carteret’s text. Carteret took formal possession of this region, the only place he did so on his voyage:

this Cove which was named English Cove after taking Possession of it, Lands, Islands, Bays, Ports & harbours here abouts in the Name of his Majy. George ye 3d. King of Great Britain &c. and Successers [sic]. We nailed a piece of board on a high Tree on which were engraved the Engl. Colours, Capt. & Ships Name, time of coming & sailing from and Name of the Cove, We did not see any inhabitants here (Carteret 183-4).

In doing this Carteret left his own mark, after effacing those of the natives he saw on their useful trees (and most probably climbable in the native view) that he had chopped
down. As we will see in the discoveries of Bougainville who followed him to the region ten months later, there was a native response to this marking of their property and place.

Bougainville followed close on Carteret’s keels to Gower’s harbour, arriving within ten months of the Englishman. Initially the French captain found the port most agreeable for his purposes, but his journal does mention the potential dangers to be encountered there. He notes in his journal entry after arrival:

The two vessels are within hailing distance of each other and of the shore. Those are the advantages of this port, we could not wish for anything better to obtain water, wood and carry out all the repairs the two ships most urgently need. Furthermore this port and its surrounding area are uninhabited, which allows us a precious tranquillity and freedom of action. However one must keep on ones guard, because on the bank of a small river, a third of a league from our camp, we found a canoe as though stored there and 2 huts. This canoe has an outrigger, very light and in good condition. We also found several remains of fires and meals, such as heaps of large shells and heads of animals Mr de Commercon told us were boars. We even thought we heard the shouts of men in the mountains. The inconvenience of this place is that one finds neither coconuts nor bananas nor any of the resources one might have obtained, willingly or unwillingly, from an inhabited country (Dunmore 2002:118-9).

There is a strong possibility that these signs of native presence were the same middens and huts Carteret noted just months earlier. The fact that a canoe was nearby suggests as much, and his officer Nassau-Siegen surmises in his journal: “Undeniably the inhabitants of the interior go there to fish and hunt especially as we saw boars in the woods” (293). From this entry we can see an impression of what Bougainville’s approach to resupplying practices might be: the final sentence about acquiring inhabitants’ goods regardless of their willingness is telling. A week after leaving this place one of Bougainville’s consort ships fired on over thirty native canoes. One of his officers recorded the incident.

I discovered that the people of the Etoille had begun to cheat the blacks when buying fruit off them, a dispute followed and the commanding officer inhumanely had them fired on. The cruelty affected the next day even those who, coming from a different locality, they knew nothing of the previous day’s happenings (Dunmore 2002:294).

The effect this event may have had on future trading is not known, but natives showed caution to the next two voyagers to visit the region (see below).
Returning to the events of Bougainville’s visit to Gower’s harbour, soon after his arrival a discovery of great curiosity occurred. Bougainville writes in his journal:

A sailor from my boat, looking for shells along the seashore, found a piece of a lead plaque on which was an inscription in English. This is what the piece contained:

(anc)HORD HERE ICK MAJESTYS

The rest is missing, there are traces of the nails that fixed the plaque to the tree from which the Savages will have torn it and broken it up. This encounter led me to search in the neighbourhood of this anchorage and in the afternoon, about two leagues N of this cove, in another fairly deep on the same shore, I found traces of the English camp, wood cut with the axe and the harpoon, a fairly large tree on which the lead plaque was attached about 10 or 12 feet up. The traces are well marked, and still fresh, some of the nails remain in place and the nails are not rusted. On the tree itself there are notches made by the English or the Savages and none of this is old. The spun yarn that presumably held the tents down is fresh, the shoots on the cut trees would in France be coming from a single drive of the sap... (Dunmore 2002:119).

Bougainville did note the marks that differed enough for him to ascribe their source as the natives. As well, he expresses his wonder about coming to the same place as the English as “one of the most singular effects of chance” (Dunmore 2002:119).

Another sailor adds his description to the record of this incident:

We found near one of the huts a piece of lead broken and rolled up where English words and half-words were written... One and a half leagues from there we saw a tree carved in espalier shape where three nails still remained and two lengths of rope that had held the inscription. (Dunmore 2002:293).

The fact that the plaque was found near the huts allows one to surmise as to who tore it down and why they did this. The native’s marks had been violated with the destruction of their stand of coconut palms, and their property had been transgressed upon. It is not beyond conjecture to believe that maybe they had reciprocated in kind to this act. It is probable as well that the locals’ destruction and defacement of Carteret’s plaque was a denial of the marking or claim that Carteret inscribed onto their world.
The next voyage to this area that is recounted in the historical record was made some fifty-five years later, although unrecorded visits by whalers (see below) may have occurred during this time span.

Duperrey reports the first extended contact with the people of the region during his voyage of 1823. Having encountered a group of men from Likliki with tattoos and decorated with powdered lime, two members of his crew reported visiting a ceremonial house with carved posts and observing a series of dances. Duperrey noted that the men were involved in what they termed “louk-louk”. Albert points out that in all likelihood this was the first European encounter with tubuan rites, involving the masked men’s cult figures, or dukduk (1987:28), and a visit to a triun, or men’s cult house and enclosure. This inference is supported by the fact that the men were initially encountered on the coast opposite Lambom, carrying Sur (lit Lak bone: a ritual accoutrement to the tubuan men’s cult) a spear whose shaft is made from a human thigh bone (see Whittaker 1975:229).

Toamisik, the bigman of Lambom island’s Buibui (Lak lit. big bush) clan confirms that the area on the mainland referred to today as pidik (Lak lit. secret, and in particular one related to men’s cult activities) was a former triun belonging to his clan that is no longer used as such today. The Buibui clan are the founders of and predominant landowners in the current village of Bakok, located just north of the former site of Likliki, and claim kinship with the earlier inhabitants of the interior mountain villages of Golon and the coastal settlement of Likliki.

Duperrey and his crew were in bad shape when they sighted this landfall, and immediately set out to collect water at Bougainville’s stream in Kabatoros harbour. The contact between Duperrey’s crew and the native New Irelanders at this site is summarized in a history of French voyaging in the Pacific:

Fifty or sixty natives came down to the ship with coconuts, pigs, and bananas. They were most friendly, in spite of their rather wild appearance: “their black and oily skin, their unkempt hair covered with red ochre dissolved in fish oil forming a thick putty-like cover over their head, truly gave a strange touch to their complete nudity; add to this a small stick thrust crosswise into their nose, and white bars on the face contrasting with red dust on their cheekbones.” Lesson, who observed them at close quarters while collecting natural-history specimens, was offered a fried lizard by one, but declined as courteously as he could an offering which seemed
particularly unappetizing. When, however, he tried to find the village, the islanders showed signs of disquiet, which caused him to desist. In return for their gifts of food, the sailors gave them pieces of cloth, iron, or small knives, and set up a small barber’s shop: “Their beard is thin and they like to get rid of it. They kept on bothering the sailors on this point, and the latter never missed an opportunity of playing pranks on them, using their pocket knives to scrape those black chins well covered with a soapy lather” (Dunmore 1969 vol II:133-4).

The first quote within this passage is an account by Lesson, the voyage’s naturalist. Although the New Irelanders may have been busy with ritual business, they quickly took the opportunity to trade with Duperrey’s men. Their reticence about revealing the location of their village to the Europeans demonstrates a limit to their enthusiasm for contact. Regardless of the reason for this hesitancy and sensible caution on the natives’ part seems a plausible one, it is apparent that the natives were insisting on interaction on their terms with regards to where such interaction would take place. Lottin, a ship’s officer, is the source of the second quote dealing with the shaving and the playing of pranks. It is of interest to note the contrast in Lottin’s impression on the natives’ beards with Lesson’s observations that “The old men allow their beards to grow very long and they appear to take great trouble with them” (Whittaker 1975:228). Here we can see the different approaches and impressions held by the varieties of men who made up the crew: sober-eyed observations on the one hand, coupled with prank playing on the other.

Further to Lesson’s impressions of their appearance:

The faces of the old men show an aloof dignity; their calm and serene features are stamped with an impassiveness which accompanies senility, while the young of these people, like all those elsewhere, are characterised by a dynamic manner and a lively spirit. If one studies for some time the faces of the New Irelanders one can easily identify the emotions reflected there, and alongside the duplicity and perfidious aspects of some is contrasted the defiance and suspicion of others, the friendliness and trustfulness of yet others. Among these men gaiety and passion do not appear to be part of more than a small number (Whittaker 1975:229).

Lesson appears ambivalent in his description. Perhaps this reflects the distance between what he observed on New Ireland, and what he brought to the encounter regarding the character of men as evidenced in their faces. Nevertheless, he does pay attention to individual and generational difference amongst the natives. This evidences an eye for detail not wholly obscured by the caricature of savagery held during his time. What
these New Ireland people thought of the Frenchmen’s appearance is not recounted in any tale I heard during my time in the region.

Only a few years later in 1827 Dumont D’urville, who had travelled with Duperrey on his earlier expedition, led his own through the region. On arrival at the south of New Ireland he immediately sought contact with the natives. His crew fired a gun to call the natives to shore, and traded an axe for a pig with those who responded to his summons at Carteret’s harbour. His men saw four or five natives fishing on shore, who subsequently spoke with officers who went ashore in a launch, this initial foray negotiating the purchase of a fish and a phalanger. “D’urville recognized these natives as racially similar to those he had seen at Port Praslin three years before, but they must have been from a different tribe, because they had no recollection of Coquille” (Rosenman 1987:140).

Two days later he had guests:

Two natives came aboard, a middle-aged man and a youth. Both are completely naked, black and unattractive in appearance. Their hair is frizzy, their nasal septum pierced by a piece of bone. They showed neither intelligence nor vivacity nor even curiosity about all the new things they were seeing. They appeared to be eager only for iron, but made not the slightest approach to get any. We vainly tried to explain to them by every possible means that if they would like to bring us pigs, fish, coconuts and even yams and bananas, they would get lots of iron. Their only response was a stupid and vacant look, and they paid hardly any attention to my explanations. The only thing that roused their interest was my cockatoo, which seems to indicate that this bird was unknown in New Ireland (Rosenman 1987:141).

It is more than likely that the French language may not have made sense to them (the understanding of English words by this point in time is mentioned below). D’urville is nowhere near as charitable in his evaluation of their character as Lesson was. He notes only negative traits; perhaps the difference in this portrait is due more to the character of the observer than the observed. While the French may not have realized the fact, it is apparent that not many things the natives were seeing on ships were new to them, as by 1811 the passage between New Ireland and New Britain was mentioned in published sailing directions between Sydney and Asia10. As well, as we shall see below, whalers

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10 See notes on Carteret Harbour and Gowers Harbour in Horsburgh’s 1811 Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, etc, cited in Whittaker et al 1975:323.
had begun to trade in the region from around 1820. Whether the natives were blase because of this experience, or expressing an ennui that reflected this, is not known. Likewise, whether such cool behaviour was a strategic posture towards trade was not something the French considered.

Notwithstanding the impressions of the Europeans at the time, we can discern a patterned response on the part of the natives. They express a consistent interest in iron. This shows a focused understanding by New Irelanders of what was important and desirable in such encounters for them by this point in time.

The following day a canoe brought four natives to visit the ship and they were brought aboard. Once on board the natives:

promised pigs and fruit for the next day... but not much faith was placed in the word of the natives the general opinion being that they were stupid, ...But they turned up as promised with some green bananas, some taros, yams and one tiny pig for which they got an axe. They were very demanding of anything iron (Rosenman 1987:141).

For all their purported stupidity the items brought to the French Captain come close to precisely matching the list of supplies the French had requested the day before; the French got taro instead of fish.

Regarding the character of these men who came to trade with him, Dumont D’urville formed the following opinion, “The natives, despite their ugliness and dirtiness, he found to be gentle and docile, but also suspicious and inclined to theft. They resisted all Dr Gaimard’s blandishments to take him to their village.” (Rosenman 1987:141) Again a perception on the part of the French regarding ‘native suspicion’ is evidenced with regards to village visits. This is similar to what Duperrey found regarding hoped-for village visits at Gower Harbour three years earlier. Such suspicion would be justified, taking into account Bougainville’s attitude to acquiring goods. This is especially so if the locals had any knowledge of the specifics of Bougainville’s actions while trading, or tales or experience of similar uses of European power during trading exchanges.

As for the native fascination with D’urville’s cockatoo, the bird roused more than the natives’ interest. D’urville reports: “My bad-tempered cockatoo, having managed to break his chain, has broken the only marine barometer we brought from Toulon”
(Rosenman 1987:141). The only remaining barometers were “hard to use even when there is only a slight movement of the ship at anchor. At sea they will be completely useless. Who could imagine that for an expedition like this they would have sent us such useless instruments” (Rosenman 1987:141-3). There is an irony here that D’urville fails to note: it seems that the natives in contrast with his French outfitters were more effective in supplying his needs. While in harbour here D’urville was near death with colic, and was treated during his stay here with enemas and leeches. He survived his afflictions and their treatment while his ship was cleaned, its sails mended, and water and wood taken on for the next stage of his voyage (Rosenman 1987:143).

The final note on the natives describes an attempt on their part for further trade:

“The natives brought out a few vegetables and some tiny pigs, but their demands were so exorbitant that little was purchased” (Rosenman 1987:143). A likely inference is that these natives were becoming quite savvy traders through experience; they were not willing to merely accept the French terms regarding exchange. By attempting to get the best deal for the least outlay, their trading strategy should not have been seen as too dissimilar to the Europeans’ experience and approach to trade.

As I will relate below, it is evident there was overlap during the European notions of an era of discovery, and the more commercially focused whaling voyages that began around the same time. Despite the contrast in their motivations for visiting New Ireland there is a similarity in what the different groups of Europeans needed and desired from the natives and what the natives wanted from them. One constant throughout this period was that most of these encounters and exchanges were conducted between canoes and ships, or less frequently on board ships or the shores and beaches of the region. The changes from this standard formula in subsequent encounters express a development and a normalization of trading relations. However, even this development still displays the tentative quality of relations of a frontier.

In addition to the Whalers, Blackbirders seeking plantation labour visited the southern shores of New Ireland during the 1840s and ‘enlisted’ five men from the Likliki community at that time (Stephan and Graebner 1907:9). The sheltered harbours between Lambom and the mainland were more frequently visited from this period, as ships followed the increasingly important route between Australia and East Asia. The
settlement of New South Wales in 1788 was a turning point for increased contact with Europeans:

After this time routes northeast from Sydney to China were in regular use by government and private vessels. While large and faster ships kept to the east seeking maximum sail in the open sea, smaller ships chose the shorter inner routes, especially when refreshments were required. The St George’s Channel route was best for this purpose (Gray 1999:24).

In a survey of whaling contacts in the Bismarck Archipelago, Gray documents the experiences of culture contact in the region between 1799 and 1884. Adding to the limited ‘discovery voyage’ literature on this period, he highlights the importance of these contacts for understanding subsequent relations between islanders and Europeans. Cruising the region in search of their prey for months at a time, the whalers were more likely to have encountered natives than explorers or merchants heading on their way to China and Bengal. The importance of these encounters in establishing subsequent relations and patterns of interaction between Europeans becomes apparent when one considers their frequency and intensity during this early period. Examining the logs of New England whalers for the period, Gray reports the following contacts near Lambom during the following time spans: one visit between 1820 and 1840; ten during 1840 and 1860; and seventeen between 1860 and 1884 (Gray 1999:27-8). These figures represent a minimum number of contacts between Europeans and Islanders, as he notes that logs often did not record return visits or occurrences during the same voyage, and all indications point to the number of contacts being much higher. During this time trading became common, the whalers generally exchanging iron for taro, yams, other root crops, and coconuts. “On the New Ireland coast, Gower’s Harbour situated just within Cape St. George was a popular site for refreshment and repair” (Gray 1999:26). The desire to trade was equally strong for the natives: Gray notes that in 1872 local people travelled up to twenty five kilometres out to sea to meet and trade with ships passing off the coast of Gower’s Harbour (1997:29).

In addition, Gray reports on “a settlement of 18 deserters from Sydney ships” at Gower’s Harbour as mentioned by Maude in the cruise of the whaler “Gypsy” (1997:39). Cases of whalers deserting included three men from the Clarice in 1844 and six men from the Young Hector in 1854, of whom five were pursued and returned.
The language skills of the locals are evidenced in the following extract from the log of the whaler Clarice for April 13th 1844:

...in English Cove Gower’s Harbour New Ireland in 15 ½ fathoms water and moored ship by evening & setting forth to attend ashore a canoe came alongside the natives of which could talk considerable English...(PMB 319).

This proficiency on the part of the natives attests to the previous contacts that they had had with Europeans.

The increasing contact with whalers and other ships, as well as the number of deserters or marooned sailors, who resided in the area, must have afforded the Lak opportunities and a range of ways of relating with these outsiders. In 1828, a Marquesan man was put ashore with his chest, marooned for lethargy by the captain of the Lusitania. That evening another Marquesan crewman jumped ship and swam to shore where his friend was marooned. The following day five more Marquesans ran away from a provisioning party. After three days ashore the men were found at the village of ‘King Deet’ and rejoined the ship.

This event seems to have provided the raw material for a story of first contact with Europeans, as told to me by several older big men on Lambom Island. Kingston also recounts a version of this story that he collected in Siar during his fieldwork there between 1994 and 1996 (Kingston 1999).

The story as told on Lambom is as follows:

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a set of strange tracks leading to the sea near Kabatoros (the southern part of Gower Harbour opposite Lambom). The man did not recognize the tracks as footprints, so he waited and hid to see what made them. The next day he saw a strange man walk to the water’s edge, then walk backwards in his own tracks back into the bush. Never having seen this type of man before, the man went to his village and after telling his story he came back with other men from his village. They half waited, and when the stranger appeared they rushed him and one man held him. The stranger was very scared, and pointed to the bush repeatedly. Following his lead, they followed him to a tree which he climbed and returned with his box of goods. He opened it and passed around the contents, laplaps, mirrors and axes. He showed them how to fasten the laplap, and demonstrated the axe in cutting wood. His name was Kuk. The men returned to their village and hid the stranger away from the women in the men’s house. They cut his hair, and wove it into a rope of
They examined his feet to see why he left strange tracks, and discovered shoes. They readied a big feast, sending the women to prepare food, and decorated the man with tar (red ochre). They then had a big *mumu* and revealed the man to the women. Later some wanted to eat the stranger, but others were happy with his gifts of axes and *laplaps*, so they made a big fire and a ship came and got him. He was Chinese and his name was Kuk. He was the first *masta* they had ever seen (story as told in Tok Pisin by Goro, Koroe Marmar clan, Lambom Island; my translation).

The version collected by Kingston differs in that it focuses upon the *kastom* that was held and specifies that Kuk was held for four or five years before he was revealed. After the *kastom*, ‘Captain Cook’ was free to go. Whereas Kingston’s version highlights the Lak revelation of the novel Cook himself as the key to his release, Goro’s version focuses on his revelation to them of new goods; it was the uniqueness of his goods and the fact that he revealed and shared them that led to his freedom.

Kingston terms the story a historical myth, and links it with other revelatory rituals performed with European innovations (this sort of thing occurred for Lambom too, see story of the Marquis de Rays colony below). Albert mentions the visit of the first German patrol to Siar, that presented locals with the pax Germanica ban on fighting and cannibalism, was accompanied by a Chinese cook (1987:42). How this fits with the Lak tale of first contact is unclear, but it does offer another possible origin for the name *Kuk*.

As to the eventual departure of *Kuk*, there is a precedent in the historical records. Maude notes that around this time on New Ireland “there had been four European residents, though three had since joined a passing ship” (jph1:194).

In 1849 a trading ship headed for Sydney and commanded by a Captain Keppel visited a community near Lamassa. His account is remarkable in that it shows that the frequency of trade to this point had led to quite comfortable relations between natives and Europeans. Of note is his trip to the community’s village. This visit is a departure from the natives’ hesitance experienced by Lesson when he tried to locate a village during Duperrey’s voyage twenty five years earlier, and Gaimond’s similar attempt on D’urville’s voyage a few years later. Keppel also visited the community’s gardens, and he commented on the pacific nature of daily life observed there. Also of interest are his observations on the spread of an emerging trade lingua franca, as evidenced by the
grammar and sentence structure in the ‘English and American’ spoken by the New Irelanders:

We now looked for a harbour near the southern end of New Ireland—discovered by and named after a Captain Carteret—where fresh water was to be obtained: it is a place occasionally visited by English and American whalers, -- as was proved by a salutation which met our ears, while we were standing in for shore. ‘What ship that?’ shouted a black savage one of a party in a canoe; ‘Tobac got!’—God Dam!’—‘Rum got!’—“Give Rope!’—while delivering himself of these Lessons in English and American, and without waiting for an invitation, he sprang into the main chains, and thence onto the quarterdeck (Whittaker 1975:297).

...While the ship was watering, we formed a party, and, under guidance of a savage who spoke and understood a little English, started off to visit one of their villages. Having pulled along the beach to the northward for a short distance, outside the harbour, we landed opposite some fishing huts; and striking into the forest, followed a jungle path for about a mile; this brought us to a collection of perhaps 200 huts; they scarcely however deserved that name, each dwelling being nothing more than a circular hole, three feet deep, over which a thatch was thrown... they explained that their cultivated ground was further off, and offered to show us the way. They led us by a pleasant walk through the jungle; we met on our way several detached parties of men, women, and children, carrying on their heads to the village the daily supply of vegetables, consisting of tapa, yams, cassava root, and plantains. Half an hour brought us to the banks of a broad and rapid stream, tumbling and roaring over rocks and large stones. The water through which we had to wade was about three feet deep. On the opposite side were the gardens. We were astonished, not only at the neatness and pretty appearance of the ground, but at the order that prevailed where no one appeared to rule. Each section of the village seemed to have its allotted portion (Whittaker 1975:298).

Keppel is evidently well pleased with his contact with the natives. His astonishment at the orderliness of their gardens contrasts markedly with his impression of what he takes to be their village. The uniform nature of the huts he describes would seem to represent a temporary encampment rather than the hallmarks of a community; and tellingly clan and cult houses appear nowhere to be seen. As well, a village of this size would be remarkable for this region of New Ireland at this time. The reactions of the natives he meets show that the desire for trade is still strong in the region, but what is of real interest in his narrative is the native willingness to invite the sailors into their temporary
community and gardens. These people are less reticent and cautious than the folks Duperrey met just a few kilometres south in Gower harbour twenty-five years earlier.

In general the logs examined by Gray show trading between whalers and islanders to have been peaceful; and though incidents of conflict occurred in other parts of the archipelago the people around Gower Harbour and the south of New Ireland had a good reputation as traders. However, as the whaling era began to wind down and European colonialism’s extension into the region began, things changed. There are reports of conflict in both the European and Lak memory of this era. Since the time of Tasman, New Iirelanders and other nearby islanders had violent encounters with the men who came in ships (cf: Bolyanatz 1998). Along a strip of beach in Kabatoros harbour the metal keel of a sailing ship is buried under the sand. It was said to have remained visible as recently as ten years ago, seasonal changes in the beach affecting how deeply it is buried. This area of land is locally named Bolok, after the ship that Lambom people say they captured "long taim bilong ol Jerman/ during the German rule".

Alois Todowe, Goro Bamsai and Iksil Tokarabus related the story to me in slightly different versions. I heard the tale while carrying out a garden census, when it was offered to explain the name of a clan’s landholdings where they had a line of coconut palms. Alois said it was written about in Threlfall’s book One Hundred Years in the Islands (1975). I present a composite version here, leaving out none of the details recalled, but covering aspects of the story that emerged in separate tellings.

One time there was a ship that came to anchor Kabatoros. The name of this ship was Bolok. Some men went to trade for tobacco and while they were on the ship one old guy waited in the canoe. When the men returned after a while, they were surprised to find the old man smoking his pipe as they were unable to trade for tobacco because the white men didn’t have any to trade. They asked the old man where he got the tobacco and he replied: “you fellows didn’t find any tobacco but I found something to smoke.” He then showed the other men how he had scraped fibres from the anchor rope. When the white men saw the men cutting the rope they got angry and swore at them. The men left. Later, they made a plan to capture the boat and kill the white men. They counted how many sailors were present, then marked two men to attack each sailor. The next day they went on board and they attacked the sailors. Some of the white men escaped, and they killed the rest.

11 All the versions were fundamentally similar in plot. Alois’ story included the swearing and cursing by the sailors as a cause for the attack; Goro added the old man and the tobacco; Iksil noted the counting of the sailors and the assigning of two men to each of them.
These men did this in Kabatoros harbour, at the strip of white sand, near Point Tawahk. Now we call this place Bolok.

The motive given for the attack was the *tok nogut*/swearing directed at the locals by the ship’s crew according to Alois. When asked, both Alois and Iksil stated there were no repercussions of this attack, and that there most certainly was not any punitive raid by anyone.

I could find no source that mentioned a ship named Bolok being attacked in the south of New Ireland. Following the advice of Alois I did look in Threlfall’s history of the United Church. There was no mention of a ship named Bolok but there was a sentence that noted an incident involving the capture and burning of a ship named Lavinia at the extreme south of New Ireland in 1875 (Threlfall 1975:24). Threlfall cites the autobiography of George Brown, the pioneer missionary who established the church in the islands in 1875. Brown (1908:99) notes that the Lavinia was attacked “a few months before we landed”. Brown does not describe the incident, but did go visit the alleged perpetrators in 1876, at Likliki village. He describes his meeting with the village leaders:

Tom was dressed in a marine’s coat, and the other chief looked very well in a blue jacket. They commenced talking at once about the Lavinia, and both of them wished me to believe that they had nothing at all to do with it. They said that the schooner was taken by men belonging to Baul, a village a little distance from Metlik. Tom said that he was angry when it was done, as he wished to stand well with the white men, and so he went at once and fought the Baul men, and killed and ate two of them. This was Tom’s account of the affair, but I do not at all avouch its truthfulness. He said also: “I have always been good to the men, some of them have lived here with me; whalers have left their sick men here, and when they died I buried them properly, and they lie on my land now.” (Brown 1908:140)

Tom and several other ‘chiefs’ made a visible effort to assure Brown of their good intentions by offering him gifts of cooked taro and other root crops as well as a large cooked pig. Upon Brown’s departure, Tom again stated his peaceful intention, denied any guilt in the burning of the Lavinia, and asserted that he was a good man and of trustworthy character. Brown’s recorded his impression of the case Tom presented:

Whether he was such a very good fellow or not I could not tell, but he treated us very well, and up to the unfortunate Lavinia affair he was always considered to be the best man on the Islands, and Port Praslin to be the
safest and best anchorage. I bought a quadrant, the Livinia’s articles, and a Savings Bank deposit book from the natives, but saw no other property belonging to the vessel (ibid 141).

It is apparent that Tom is very interested in re-establishing good relations with the white men of the region. Brown notes that no one had visited Port Praslin since the incident, which he then reckoned to have occurred about two years before his visit (139). Though Brown himself noted the way different villages in New Britain attempted to control access to the white men, he seems to be ambivalent about accepting Tom’s tale. What is apparent is his appreciation of Tom’s sincerity in wanting to be on good terms with the whites.

The clearest European narrative of the incident I have uncovered was reported in the London Times on 12 December 1873. Citing a report in the Sydney Morning Herald, the article is based on the story told by Captain Neil Brodie who led a crew of ten men, five white and five natives of Rotumah.

On arriving at Port Praslin, in July, the natives seemed quite friendly, Captain Brodie had, in fact, frequently been there before, trading with the natives, and on this occasion he observed nothing unusual in their demeanour. On the second day after his arrival he was preparing for departure, and while they were heaving up the anchor about 20 of the natives came off to sell a turtle. They would not leave the vessel when requested to do so, but suddenly rushed, threw the captain overboard, and were seen to kill the mate, Mr. John Webster, and the cook, Henry Huish, and two of the native sailors. Fortunately for the captain and some others of the crew, the ship’s boat was lying alongside and they managed to escape. (London Times 12 December 1873:7 column e)

The report goes on to describe the escape of the five survivors to another island before being rescued by the HMS Beagle. The ship proceeded to Port Praslin, “but was fired upon by the natives, who had obtained arms from the Lavinia.” Not equipped for this eventuality and unable to land “as the natives were so numerous, likewise so bold”, the Beagle left. The report concludes, "Nothing was seen of the schooner Lavinia".

Information gathered at Lamassa thirty years later reports that Lambom and the mainland across the passage were abandoned during the five-year period following this

12 It seems likely that Brown’s statement that the attack took place a few months prior to his arrival led Threlfall to the incorrect date of 1875.
event (Friederici 1912:68). Lambom was resettled at the time of the arrival of ships bringing colonists to the ill-fated Port Breton settlement in 1880.

Before addressing the events relating to Marquis de Rays venture and the subsequent periods of more formal colonialization, a few preliminary conclusions are worth noting for this initial period of inter-cultural connection. In contrast to the east coast of what was to become the Lak region, the islands and mainland of south-west New Ireland were engaged with the wider world in a relatively intense manner. Contact was the spur to New Irelanders to increasingly visit this coast and its offshore islands.

Originally a place where exchange could take place, its increasing use by Europeans made it a site of increasing importance for the natives of the region. Friederici notes that in the interim between the Lavinia episode and the founding of Port Breton a lookout kept watch on Lambom to maintain rights to the community (Friederici 1912:69). In general the natives of this region became more sophisticated traders in their dealings with the ships that harboured along this stretch of coast. The local desire for iron was matched by an understanding of the items sought for by the European voyagers. Instances of subsequent retrading of iron to inland village were not uncommon (Gray 199:37). As well both the place of trading and the rate of exchange were impacted by local agents and their desires. Eventually the experience of trading led to a normalization of these exchanges within the local understanding. Initial suspicion, well founded if we consider the actions of Bougainville’s visit to the region, gradually subsided to the point were visits to villages began to occur. The events of this period represent an entwined history of contact. They reflect not only the search for necessities by European voyagers, but the local desire to access forces and things from beyond the local horizon. The sophistication and agency exhibited by the locals becomes even more pronounced during the events involved with an increased and more settled European presence to which I now turn.

The Marquis De Rays Colony

The story of the founding and abandonment of the ill-fated colony of New France are well known in New Britain and New Ireland and have found a place in the wider
understanding of New Guinea history. My interest is with the interaction between the colonists and the people of the region so I will only briefly sketch the broader history of the colony before addressing the role local people played in the affair.

In what is generally considered a fraudulent land swindle perpetrated by Charles du Breil --- the questionable noble Marquis de Rays --- over twenty thousand Europeans beginning in 1872 bought subscriptions in the colony, investing approximately five million francs in the Marquis’ company. Investors were attracted by an advertising campaign based on the publication of a journal that presented the colony as an already established tropical paradise and included engravings of happy natives toiling fertile fields. Investors were promised returns from their investment in the land as natives and Asian coolies laboured for them in New Ireland. Under pressure to put his plans into action after raising so much money, actual settlement was readied in the late 1870s. This required actual settlers, so the Marquis set out to attract people to move to the South Pacific. Given the choice of actually taking up land in the colony, over eight hundred subscribers, mainly French, Italian, Spanish, and German citizens, took up discounted shares and readied themselves to move across the globe. The first ship of colonists sailed in late 1879. In all, four ships came to New Ireland, carrying over eight hundred colonists between 1880 and 1882. The first boatload to arrive in southern New Ireland immediately decided that Port Praslin was unsuitable for settlement and sailed around Cape St George to the present site of Metlik before landing. After a dispute among the leaders of the colony the designated governor took the ship and sailed off to Sydney leaving a party of sixty colonists to make an attempt at establishing a settlement. By July of 1880 the remnants of this expedition were evacuated to the Duke of York mission station by the Methodist missionary George Brown.

The next ship carried sixty men, most of them officials for the colony and a police regiment. The ship arrived to find the site of the proposed colony, opposite Lambom Island, deserted. Its occupants began to prepare the settlement for the settlers who were soon to follow them. Two more ships arrived in 1880 carrying over six hundred settlers

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13 Popular accounts were written by Beche, Niau the daughter of one of the child colonists, the novelist James Michener, and the event is even outlined in the Lonely Planet tourist guide for PNG. Scholarly depictions of the colony are included in appendices of Reed’s history of New Guinea, Robson’s biography of Queen Emma, and Biskup’s introduction to Mouton’s memoirs. Albert discusses the colony in his thesis and justifiably writes that a full history of the colony “has not yet been written” (1987:30).
in total, one of them carrying three hundred and fifteen Italians. After a year of sickness and death the colony was abandoned in early 1882 and in exchange for the cargo the settlers brought with them, Queen Emma Forsyth and her partner Thomas Farrell provided a ship for the remnants of the colonists to be repatriated to Sydney. This cargo has become the stuff of island’s legend, purportedly including such bizarre items as a millstone for a place where no grain could grow, hundreds of dog collars, expensive stationary, a church organ, and a Punch and Judy puppet show. Thousands of bricks were left by Emma and Farrell, and still litter the undergrowth of mangroves in Lavonai cove. The doctor who arrived on the final expedition wrote a book recounting the scandalous behaviour of the Marquis and his agents, and Du Breil was tried and convicted in 1883, sent to jail and fined a few hundred francs.

The book written by Dr Baudouin is the only first-person narrative dealing with the events in New Ireland. His observations regarding the natives, and in particular their leader Maragano, offer a glimpse of the skills this man used in his dealings with the colonists. Baudouin describes the character of the “remarkable savage” Maragano, a man he portrays as “a potentate worthy of the Palais Royale” (1883). Maragano was:

Endowed with a surprising political spirit...he quickly understood all the advantages he could get from an alliance with Rabardy and he easily made the latter understand what a powerful auxiliary he could himself be for the captain of the Genil (Baudouin 1883:134).

Rabardy told the doctor that there were five natives on Lambom when he first arrived in 1880 with the Genil, and that Maragano was the man who presented himself as their leader. Baudouin tells of Maragano’s founding of the Lambom community. Maragano was “chased from the east coast of New Ireland for adultery, he found refuge on Lambom with his four companions” (1883:135). Drawing a classical allusion he calls Maragano a “neo-Romulus”, who “offered hospitality to a few other scoundrels expelled from their country and it is from them that the current village of Lambom was built” (1883:136). By the time of Baudouin’s arrival the island village consisted of thirty two people: “His rule extended over fifteen warriors and seventeen women”. These women were of “various shapes and colours” and Baudouin posits that like the founder of Rome Maragano had “taken them a bit from here and a bit from there” (Baudouin 1883:136).
Of particular interest is the way Maragano positioned himself between the colonists and other natives of the region who came to trade. Fruits, tubers, and pigs were brought to the colony and exchanged for tobacco, fake pearls, and lap laps. “But Maragano was a protectionist and he did not let these traffickers pass by without having extracted from them, depending on their cargo, a more or less large quantity of their goods” (Baudouin 1883:158). This depiction of the Lambom leader portrays a man who was quite capable in his dealings with the Europeans. In essence Maragano was a man who put himself into a position of power by mediating between the colonists and natives of the region. He took advantage of the opportunity presented by the arrival of the colonists to monopolize trade with them and establish himself as the leader amongst his people. This put him in a unique position as regards his legitimacy as a Lak leader. Baudouin describes Maragano’s failed attempt to gain entry to the ‘Dok Dok’ (Dukduk) society when his payment of shell money was returned from Lamassa “with scorn” by the cult leader there (1883:136)\(^{14}\). Besides evidencing the hostility between Maragano and members of the Lamassa community, this event is telling in that it shows Maragano attempting to acquire a more traditional basis for his leadership. It is entirely possible that Maragano was trying to diversify his leadership credentials through gaining status in the men’s cult. It is also evident that there was resistance to this move on his part by leaders of the cult.

On Lambom Maragano is remembered as the man named Maranganu the leader of Koroe clan. He is universally regarded in the community as the founder of Lambom. Several men told me of Maranganu’s fierceness. Maranganu was a warrior who killed many men according to his descendents and practiced cannibalism. He had three wives. The youngest, Rangkar, was a woman who he forcibly took from a man he chased up a tree near Lamassa. People tell of a picture they saw of him in a book titled *New Guinea Legends* that one of the island’s emigrants brought back with her from Sydney. The photograph apparently shows a powerfully built man sitting on a throne with two other men kneeling at his feet. They say he looked like a gorilla and that the caption identified the two men at his feet as the dogs of Maranganu\(^{15}\). Maranganu met his end several years after the colony was abandoned at the hands of Lamassa members of the Tokbol

\(^{14}\) Albert discusses this event in order to trace the spread of the *tubuan* cult through the region and its origins as a coastal possession in the early contact period (1987:34-5)

\(^{15}\) See Neumann 1992:51 for an ancestor described as having the “eyes of a monkey”.
The chief Panake from Lamassa, who was 38-40 years old in 1908, lived as a young boy in Lambom during that time. He can remember the Marquis de Rays expedition quite well and told me about it in detail. Ten to twelve years later, between 1888 and 1893, an enormous number of families left Lambom in order to establish a new colony in Lamassa (Friederici 1912:68).

Whether this migration from Lambom was related to a feud between the Tokbol clan and Maranganu’s supporters is not known; but the exodus from Lambom does support a more general assertion that the absence of the De Rays colonists lessened the pull that access to their goods had once had in bringing Lak people to the island community.

In general, by the late 1990s, the events surrounding the colony had come to be considered a missed opportunity by many members of the current Lambom community. I was repeatedly told that it was the ignorance of their ancestors that led to the sickness and death that caused the colony to founder. These ancestors used sorcery to poison the colonists and give them malaria and tropical lesions that forced the colonists to eventually flee the area. One man told me that if his ancestors had not treated the colonists in this manner, today Lambom would be adjacent to a town full of Europeans -- a town like Rabaul, only better because Lak people would be the bosses there. Life would be easy today if only their ancestors had had more sense.

Towilly, an elderly man of Koroe clan told me he had heard from his grandfather that the Lak people first learned how to make gem, bread made from ground cassava and coconut oil, by watching the De Rays colonists use the millstone to make flour. This large millstone was eventually taken Rabaul by the Australians soon after they took over the New Guinea from the Germans after the First World War. This account seems questionable as it appears the mill was never completed. What is undoubtedly true is that the thousands of bricks left behind when the colony was abandoned have found their way into use as stones for cooking gem in mumu/earth oven pits. Mirroring the Australian appropriation of the millstone as a memorial for the town of Rabaul, the people of Lambom brought the large iron gears meant to drive the millstone to the
island, some time after this event. Men took the trouble to build a raft and float the gears several kilometres and across the passage to Lambom. Originally they were kept in a men’s house enclosure, where they were painted red then eventually revealed as part of a mortuary feast before the outbreak of World War Two. Around the time of independence in 1975 the gears were moved to their present location at the base of the flag pole, surrounded by a flower garden, outside the school house.

**Neu Mecklenburg**

Soon after the abandonment of the De Rays colony, Lambom encountered a more standard form of colonialism with the founding of the German colony of Deutsch Neu Guinea in 1884. New Ireland was renamed Neu Mecklenburg, and the northern part of the island saw the establishment of the town of Kavieng.

Despite the exodus from Lambom mentioned above by 1904 there were approximately one hundred people resident on the island (Firth 1983:75). A glimpse of the situation on Lambom during this period emerges from the writings of German colonial officials.

Lambom—and in this it was typical of hundreds of ‘villages’ in New Guinea—was not really a single village but a number of dispersed hamlets. In Lambom’s case people lived in four hamlets, each with its own men’s house for unmarried youths, yet the government recognized only one official luluai, a man called To Kulau... The relationship between these offshore islanders and the hill peoples was not one of never-ending warfare, but of war and peace at different times in a long history of contact. In times of peace, Lamassa and Lambom supplied the hill villagers with coconuts and seawater, much valued for its salt and carried in long bamboo vessels, in return for spears, baskets and belts (Firth 1983:75).

Firth describes an event that shows the complicated relations between government and native and how particular Luluai, government appointed village headmen, were able to manipulate their relations with the colonial powers for their own purposes:

When District Officer Kommajer took twenty police from Kokopo to Lamassa in January 1905, he did so in response to reports that escaped labourers from New Britain had been killed and eaten in southern New Ireland and that mountain warriors were raiding the islands near Cape St George. Before he had a chance to explain why he had come, the Lamassa people asked for help in their dispute with Lambom, following accusations
that a Lamassa man was working sorcery on Lambom women; then when he revealed the purpose of his visit, everybody hastened to complain about the big man To Kabar and his murderous raids on them while they worked in their gardens on the mainland of New Ireland. Two men with fresh spear wounds were exhibited as proof.

Kommajer now took the *luluai* To Puang south to Lambom, but as the *Seestern* entered the harbour no one was to be seen. The houses were deserted. The Lambom people had hidden across the channel on New Ireland, their men armed with spears and ready to fight the police, and took much persuading to emerge from their hiding-places. Kommajer thought they were afraid of government retribution for their dispute over sorcery, but other evidence suggests that they may have been responsible for killing escaped labourers. They had good reason to fear the police, perhaps, but soon realized that Kommajer did not suspect them of any wrong-doing. On the contrary, he wanted to hear more stories about the bad hill people led by To Kabar, and they were happy to satisfy him. Not long before, he was told, To Kabar’s people had killed Lambom women working in a taro field on the mainland.

The complaints of the Lamassa people now seemed confirmed and Kommajer decided ‘to take action against him with armed force’. With a knowledgeable guide from Lambom, the *Seestern* sailed to the east coast so that the party could approach To Kabar’s village unnoticed. After hours of strenuous marching up hill-tracks and wading in the pouring rain through river beds, the expedition emerged below the village, to be met by a hail of stones and spears. ‘We now stormed the village’, wrote Kommajer, ‘6 natives fell in the struggle. The village itself had been evacuated by the time we arrived. In the pursuit of the natives by the police troop 2 further kanakas were killed’. With night coming, the steep gullies were no place to be chasing warriors and he prudently decided that the punishment was ‘adequate atonement’, although he was careful to burn down the village before leaving the next morning.

To Puang and To Kulau, the government *luluais*, had seen the caps and sticks belonging to luluais in Tolai communities with whom they traded, and they asked Kommajer for the same badges of office. Soon afterwards To Kulau, complete with the government’s cap and stick, visited To Kabar and concluded peace with him. No records remain of what was said on that occasion but it is tempting to speculate that To Kulau represented himself as a powerful man who could call on his allies in the government at Kokopo and would not tolerate any more attacks on his people.

Kommajer was typical of the German district officer in New Guinea in depending entirely for information on people who were immediately affected by his decisions, and in siding with one group of people against another who had no opportunity to present their side of the case before being confronted by armed police. In this incident the Lamassa and Lambom people, some of whom may have killed labourers, appear to have been eager to damn To Kabar in the eyes of the Germans once the cue was given; equally, they were not sure what to tell the district officer until he made his
The Lambom islanders assumed he had come to punish them and must have been relieved at their unexpected good fortune when he said he was there 'to help them against their enemy To Kabar (Firth 1983:75-6).

The actions of Tokulau as he is remembered on Lambom in 1998 show a similar political spirit as that ascribed to Maranganu. It may be speculation to imply that he manipulated Kornmajer; Firth points to Kornmajer's complicity in reaching a consensus with the natives about what was going on as well as what to do about it. At the very least we can recognize Tokulau's capability to adapt quickly to a novel situation and take advantage of an opportunity and turn it to his advantage. Tokulau is remembered as one of the original big men on Lambom, who founded Lilina hamlet, south of the main village. He was a member of Maranganu's clan Koroe, and he founded a triun (men's cult exclusive area), meaning that whereas Maranganu did not get access to a tubuan, Tokulau most certainly did. While we were digging a grave during 1998, old bones were discovered and all the men present joked that we had disturbed Tokulau. Tokulau's political acumen may not necessarily have been home-grown as there is evidence that he may have left Lak to work on a plantation outside New Ireland. Lambom was visited by the colony's Acting Governor Emil Krauss in 1906. Krauss found that "almost all the men had already worked for whites in Samoa, New Britain, and Kaiser Wilhelmsland" (Firth 1983:86). In 1905 alone, "464 southern New Irelanders signed on to work in the Bismarck Archipelago and Samoa" (Firth 1983:86). This is in contrast to the situation on Tanga where Foster (1995:40) reports that big men resorted to murder in order to protect their power base of young men. The Lambom community seemingly embraced the opportunity to gain access to experience and objects from beyond the horizon of their immediate locale.

To briefly summarize the Lambom community's experience of colonialism as presented by the New France and German ventures I would like to point out the importance of relations with the various colonial officials with whom they came into contact, and in particular the effect that managing this contact had in the careers of specific Lak leaders of the time. Maranganu and Tokulau both showed political acumen and resilience in adapting to whatever situation arose and quickly understanding how they could best respond according to their own agendas. Throughout the rest of this thesis I will show that contemporary Lambom island leaders display a similar approach; by attempting to
solve the riddles of European intentions and motivations, they adapt strategies and try to
turn novel situations into opportunities to advance their own goals and leadership
aspirations.

The German colonial period ended with the capture of New Guinea by Australian forces
during the First World War. The new colonial masters:

...did little more than continue the policies of Germany in the area. Resettlement along the coast, imposition of taxes, encouragement of copra plantings, corvee labor for road work, and paternalistic lessons in hygiene...were the major objects of the successive administrations right up to the introduction of local government councils in the late 1960’s, the prelude to independence (Albert 1987:36-7).

However there was a period of intensive interaction with forces external to the region
during the Second World War, and these events have left an impression in the memory of
current Lambom residents and on their place. The period of Japanese occupation is
remembered as a particular epoch in Lambom people’s view of their past.

**Japanese Occupation**

The Japanese armed forces occupied the entire island of New Ireland during World War Two. At the southern end of the island the Japanese established an ammunition depot at Cape St George and set up a base on Lambom Island in April of 1942. Joseph Laiman recalls the initial meeting with the Japanese on the beach near the centre of the village. According to Joseph an officer stepped forward, bent over and reached his finger into the stand and said in pidgin “dispela em i Australia/this is Australia”, showing the few grains of sand that had adhered to his finger to those assembled. He then reached down again, this time cupping both of his hands full of sand and added “Dispela em i Sapan/this is Japan”. His point was well taken on Lambom. The Japanese forces represented the largest number of foreigners on the Island within the memory of anyone on the island at the time.

An Australian Coast Watcher was in the hills on the mainland of New Ireland soon after
the Japanese arrived. He complained of the local population’s cooperation with the
Japanese after narrowly escaping capture attempting to retrieve a radio that was dropped
so he could carry out reconnaissance for the Allies. His impressions were recorded in a letter he sent to his commander:

Dear Eric,

First, many apologies for not being able to carry on at Labom [sic]. We are pretty sure they didn’t pick up the radio, but they brought two warships and two merchants into the passage—apparently chased out of Rabaul by bombings, and to put up an O.P.—(50 men at first), and a bloody coon put us away and led them to our hidden possie on the ridge; and in spite of a guard (three parties came). They got to within twenty feet of men and I had to break through the side of the hut and dive down the mountain...we lost everything and had to go all night to Lamassa and then up the coast begging kaikai along the way. (Feldt 1967:66)

This Coast watcher, named Kyle, was the district officer for Namatanai as war broke out, and his partner Benham was the patrol officer for the same region. The letter was their last communication and they were assumed to have been captured by the Japanese soon after this time.

For the people of Lambom occupation is remembered as a time of hardship, as garden work was delegated to the community in order to supply not only their needs but those of the Japanese forces. However, the relationship with the Japanese forces is not recalled as being overtly hostile, as was often the case elsewhere in New Guinea (Saito and Kawasaki 1993). Several men alive in 1996 recalled serving as carriers and servants to the occupiers. They also remember moving the women and younger children to bush houses up in the hills on the mainland as a precaution. At the same time, many men cherish memories of friendships with the Japanese, though there was harsh discipline meted out to anyone who was bikhet/wilful toward their new masters. Three men were decapitated by the sword of a Japanese officer on the shores of Kabitoros harbour. Joseph says these men were from the Sepik and northern New Ireland. “Ol Sapan ol i no save pilai wantaim ol bikhet mangi. Ol i katim nek tasol/The Japanese did not play around with recalcitrants. They just cut their necks” he said. The locals tended to be treated better as long as they followed orders.

Daniel Bamsai was called Goro by one of the Japanese officers and maintains that name to the present. He remembers being taught to count to ten in Japanese and learning the words to songs the soldiers sang. One song was a nostalgic tale about the soldiers
leaving Japan on troop ships. Goro was told that the words related the feelings of the soldiers as the ship left dock, wondering when they would see Japan and their loved ones again. The next verse reversed the perspective, and voiced the same question from those who were left behind, wondering when they would see the soldiers again. Goro’s eyes would well with tears when he sang me the song, and he said the soldiers would often cry around the cook fire in the evenings. The other song he sang was a humorous tune that one man had composed about constantly being ordered back and forth between Lambom and Cape St George by the Japanese commander.

A man named Gan (Gun) became particularly attached to the officer he served, and earned his name since he often carried the man’s weapon. He told me how he cried when the officer committed suicide as the war came to a close. Gan remains impressed by the officer’s lack of fear of death, as he recalls being terrified when the island was strafed or bombed during the war.

In general the Lambom community accepted Japanese rule. Joseph relates that his uncle, the clan big man Lipten was given the task of carving ornate boxes that would be used to transport the ashes of cremated soldiers to their base in Namatanai. His name subsequently became Sapan, the local pronunciation of Japan. He relates the tale of a Japanese pilot who was incinerated when his plane was shot down over the passage and crashed into the mainland. His ashes were gathered from the wreckage and a box carrying his ashes was sent to Namatanai. Later his foot was found still in the boot when the wreckage was being scavenged. It was subsequently buried on a hill above the path between the hamlet of Lilina and the main village camp. His ghost is said to have haunted this stretch of road ever since. The pilot’s presence is manifested through the sound of his foot hopping noisily along the crushed coral pathway on particularly dark nights as people hurry between the camp and hamlet.

The fortunes of war eventually shifted and the Japanese became aware that they were soon to be defeated. People remember numerous battles and the huge explosions out to sea during the battle of Cape St George, when the Americans sank several troop ships trying to ferry soldiers fleeing Buka to Rabaul. Goro recalls a dogfight over the passage where an American fighter shot down two Japanese planes then flew low, tipped his wings, and waved at the party of locals on the beach. As Joseph relates, one officer
sensing the end said "Amerika nambawan, Sapan nambaten! America is tops, Japan is inferior".

The Japanese left their mark on the landscape in other ways besides the ghostly boot. They set up a lookout in a tall kwila tree on Lambom’s hilly interior that was subsequently named Longwas/Lookout. When an American ship entered the passage at the end of the war, the locals asked whether they could have the food store that the Japanese had stockpiled near Lavonai cove. The officers forbade them to eat the Japanese supplies and instead provided US Army rations for the community during their brief stay. The Lambom community respected this directive and the Japanese cargo eventually rotted into nothingness, earning for the site the name Kago Igoh (Lak: literally, Cargo stinks).

But what the Japanese occupation mainly represented was the largest influx of foreigners in the region for the most extended period of time in the living memory of those in the community today. It was the last intensive period of contact with the wider world until the arrival of industrial logging and UN sponsored conservationists in the 1990s. Like the earlier De Rays colony, this intense contact with the Japanese occupying garrison on Lambom came unexpectedly to the region and then was gone. The Lambom area’s usual situation of isolation from the world was again interrupted by a brief punctuation in their more common fleeting contacts with those from beyond the horizon.

At this point I leave off my examination of the history of west coast Lak engagements with the world beyond their horizon. In general the period of Australian stewardship subsequent to the Second World War was one of government through infrequent patrol expeditions until independence in 1975. The more salient of events that occurred within the period of Australian colonial presence will be discussed in several of my following chapters were appropriate.

I now turn to a brief discussion of how the people of Lambom have inscribed parts of the history described above onto their immediate landscape. Here too, we will see the literal markings of an engaged community memorialized in the local consciousness.

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16 This event is also reported in Albert’s thesis (1987:54).
Place names: mapping terrain with meaning

Rather than being one definite sort of thing—for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social—a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only are, they happen. (Casey 1996: 27)

The community of Lambom Island today has emerged from the historical experiences described in this chapter as the largest village in Lak, and indeed, in the entire southern part of New Ireland province. Much of this history is written on the landscape in place names, and in other ways such as through the use of place names in various tales and myths. The process of using the terrain to map history and meaning into the physical world of the present has been noted for other parts of New Guinea, as well as elsewhere (Jørgensen 2001; Basso 1984). As a preliminary introduction to how this process has worked on Lambom, and to show how some of the historical experiences outlined above are marked onto place, the table below gives examples of the meaning of some place names on Lambom, reflecting stories drawing from mythical origins, and more recent, remembered experiences from the shared past.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malum pul</td>
<td>Dog stream</td>
<td>Mythic time: site where after slaying man-eating pig, original brother created stream for watering dogs that came to his rescue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basi buria</td>
<td>Tossed firewood</td>
<td>After the death of the island’s first big man, wood for his mortuary kasom appeared here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kago igoh</td>
<td>Supplies rot</td>
<td>Japanese food supplies left to rot after war on allies orders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabasai madar</td>
<td>Buried masters</td>
<td>Where the dead of New France colony were buried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolok</td>
<td>name of a ship</td>
<td>Place where sailing vessel destroyed in attack by ancestors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solah</td>
<td>Solar</td>
<td>Garden site cleared in anticipation of promised but undelivered solar panel array during 1980s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pos</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Area that once provided good timber for house posts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pidik</td>
<td>cult secret</td>
<td>Abandoned triun, site of men’s cult rituals related to tabuan. Place where Duperrey encountered native party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sako</td>
<td>Proper name</td>
<td>Stream named after Samoan trader who came for beche le mer after WWII.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>A country in Central America</td>
<td>A garden site named during the US incursion to oust Manuel Noriega.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pal kapu beche le mer house</td>
<td></td>
<td>Site of dryer oven used to prepare beche le mer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longwas</td>
<td>pidgin: lookout</td>
<td>Garden named after tall tree used by the Japanese during WWII as a watchtower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngas Pirim</td>
<td>Road descends</td>
<td>A path in the island’s central spine that descends to the southern sheltered bay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanaram</td>
<td>Echoing sound</td>
<td>Name given to hamlet where grinding millstone gears from New France colony were brought to the island. When struck it has a reverberating ring.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Place, names and their significance
Here it is evident how Lambom people’s cultural practice inscribes the landscape with meaning, producing and reproducing their cultural identity by linking places with past events. In the next four chapters I will look at the inverse of this process, whereby the storied landscape influences their comprehension of current events, informs their understanding of their place in a wider world, and gives meaning to their daily existence in the modern world. Now I turn to some brief concluding remarks in order to situate this history into a regional context as well as engage wider issues of history for the region.

Comparative History and Historiography of the Region

When situating the Lak experience within the context of neighbouring peoples several immediate differences become apparent. The most puzzling is the lack of stories regarding the origin of Christianity on the island. The other distinctive feature that needs to be addressed is the later and much more gradual entry into the experience of a metropole and urbanization than was the case amongst the Tolai on New Britain, with whom the Lak are in frequent contact on their trips there as we shall see in Chapter Seven.

The people on Lambom, though predominantly within the United Church sphere of influence, have few tales about the coming of the *lotu* to their island. Though George Brown did visit Likliki in the aftermath of the Lavinia affair, there was no community on Lambom at the time. Friederici’s informant told him there was only a “lookout”, the island having been abandoned in fear of retaliation for the attack on the Lavinia. Brown again visited the region in the wake of the collapse of the Marquis de Ray colony, so the community may have been distracted by the events surrounding those boom times and their eventual dissipation.

This failure to note the coming of Christianity is unique in that several nearby peoples have allowed George Brown, in a classic structure of the conjuncture fashion, to become a part of their histories. Errington and Gewertz (1995:77) outline how the local people believe George Brown brought the light to the people of Karavar and the Duke of York islands, and separated their ancestors from a prior wildly, accultural era to an ordered time of *kastom* and *lotu*. In fact Brown emerges as the originator of most of what could be termed social structure, therefore initiating both traditional *kastom* and the innovation of Christianity, for the people of Karavar and the Duke of York islands in general. Bolyanatz has a similar tale, identifying the man who first accepted Brown for the Lak
people’s northern neighbours, the Sursurunga. Some Lak people did note that they were aware of a coconut palm that Brown had planted at Mioko in the Duke of Yorks, and that their ancestors had seen it when it first sprouted. Recent visits show it to be old and hoary according to those who believe this. Several elders however said they had no knowledge of this. Several different tales are told of people going to Kalil on the West coast of New Ireland opposite the Duke of Yorks and then bringing the Methodist Church to Lambom.

The consequences of the Lavinia incident may have led to the community being wary about contact with Europeans for a time; and this may well explain the Lak ‘missing out’ on a chance to fit Brown in a tangible way into the local scene, as other notable events were mapped onto the landscape as described above. Likewise there was a lot going on, and of consequence for the community, with the brief appearance of a community of Europeans in their midst during the de Ray era. One more small group of Europeans coming to see the straggling remnant of the soon to be aborted colony of New France could easily have been subsumed within the narrative of those times as merely tangential to the larger issue of the what the colony meant to the people of Lambom of that time. But given the importance of Brown to the entire region today, and the fact that a holiday exists in his honour, the gap in local recollections is notable. There have been no invented traditions to adopt Brown into the local corpus of tales of the past. This contrasts what Albert reports with the elaboration of the Swilik tale and its ruminations on the origin of Europeans. I have no definitive explanation for this disparity, but can only point it out as a puzzle, and offer the conjectures above as to why the Lak may have failed to incorporate Brown into their tales. Certainly the Marquis de Ray colony left marks on the region in various place names, as did the earlier actions surrounding the capture of the Lavinia. Thus circumstances may have led to a five year gap in the history of Lambom, during which events may have occurred that subsequently became of great importance to several of their neighbours at the time, and eventually to the Lak today.

The failure of the New France venture contrasts with the success of the eventual settlement endeavour amongst the Tolai people of New Britain. As noted the current Lak community bemoan the fact that their ancestors drove away the French through sorcery. They do not reckon with the fact that the Tolai lost approximately 40% of their land, alienated to white plantation owners and the Methodist and Catholic churches in a very short span of time (Neumann 1992:62), or ever consider that their own position may have been preferable in light of the violence Tolai encountered during this era as plantations, missions, then towns emerged in their midst. And though Neumann titles his ‘construction’ of the Tolai past, Not the Way It Really Was, Lak complaints about what might have been seem to ignore the violence and displacements that most certainly
did occur during this era. Yet the people of Lambom today see their current marginality in relation to the Tolai on fundamentally economic terms: as owing to the rise of first Rabaul, then Kokopo as boom towns that serve as metropole to the Lak hinterland. I will discuss the current situation at some length when discussing the present relations of cash cropping and marketing and the general Lambom experience of those towns below in Chapter Seven. Suffice it to say at this point that what is currently perceived as a near miss with regard to subsequent urban opportunities, adds to the Lak’s puzzlement as to how they could have come so close, but ultimately failed to achieve an engagement with the wider world on terms more to their liking, --- the more so, given their view of themselves as eminently capable and worthy people.

Having begun this chapter on Lak history by considering Wagner’s view that history is locally construed as structure reproduced through ritual, I will now briefly conclude with some words regarding historiography for the Lambom region in light of the work of Neumann.

In his work on the Tolai Neumann challenges us to consider the relative nature of the past. His title encapsulates his general argument. He concludes with the following coda:

What have I learned so far about the constructing the Tolai past? My most important initial misapprehension was that there would be one Tolai tradition that contradicts the colonial European history. But Tolai histories differ depending on who tells them, when, and where. They reflect the biographical past of the narrator, his or her identity (as someone belonging to a certain vunatarai [matriclan] or a particular village, or living in the diaspora), and gender. In histories claims are established or refuted. Knowledge about the past can be a basis for power. The past can be subject to debates, and those debates are in the last instance often about the position of social groups in society. Tolai create their past not only by writing or telling histories but also in dramatizations of events, occasionally in lyrics, and in rituals, especially those connected with death. Those recreations of the past serve ends in the present; they guarantee continuity and stability. They can be interpreted in terms of the social context of those performing them. But in many cases they are also appropriations of the past and juxtapositions of the dysfunctional “what was” with the realities of what is. (1992:260-1; italics in original, block insert is mine)
Fair enough. As I noted earlier in this chapter, Lambom tales of the past, what they construe as their history, are likewise contextually situated and embedded in power relations. And likewise, I do not assert that this chapter in any way describes the way it really was. But I do believe that events occurred, and that both Westerners and Lak have noted these in their own fashions and for their own reasons. In this respect I agree with historian Richard Evans’ critique of extreme relativistic approaches to past events which disavow the possibility of ever getting at the way it was. Evans argues, and I agree, that, on the contrary, the past “really happened, and we really can, if we are very scrupulous and careful and self-critical...reach some tenable conclusions about what it all meant” (1999:290).

This chapter chronicles the engagement of Lak people and external agents by tacking back and forth between their stories and the written records which the events described here have engendered. I believe that by putting the two together we can come to a better understanding of how both ways of relating the past have come into being, and what the juxtaposition of differing histories might reveal. Recent work regarding first contact, in particular the multi-authored Like People You See in a Dream (1991), and Gammage’s excellent (1998) The Sky Travellers, bear this out. What emerges is a fuller understanding of the working conceptions and misconceptions at play in the intercultural contacts that occurred in the past; and an appreciation of these earlier opposed interpretations may allow us to ponder such mutual misunderstandings as they continue in more recent times. Puzzles of the past for the people of Lambom are often

17 However one would assume that such a relativistic approach would be sensitive to just these same conditions being at play in the work of earlier ethnographers of the region. But Neumann finds the time to take to task both Errington and Sack with regards to their description of the acultural time of darkness ascribed both amongst the Duke of York people and the Tolai to their pre-missionized ancestors. He suggests that the ethnographers got it wrong, rather than considering that the locals may have been situating the accounts they gave their ethnographers within the contexts of those earlier tellings. In this case Neumann seems to suggest that only Not the Way it Really Was tells it like it really was --- a stance which is inconsistent with the general argument he makes in rest of the book. Errington makes this point in a footnote to a collection of papers he co-authored with Gewertz (1995:105). A further departure from his central premise sees Neumann actually practice what he professes to have no interest in doing: testing Tolai tales for support amongst the historical works of Westerners. In ruminating upon a particular tale related to Queen Emma he cites Biskup’s naming of the Plantation owner Mouton’s Tolai wife as Yekanavo, sounding similar to his story’s laKanavo (Biskup 1974:28n6; Neumann 1992:280n4).
related to the current puzzle they face in dealing with aspects of modernity, such as global capitalism, Christianity, nation state political economy and governance, and the current manifestation of what they consider customary and traditional. It is to the more recent times --- this study's ethnographic present ---which I now turn to in the next quartet of chapters.
Spheres of action: a societal Taxonomy of the domains of Modernity

I have gone into some depth in the previous chapter outlining the history of engagement between Lambom and the wider world. History informs Lak people’s current approaches to dealing with external forces. In turning to a discussion of contemporary Lak culture it is important to acknowledge the important role that external forces play on Lambom today. Here I briefly want to signpost how my transition from history to the contemporary scene will move the focus of this thesis toward the issue of how modernity is envisioned, constructed, and acted upon on Lambom.

A discourse of modernity has emerged in the social sciences and been articulated for the particulars of out-of-the-way places within recent anthropology. This has not gone without the usual sort of contestation whenever universal theoretical insights are applied to the fundamental specificity of a world of unique cultural identities that is the focus of the anthropological endeavour. And while anthropologists have had much to say about the problem of assuming that modernity develops in cross-cultural uniform ways, consensus on the issue remains hard to predict. I hope to avoid the internecine battle between lumpers and splitters on this issues. What we have come to accept is that the forces of a modern world system are of crucial importance to the people and places we study; and this acceptance is due in no small part to the things that these people say, as well as the actions they carry out. Like the blind men with the elephant, depending on where one is standing something can be sensed very differently indeed. Not to mention that this creature appears in different guises as a result of the travels it takes around the world. As Knauft has noted:

Given the extent of contemporary changes, it would be an empirical as well as a theoretical blunder to expect hundreds of Melanesian cultural orientations to have a singular relationship to current developments, much less than expect them to converge toward a similar result. (Knauft 2002:247).

And there is little doubt that the way the global forces of capitalism and modern political economy are constituted and play out are situational and grounded in particular contexts. As well what comes to various places under the guise of modernity is distinct and historically specific. If localities are unique when engaging external forces, these forces are different in form and content, as are the agents of their transmission in various contexts.

Contemporary life on Lambom is ordered in a manner that by necessity must deal with the forces inherent to world capitalist influences through the exigencies of being part of the modern nation state of Papua New Guinea. The Lak people have organized their local view structurally into a discrete set of conceptual spheres as a result of the long
historical process of contact with outsiders as well as the current imperatives of the modern world in which they live. My approach in the following set of chapters is to unpack this taxonomy as a source of insight into the Lambom perception of the modern world.

For Lambom I argue that the local concepts best suited to unpacking modernity are the organizing domains involved with the Tok Pisin terms *kastom, bisnis, lotu* and *gavman*. These terms are part of a taxonomy of social life that has emerged in many places in PNG as well as Melanesia in general (Foster 1995:25-6). While Foster focuses on the opposition of *kastom* and *bisnis* as a contrastive framework that gives meaning to both categories, I aim to use all four categories present on Lambom as a local discourse for ordering modernity. Talk of *kastom* has a long and chequered history within Pacific anthropology and I do not wish to revisit the rancour of this debate. Rather I hope to focus on the entire suite of this taxonomy instead of focusing on the uses one particular sphere, or the way it is opposed to another such sphere, in discussions of authenticity in cultural reproduction. So I will return to one of the earliest discussions of involving *kastom* as evidenced in the work of Ton Otto. As he stated in one of the seminal papers on *kastom*, “I am not concerned with national political ideologies but with the everyday practices and representations in a Papua New Guinea village” (Otto 1992:264). I want to pay equal attention to each of these conceptual spheres as a means to unpack how local people address, conceive, and act with regards to modernity.

If modernity takes different forms and is understood in alternative ways depending upon the particulars of history and culture of specific locales, it also appears different from a particular locale depending upon which framework is used there to perceive it. So where Lambom exhibits its own distinct way of understanding modernity, it also comprehends modernity in a different light according to whether it is experienced through the domains of *kastom, bisnis, lotu, or gavman*.

Otto outlines the nature of each of these domains for the people he worked with on Manus. *Kastom* “includes traditional leadership practices, ceremonial exchanges, traditional rights of land and sea, agricultural and fishing practices, belief about illness and the power of spirits, and finally traditional ways of solving conflicts” (1992:271). With regards to *gavman*, a literal translation as government is insufficient as the meaning of the term “not only indicates all levels of government including its representatives, but it may also refer to the judiciary, to village court officials, to
hospitals and aid-posts, to government schools...” as well as various development projects (271). *Lotu* encompasses “all the institutions attached to the church, such as women and youth groups, religious instruction in school or elsewhere, missionary activities and the spiritual care of the sick” (271). He notes that though *lotu* is accepted as something like *gavman*, having been introduced by white people, they “perceive more continuity between *lotu* and their own culture” (271). For Manus, Otto is unable to elucidate a separate category of *bisnis*, thus he draws upon Foster’s definition as “practical conduct exclusive of wage-labor (*wokmani*) that generates a cash income” (cited in Otto 1992:272).

Otto offers the following caveat with regards to thinking about culture as being divided into separate domains of society. The division of society into these spheres:

...is a conceptual construction and it exists only so far as it is realised in the practice and discourse of a group of people. It seems important, however, to maintain a distinction between meaning and enactment, between institution and practice. In discourse and in practice people are consciously and unconsciously guided by the idioms and institutions of their culture, but in the process they may rearrange and revalue those institutional meanings. (Otto 1992:272)

As well, Otto stresses that “Power and interest appear to be crucial factors in the process of redefinition and revaluation of existing or imported concepts” (1992:264). Therefore the importance of practice is crucial in apprehending the motivations of the agents involved. Otto focuses on leadership within Baluan society and in this case the contexts of *kastom*, *gavman*, and *lotu*, and the way they overlap within the machinations of one particular set of brothers.

In Lambom this sort of contestation occurs across the full spectrum of this taxonomy, with the added sphere of *bisnis* also being pertinent to the Lak case. So I present the following quartet of chapters as an ethnographically grounded examination both of how agents attempt to further their interests and of how they engage the forces of a modern capitalist, nation state based political economy. I will return to a theoretical discussion of the various approaches to modernity, which I began in my introduction, in my conclusion; for now my aim is to show the ideas and practices that are current on Lambom in acting and ordering the world in which their everyday life is situated. The overlap of these competing conceptual frames will be readily apparent as the chapters in this section unfold. Yet central to each the role of interested agents, leadership, and everyday life and practice will be highlighted. And in each case I believe it will become apparent, that much like their historical experiences with external forces, Lambom people deal with modernity as an opportunity to transform and expand upon their world.
Individuals strategize and adapt their behaviour in order to achieve their own ends, whether these be commonplace or innovative. Things may not always be readily apparent, but puzzles present the opportunity to extend standard ways of perceiving the world, and offer unexpected solutions to the astute or fortunate.
Chapter Two

**BISNIS AND BLAK MAKET: THE LOCAL CASH ECONOMY**

My aim in this chapter is to outline the local economic practices that support the community of Lambom Island. Gardening, cash-cropping, storekeeping, marketing, and consumption practices are all examined in relation to the flow of cash in the lives of Islanders. Of importance within local discourses regarding money, as well as traditional items of value, is a morality of participation within this flow. Context and identity are crucial in positioning one's self appropriately in relation to it. The concept of *Bisnis* emerges here as context, a set of defined practices; *Bisnis* man is an identity claim that operates within this context. I will describe the activities of trade-stores on Lambom in order to illustrate what these terms actually mean in lived experience on the island.

To start I will describe the lifecycle for Lak people as it existed on Lambom in the late 1990s. I present a brief outline of what sort of work is carried out by gender and age grade. This should serve to introduce and contextualize the work done to produce food and earn cash within daily practice. Next, I will address the production of food through gardening, gathering, and fishing practices. The aim is to show what people actually do and what they feel about this.

A typical family meal will be described. The consumption of local foods will be discussed in comparison to store-bought goods such as rice, tinned meats and fish, biscuits, tea and sugar. Following from this, an outline of local cash cropping of copra, *kampang*, *buai*, and *beche le mer* will be discussed and contrasted with garden work. These forms of cash-earning practices will be contextualized within the wider cash economy of timber royalty payments and wages, and church tithing to get a view of the scope of the cash economy on Lambom. Next I will discuss the role of trade stores and the issues that arise from their operation at the intersection between the cash economy and a social order based on gift exchange. I will end this chapter with a brief discussion
of the implications of wage labour within the local economy of Lambom and how this relates to more traditional concepts of work and status.

**Childhood**

On Lambom children spend the first six or seven years of their lives with their parents, particularly with their mothers. Little boys run naked until their third or fourth year until they feel *sem*/shame or begin to covet the clothing worn by their older siblings. Baby girls are dressed in small *meri* blouses or *laplaps*. For boys the one exception to their usual nakedness is church attendance, where kids are dressed smartly by their parents as all people do. For the first couple of years the child is carried most places and has its cries immediately attended to by its mother or matrikin. Babies are nursed until weaned between their first and second year. The weaning process is abrupt and young children quickly learn to get up and get what they want for themselves.

Entry into school marks the first major transition in a child’s life. Most children enter grade one in their seventh or eighth year. During the colonial era and the early years of PNG’s independence children were admitted after reaching a certain height or when they could reach an arm around to touch the opposite shoulder blade. Local people continued using such measurements until recently when age became the accepted criterion. Today some children are held back from entering school by their parents if they are particularly small so as not to be disadvantaged in their age set. Community schooling extends from grade one to grade six. The school takes an incoming class every other year. Subsequent school years see three classes running at a time: grades one, three and five; then grades two, four and six. In school boys and girls sit in rows but share desks only with others of their own gender. When playtime comes boys play sports with their grade mates, picking teams according to friendship and changing teams often. When the girls play sports they invariably divide themselves up into two teams based on moiety membership, *Koroe* and *Bongian* in local terms but often referred to in Tok Pisin as *Bikpisin* or *Smolpisin* (eagle or hawk). School attendance also determines church attendance, with schoolchildren having a separate shorter service next to the church in the community centre, then being split up by grade for bible school while the
adult ceremony continues. Finishing primary school marks the transition into the next phase of life, youth.

**Youth**

The status defined by the term youth begins with completion of primary school and continues until marriage, though certain committed bachelors and spinsters eventually get transferred to another category. As only a handful of students qualify for further education in town, my discussion of youth here refers to the majority of children who remain on the island. All primary school leavers begin to attend the main church service on Sunday mornings and enter into the church group for youths. Both young men and women pay special attention to having nice clean clothes for Sunday church going. The boys shave and wash at the men’s house enclosure then walk en masse to church on the third bell. The young women get dressed up at their parents’ homes and make their way to services between the first and second bell, walking in family groups or calling on their friends on the way to church. The first several rows on both the men’s and women’s side of the aisle are reserved for the youth of the congregation.

For young men the transition to youth also involves a change of residence from their parents’ home to one of the community’s *rumai dalwan* (Lak: bachelor houses). Again, especially small boys are held back by their parents for fear of the roughness of the older young men. The boys’ labour is now split between their families and the demands of their bachelor house. Young boys usually end up running errands for the older bachelors, in particular climbing palms for *kulau*/*green* coconuts for drinking, or *buai*/*betel* nut for chewing. There is no pattern to choice of *rumai dalwan* affiliation beyond friendship, it cuts across moiety and clan affiliation, and brothers often live in different houses. The young men spend their days taking care of their house, gathering firewood and coconuts, fishing or going into the bush for various purposes. Though they sometimes share the fish or game they catch with visitors, mostly the bachelor house becomes the unit of consumption for much of what the young men find. Daily, at sunrise and sunset, the bachelors find their way to the village to get their main meals from their mothers or the mothers of their close friends.
Girls go to work with clan sisters, mothers and maternal aunts in the garden or stay at home to bake *gem*/cassava bread and look after young children. Canoe loads of young clan sisters set out after morning tea to the gardens their families maintain to plant, tend, or harvest cassava, sweet potato, yams, bananas, pawpaw, taro, and greens that are grown on Lambom. Young women also travel to the mainland to wash clothes, feed pigs, and collect fresh water for drinking from streams, and washing on the island. Though there are separate areas at the larger streams at Lavonai Cove for men and women to wash at, other streams are segregated on the basis of who got there first.

Both genders form the basis of labour groups that can be hired by individuals or clans for the various jobs concerned with cutting copra: clearing bush, gathering *rai*/mature coconuts, cutting copra, cooking copra, and sacking it. The church youth group provides workers of both genders, while the bachelor houses are also available for hire. As well, some young women have membership in the church’s women’s fellowship, and this group also is available for hire as labour in the copra trade.

**Family**

The final and most common phase in the lifecycle of work on Lambom is that carried out by married folks. Married couples form an enduring team for production and the most common unit of consumption of the fruits of garden toil. Young married couples are amongst the busiest gardeners on the island. In order to establish a wide enough basis for subsistence needs most newlyweds try to get two or three gardens planted and producing. The idea is that in order to feed them throughout the year rotation of plots within a garden and across more than one is usually required. It is also of note that newlyweds are often required to wait before they can set up house, as village space for homes and labour for construction are not always readily available. Thus trips to the garden are often a young couple’s most likely way to gain privacy. Older couples often travel to gardens to enjoy privacy as well. Families often see trips to more distant gardens on the backside of the island, the mainland, or around the point as combination work details and picnics. Even bachelors will offer to go on garden forays to the mainland in order to fish or hunt pig then camp out with their families. But the women of a family make the typical garden trip. Usually a mother and her daughters will form
the core of any workgroup. The father and young males carry out the initial clearing of a garden, the building of fences, and the firing of brush to add to the garden’s fertility. They also may be called in at any time if in addition it is decided that a tree needs cutting.

Saturdays are busy garden days as families often go en masse in order to get enough food for the day and the following Sunday when most sorts of garden work are banned for the Sabbath. Extra kulau and buai and daka are especially important as they serve as the basis for most forms of Sunday afternoon relaxation. Most families go to the garden for day-long outings two or three times a week, and women of a clan often plan to go to adjacent gardens during the week so several family units travel together. Newborns and younger babies are often left at home during day-long outings with their mothers to nurse them and younger clan relatives help out in clan-based form of day care. The women who are not out gardening attend to the other household tasks such as washing clothes and baking gem, the cassava bread that is a Lak staple. On most days, most women are off doing garden work, but the remaining ‘skeleton crew’ of women still form the basis of subsistence work that goes on in the village.

Production: Subsistence activities

The general means of providing sustenance on Lambom involves gardening, gathering shells from the reef, and fishing. Hunting is more often then not considered a recreational activity and was mainly practiced by bachelors with the rare feral pig and marsupial captured marginal to the diets of most of the Lambom community. Pig husbandry was not practiced as a subsistence activity as pigs were almost exclusively raised in order to meet the requirements of kastom and in particular the demands of mortuary feasting. Thus aspects of pig husbandry will be addressed in the following chapter on kastom.
In order to give a full picture of the subsistence practices on Lambom I will begin by offering a general picture of the scope of garden work as evidenced through census data gathered in late 1996 and early 1997. With this information as context I will describe a typical garden on Lambom as well as the stages of work that are carried out through a garden’s productive life.

Most families maintain more than one garden at any given time. According to the results of my initial village census a majority, approaching two thirds of all households, tend either two or three gardens at a time (see table). Six of the households that claimed only one garden at the time of the census were in the process of retiring one garden and clearing another. The other two cases involved elderly women residing in houses by themselves. The three households that had more than three gardens were particularly large, ranging between six and ten people per home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF GARDENS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLDS [%]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 2: Gardens per household.

A family’s gardens are located on land belonging to the husband and wife’s respective clans. Most families maintain gardens at any given time on land they are entitled to work through both the husband’s and wife’s lines of matrilineal descent. Additionally, a couple can access the produce of trees, particularly coconuts and betel nut that were planted by their fathers for their use. Though the sites where these trees are planted may not be accessible as garden sites because they belong to the father’s clan, copra cutting and kulau and buai gathering are considered rights that a father can pass on to his children with regards to these particular designated stands of palms (see Foster 1995 for a similar practice among matrilineal people on Tanga Island).

In general households tend to share their garden produce, once it is cooked, with matrilineal kin. This is especially so with the staple cassava bread gem (Lak). This
cassava bread is always made in large batches of twenty or thirty banana leaf covered packets; each packet is enough for a meal for an individual. The resulting intentionally-produced surplus of gem packets is then distributed along clan lines, and to in-laws. Thus different households, usually linked by matriline, involved in these informal exchange networks make plans during the week in order to take turns cooking gem. The only time that local food is sold instead of shared, is during church fundraising markets, no more than once a month or so. However the food sold during these markets is always cooked and considered spesel/special. This means that it is usually a form of food not ordinarily cooked on Lambom; for example special gem can be bought with bits of fish or banana baked into it. Portions of rice wrapped and bound in a banana leaf are often ‘greased’ with greens and bits of tin meat or tin fish.

**Fishing**

Fishing is carried out by almost everyone except married women on Lambom. Young boys and girls are often seen on the reef throwing out a hook and line using kru/coconut flower for bait. Bachelors tend to glas, using a snorkel and homemade spear guns. Older men usually fish by canoe when they feel the urge to catch the more sizable atun or malahur (Lak: tuna and mackerel), but often throw out a hook or net onto the reef while they recline in the pal enclosure. Dinghy owners will go trolling when fuel is available or when they have charter customers. Usually this takes place around the evening time with the best spots being the deep off the reefs at the north and south end of the island. Whenever gulls or other birds flock above shoals of fish if men are travelling in dinghies they immediately head for the spot and drop a few hooks over the side. Four or five quick runs through a school of tuna can land anywhere from ten to twenty nice sized fish. The lines are spooled on hand reels and the hooks are baited with ‘lures’ made of shredded plastic bags or condoms. The power of the pull on the line when a fish strikes is often quite violent, so it is not uncommon to see the lacerations caused by nylon line burns across the palms of devoted trollers. The type of fishing most carried out by married men is bottom fishing using a line and hook and sinker and crab as bait from a canoe off the edge of the reef. The most common form of sinker used is traditional. A small stone is wrapped in a leaf then tied with a length of grass into a
loose knot. Once the sinker is felt to hit bottom a light tug releases the leaf wrapper and its stone and the baited hook is set loose to drift along the bottom with the current. This sort of fishing often takes place at dawn and late afternoon heading to dusk.

**Production: Cash cropping**

This section will outline the range of activities available on the local scene for productive activities to earn money. Though copra production is far and away the most common means of generating cash, other regular activities such as the production of *kampang*/powdered lime (for consumption with betel nut) will be discussed. Also, one-off irregular ventures such as the beche le mer trade will be examined. Business activities such as trade stores and *blak maket*/black market (informal marketing) trading will be discussed later in the chapter while the dinghy business will be addressed later in the thesis. The aim of this discussion is to present the options available to Lambomb islanders to produce commodities for sale, as well as give a sense of the work involved and the scope of the cash economy as it exists on the island.

![Figure 3: Sources of Cash Income.](image-url)
The graph in figure 3 shows the sources people reported on how they had earned cash in the previous six months according to a survey conducted in early 1997. Beche la mer is absent from the list as the opportunity to sell it on Lambom to visiting traders did not occur until the middle of 1998 (see below). I will now describe some of these cash earning practices. People were generally reluctant to discuss the amount of money they received from remittances and timber royalty payments. Most remittances came from people working in town. Wokmani/wages overwhelmingly came from earnings for wage-labour at the nearby logging camp at Metlik. Church officials and the resident preacher also received nominal wages. However I was able to access most people’s earnings from the public meetings that tallied church tithes collected quarterly. In the conclusion of this chapter I will outline these earnings and examine the apparent uneven distribution of cash amongst households.

Cutting Copra

The production of copra for sale is the most prevalent form of cash cropping activity on Lambom. For the Lak region data collected by the Copra Marketing Board of Papua New Guinea (CMB) tabulates sales worth K323,135.22 for 1996 and K357,877.87 for 1997. The CMB is a state governed buying cooperative that purchases copra from individual copra producers. A rough estimate of the copra income generated on Lambom would be twenty five per cent of the Lak region total. Approximate income from copra on Lambom would thus be just over K80,000 for 1996 and just under K90,000 for 1997. During this time copra prices had risen in kina, due almost entirely due to kina devaluation. Prices had fallen in the late 1980s but had rebounded during the 1990s (Smith 2002:138). Yet Lak copra production remained fairly consistent through this era.

Most people have rights to cut copra from the blocks of coconut palms belonging to their clan. A survey of coconut Lain (rows or stands), or plantations as people often referred these plots, reveals ownership on Lambom as well as on the mainland from just

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18 Lambom Island is home to twenty five per cent of the population of Lak. As Lambom has numerous stands of coconut, readier access to CMB in Rabaul, and a dinghy fleet to provide transport, twenty five per cent of the total Lak production is a conservative estimate.
south of Lamassa to the north, around the southern tip of the New Ireland as far as the
Metlik plantation. There are forty distinct groves of coconuts on Lambom Island, and
another ninety stands of coconut on the mainland. For each of these groves, colloquially
termed ‘plantations’ or lain kokonas (TOK PISIN: row of coconuts) ownership ascribed
to particular individuals and clans encompassing the local plantation economy. With the
entire Island community consisting of approximately sixty households, and people
having copra-cutting rights through the matriline, everyone has some access to
individually or family owned stands of trees, as well as clan ‘plantations’. Decisions
about when anyone can actually cut copra from clan ground are not straightforward.
Among all the people who have rights of access, the right to cut in a particular place
depends upon one’s position in a cutting queue as determined by the clan big man. As
well, many people have personal stands of coconut trees planted with approval on their
clan land or inherited from their fathers who planted such trees for their children.

Cutting copra follows a four-step process after a ‘fallow’ period when the area’s
cocoons are left ungathered. First the undergrowth within the area to be harvested is cut
back in order to expose the dry coconuts and allow them to be quickly located. Next
comes the gathering of the mature nuts into large piles. This process is termed basi
lamas in (Lak. lit. ‘throwing coconuts’), as the coconuts are tossed into intermediate
piles around the perimeter of the plot then finally thrown together in a large central pile.
These first two steps are usually carried out by a household, sometimes aided by close
kin, and each stage can take a few days of labour to complete. The different phases of
this work can be separated by weeks, but not much longer as coconut heaps have a way
of dwindling through unconnected and random acts of pilfering.

The actual cutting of copra requires a larger workforce than the household can usually
provide, so a work group is usually hired to accomplish this task in one day. The most
common groups hired are church-based women’s and youth groups, but particular
fundraising activities sometimes impel bachelor house groups or rugby teams to offer
their services as well. The standard fee for hiring a work group during my field stay was
twenty Kina. In addition to the money the group is paid, a meal is provided including
rice, fresh fish or tinned meat or fish, and kaukau. Most copra cuts generate between
five hundred and a thousand Kina when the dried copra is sold in Rabaul. For this fee
the group cuts the copra, bags it in large burlap sacks, and then transports the copra to
the mainland to a *haus paiaman*, one of the available drying ovens. There are twenty-four copra-drying ovens in the community, with set rates per sack dried. These drying sheds consist of sheets of corrugated tin shelving over metal pipes in which the fire is set. Most people depend on credit at this stage and favour patronizing a dryer bossed by a close family member. While the copra is being dried close attention is required as the copra is quite flammable and someone needs to be nearby to monitor the situation as well as feed the fire. During my stay a *haus paiaman* burnt to the ground when the minder went off to do something else after replenishing the fire.

Increasingly, hire groups now negotiate for a dinghy to be chartered to carry the sacks of cut copra over to the mainland due to complaints about the number of canoes diverted from other activities to carry out the transport. The usual reasoning behind this demand is that canoes used for this purpose thereby become unavailable for other household members’ garden work.

**Cooking Kampang**

Cooking *kampang* is an arduous job but doable by one person over several days. During my stay on Lambom only one clan’s members were producing *kampang* for market. Along the southeast shore of the island, south of the bachelor’s house, a line of coconuts belonging to Goro leader of the Koroe clan on Lambom fronted the rocky shore and reef that edged the island at this point. The large rocks of white coral that littered the shore on this stretch of beach were the only suitable source for powdered lime on the island. Unlike cutting copra, there did not seem to be a required wait between the gathering of stones, but some men did acknowledge that it was easier to find the stones required if a bit of time had passed since a previous harvest. The first task involved is the gathering of the stones from the shoreline and the reef. The stones are thrown a ways from the surf then gathered together to form a big pile. Once enough stones are piled into a heap the next step is to cut firewood. This is the most arduous part of the process as particularly hard wood is required since the lime must be cooked for several days and only a slow-burning, very hot fire is capable of rendering the stones into powder. The biggest problem here is finding a suitable tree to cut, and then expending significant effort to
chop it down with an axe. As the types of trees most appropriate for this work tend to grow up the slopes of the island, transporting the required firewood is also a significant task. Once all the required materials are at hand an oven is constructed with wood formed into a scaffold and the coral stone surrounded by it. Since the cooking process takes at least a few days, and allowing several more days after the burning is considered beneficial in the process of powder creation, it is often necessary to cover the oven with sheets of tin roofing, or pieces of tarpaulin. This is not always done prior to the cooking but almost always afterwards, and those who skip this step often are forced to scramble for the necessary materials on short order if it starts to rain.

_Kampang_ cooking is not considered easy work. The drawbacks are acknowledged: it involves hard physical work; there is limited access to the type of coral required for its production; and the processing of _kampang_ produces an irritant, the fine powdery dust that one inhales, and is covered with during the work of cooking the stones and screening and sacking the _kampang_. However, most men with families stressed the need to provide cash, as well as garden and fish to provide the necessities for their families. _Lukautim pamili_ (TOK PISIN: taking care of the Family) is the moral framework in which a range of cash related activities are discussed and judged. Men pointed out that one benefit of cooking _kampang_ was that it afforded the opportunity to garden and make money while staying on the island and looking after their families. William compared his work to wage labour at the nearby logging camp as he was bagging _kampang_. When asked whether he had worked for the company he asked back:

_Westim tupela wik taim long wanem? Fifiti Kina, fortii Kina? Sapos mi wokim 20-sak _kampang_, em K400, inap long putim tri hanret long bank, na baim rais long wan hanret. Mi save katim kopra, tasol mi yet mi inap wokim _kampang_. Long baim skul fi na putim long bank._

Waste two weeks time for what? Fifty or forty Kina? If I screen 20 bags of powdered lime, that’s four hundred Kina. That’s enough to deposit three hundred in the bank and have one hundred to buy rice. I cut copra, but I can produce powdered lime by myself. For paying school fees and bank deposits.

He noted that the workers at Metlik were “_slak tumas_/relaxed, taking it easy”. At Metlik work wasn’t time intensive. “_Ol i save sindaun nating, na raun nating planti tumas. Wok tru blo ol, ol lain blo painim kaikai tasol/ they merely sit around, and hang around too often. Their real work, they’re mainly looking for something to eat_." His work in
contrast was explicitly meant to produce cash in order to meet the needs of his family. William was one of the regular *kampang* producers on Lambom, and he planned to continue marketing it in Kokopo for the foreseeable future.

*Kapu: beche le mer*

The sale of *Kapu* (*beche le mer*) tended to be an irregular practice until the arrival of the MV Teonemotu in May of 1998 to purchase *kapu*. There is a place on the island named *Pal Kapu* (*Lak: 'beche le mer house'*)). The story goes that a Samoan trader who came to the island in the period after the Second World War to purchase it helped build a drying shed there for processing the *kapu*. The ship MV Teonemotu had visited earlier in March to explain the various types of *kapu* they wished to purchase, and the price per kilogram they were willing to pay. They brought samples of dried *kapu*, explained the manner in which they were to be processed, left a price list and said they would be back in May. The chance to earn money through gathering a local resource set off a *kapu* gathering frenzy amongst the Lambom populace unlike anything I had seen during my two years on the island. Every day people set off to hunt *kapu*. Men, women, and children all took part. The most effective means of catching *kapu* was with a spear from a canoe, but people also had success walking along the reef at low tide as well as gathering the sea cucumbers near the shore at several beaches along the passage. Besides the money that was generated by this harvest, it is of interest for what was revealed regarding local notions of marine tenure. This became most apparent due to the occurrence of disputes over rights to particular stretches of shoreline. One dispute within a clan became so acrimonious that a *kastom* event was required to restore good order and was carried out the day after the *Kapu* buying event.

The anticipation built to a fever pitch on the evening that the ship returned to the Lambom passage. Canoes dispatched to the ship returned with the news that the buying would commence in the community centre the next morning at seven o’ clock. The captain and crew showed up early the next morning as most of the island’s population waited in the centre or milled around with their sacks filled with *kapu*. The captain sorted the *kapu* of individual sellers into piles according to type, rejecting improperly
cooked produce, then directing the seller to a set of weighing scales, which were hung from a rafter. As one crewmember weighed the different batches of *kapu* calling out the gross weight, another sat with a calculator and tallied the money to be paid. A third crewman then paid the seller in cash. One hundred and forty seven individual sellers, including men, women and children sold *kapu* that day. They waited their turn and the process was not completed until just before sunset late that afternoon.

The total cash paid out to Lambom islanders was K 15, 460.35 in a single day. People were quite happy with the events of the day. Several women told me that this sort of cash earning was much more satisfactory than the receipt of timber royalties. The money came straight into their hands, and instead of a few clan leaders irregularly and unevenly distributing royalties, everybody got some money directly. The next few days saw many people heading off to town to go shopping or to bank their earnings. The ship was expected to return at the end of June.

In July one of the community’s leaders heard on the Radio New Ireland that a moratorium was being put on the purchase of beche le mer until the end of October. Preliminary reports suggested that the provincial and national catch limits had already been exceeded by a significant margin. Much talk was bandied about whether this report was accurate. In any case the *kapu* were becoming much harder to find, and the reefs surrounding the island that once teemed with these creatures were now devoid of them. A return visit of the MV Teonemotu in July saw a couple of dozen further sales of *Kapu* netting a few hundred Kina but the frenzy had subsided. The ship’s Captain asserted that talk of a moratorium was simply “*tok nating tru. Jeles tok tasol/empty talk. Envious words*”. Regardless, people were getting on with business as usual, once again cutting copra, and continuing with their conventional forms of resource extraction.

**Trade stores and Blak maket: negotiating commodity relations on Lambom**

Lambom people see themselves fitting into a wider world, and discuss problems of how they adapt aspects of capitalism into their world. There are consequences of integrating the world of commodity exchanges into Lambom daily life. Often these forces involve
capitalist systemic forms becoming embedded in local practices, through introduced structures such as the trade-store. The people of Lambom have to work out these difficulties, and attempt to come to terms with the ambivalences involved with commodity relations. The main difficulty is that the visible manifestations of wealth a trade-store gathers together are not immediately accessible through customary distribution.

The most obvious example of the actual difficulties of living with global embedded forces in local practice can be accessed through the *stuakipa* store keeper’s dilemma. I will illustrate the nature of this dilemma by presenting brief case studies of three stores that traded on an ongoing basis between 1996 and 1998. There were several other trade-store enterprises attempted during my stay, but all of these traded for only one supply of inventory or cargo before ceasing trading. Hence the ubiquity of the local saying: *stua ki pung* (Lak: store it fell) or the Tok Pisin version *stoa i pundaun* store failed.

**The Trade store Bisnis on Lambom**

Trade stores are an innovation of the colonial period in Lak. The first trade-store on Lambom appeared to be a cargo cult inspired venture according to patrol officers at the time. The *Kaun* movement originated in the nearby Duke of York islands, just off the coast of New Britain in the early 1960s (Errington 1974). Albert outlines the events surrounding the introduction of the *Kaun* movement into Lak by a Duke of York man who married into Matkamlagir village in the early 1960s (1987:58). Although Lambom is not one of the five villages where Albert noted *Kaun* inspired trade-stores, I was told that the store operated by Todowe, a prominent big man, was part of the *Kaun*. This trade store, the first such store on Lambom, exhibited similar characteristics to those described elsewhere in Lak. Firstly it was a subclan-run enterprise. Members of the same subclan involved in all the other Lak *Kaun* stores, Kamrai, were charged a tax in order to raise the money for the store. In return they were able to purchase goods such as rice, sugar, tea, and biscuits in exchange for coconuts. This store operated for a brief time and then collapsed when insufficient funds were available to re-supply its stock. Despite its unique place in Lambom island memory due to its acceptance of coconuts as
currency, this venture set the pattern for subsequent trade-stores in the manner of its failure.

Errington related the *Kaun* movement to traditional forms of esoteric knowledge. This interpretation was based on the manner in which the collected *Kaun* tax was presented to the administration; much like an initiate in the *tubuan* society pays for the knowledge of the men’s cult. Duke of York *Kaun* leaders were attempting to use a ritual process to acquire the knowledge required for successfully operating a business endeavour. In Lak no such payment was offered to the administration; the tax raised remained under the control of sub clan leaders. Thus Albert offers a different interpretation:

The Lak *Kaun* would seem more an economic experiment, an attempt to find the apparent link between sales, profit, and wealth… Unaware of the ways money generates commodities and more money, the account system stressed the simple concentration or pooling of money; this alone was supposed to have the intended effect. Not ritual, then but normal subclan relations were the model for the movement, for Lak subclans continually pool wealth and bring in pigs and shell wealth from other segments to create the “wealth” most significant in social life… Thus, I take a more pedestrian view of the movement in the case of the Lak. The “Accounts” movement here was less an attempt to project ritual outside the society than one designed to bring institutions like banks into it. (Albert 1987:61-2)

In effect, the Lak were not hoping to be passive recipients of mystical largesse but rather aiming to be active participants involved with the process of development itself. Consistent with the events discussed in the last chapter, the people of Lambom were attempting to pull aspects of external forces and things into the local scene.

Albert reports that the movement came to the attention of the colonial administration due to its leaders’ assertion of a right to claim subclan member tax for itself, obviating the need to pay the levy to the administration. As the store on Lambom did not advocate this practice, the Lambom version of the *Kaun* did not enter the patrol report record. It is recalled today on Lambom as an anachronism, with the use of coconuts as tender being considered humorous (however, see section on *blak maket* below for recent changes to this attitude). As noted above, it also set the precedent for subsequent trade stores by its failure to be able to operate continuously.

Trade stores are the most tangible form of *Bisnis* on Lambom. Within the local cash economy the role of *stuakipa* is sited at the nexus of contesting relations: kin, clan,
family, and church. The following cases show the interaction of these forces through the problems associated with attempting to successfully operate a trade store. Though each store suffered from particular difficulties in remaining in operation, there is a common set of challenges that all such endeavors had to deal with. General observations on the nature of these dilemmas will be offered after all the cases are presented.

Case 1: Credit Woes

Wilson Boki operated a trade store in Lilina hamlet on Lambom Island from early 1995 until the end of 1997. A married man in his forties with three children, he served as the village komiti (TOK PISIN: local council member). He was the sole owner and operator of his trade store. He built the store next to his house out of sawn timber and tin roofing from funds he had raised during two copra cuttings and with the assistance of remittances from his son Limson who worked at a wholesaler in Kokopo. Wilson estimates that the construction of his store cost around seven hundred kina mainly spent on the sheets of tin roofing and the rough cut lumber planks. His usual stock consisted of the staples of rice, tinned meat and fish, noodles and such sundries as soap, fishhooks, and Spia cigarettes. For special occasions he would carry cordials, Twisties and candies. Wilson used a storekeeper’s guide produced by the provincial government to plan and manage his store. He would go to town for supplies irregularly about every 4-6 weeks. His usual cost for re-stocking was approximately 500 Kina; most of it spent on rice and tinned goods. His transportation costs varied depending on whether he travelled by copra boat, around 100 Kina, or had to charter a dinghy, between 150 and 180 Kina for the time his store operated. When he went by dinghy he would travel in his wife’s sister’s husband’s boat. Wilson was considered one of the more consistent and efficient store managers at the time of my arrival in Lambom in October of 1996.

On my first visit to Wilson’s store I noticed a large sign he had displayed prominently beside the counter: NOKEN ASKIM DINAU. MI LES/ DON’T ASK FOR CREDIT. I AM FED UP. I remarked upon it and he said it was a big worry. According to his

19 Smith reported a similar sign at a trade store on Kairuru Island in 1998 (2002). He offers no analysis of its meaning or implications but does note that it was: “something I had never seen in Kragur in years past” (2002:139). According to Alan Rumsey these signs are common on trade stores in the Western Highlands and have been since at least 1981 when he first went there. (personal communication). Don Gardner reports the same for the Ok region (personal communication).
guidebook, loans were the most common cause of store failure. When we spoke about the problem of loans a few days later, he added that he did not like having to turn down people asking for things, it made him feel bad. He did give credit, and showed me a book with a list of about a dozen outstanding debts. The sign was aimed at these people who had longstanding debts. In talking with the other storekeeper at the time he said they had shared information on who owed how much, and noted that the same people tended to appear in both of their debt books. Wilson said he preferred to help those in need, but the store was meant to help him pay upcoming school fees for his youngest daughter, who was the first of his three children to pass the high school entrance examination. He was very happy when she passed, as he had been upset that his other children had failed. Wilson was looking forward to his last born being able to eventually get a well paying job and be able to help him and his wife in their old age.

Wilson’s troubles began in October of 1997 when his store was broken into and robbed. Some of his rice was taken, and two cases of tinned goods as well as two hundred Kina in cash. The culprit was quickly identified; the fellow shared a lot of meat at his bachelor’s house then disappeared with the cash to the logging camp at Metlik where he and his friends spent the cash on beer. The thief turned out to be a young man of Wilson’s own sub clan. Instead of charging the youth in village court in front of the village mejistret/magistrate, he met with him and his parents at his house one evening. "Em Bisnis blo mipela wanBisnis tasol/ it is an affair for my clan alone" he explained when asked about why he avoided the village court, even though he was a member of the village council. Wilson presented his losses at four hundred Kina and asked for it to be paid back. The youth’s father said that the young man would cut copra on his father’s block and pay the money back in a couple of months. This could not have occurred at a worse time for Wilson, as in February he would be required to pay several hundred kina in school fees and provide pocket money for his daughter. With the bit of cash he had left and an advance payment from the thief’s father he was able to pay for his daughter’s first year of schooling but was unable to resupply his store. He told me, "Larim stua i slip pastaim. Bihain, bai mi traim gen. Nau, tasol mi save katim kopra/ let the store rest first. Later I will give it another go. For now, I can only cut copra". Wilson’s store remained inactive when I left Lambom in November of 1998. He attempted a Bisnis venture during the Christmas season of 1997. Wilson sold cold drinks from an ice filled
cooler during the school closing festivities the year after the robbery, but this was only a small one-off enterprise. Wilson told me he was waiting for a time when he could cut copra to be able to refinance his stock and raise enough cash while at the same time being able to pay his daughter’s school fees.

Case 2: Managerial Deficit

Joseph Laiman is a man in his 70s, and an important leader of the Bongian clan on Lambom. During my time on Lambom he ran his clan’s store located in the middle of the village. The store was a large building, with stairs and a veranda, adjoining his house and facing the main path through this densely built part of the village. The store had a disused freezer and its own generator, but was poorly and irregularly stocked during my stay. It had been built with money given to him by his son for that purpose in the late 1980s and had been managed by his sister’s son until 1995, when his nephew moved to the mainland with other members of the breakaway Foursquare evangelical church. Several people told me that until his nephew left it had been an excellent store, with a wide range of stock including cookware and clothing. One man said “long taim ples i bruk, orait stua i Pondau tasol/ when the village was divided, that’s when the store collapsed”. The consensus was that his nephew was an educated man and an up-and-coming village leader when the religious schism occurred, and that Joseph had bad eyesight and wasn’t good at handling money. Joseph was known to give credit, and though he would record these loans in an account book, he just as often would forget about them after a while and failed to collect the money he was owed. Joseph was concentrating his energies on ritual demands20, and looking after the dinghy that his son had bought for his family, and that his youngest son operated. Sporadically the store would be stocked when remittances were available, but it never seemed to be able to continue beyond one or two subsequent resupplies before it became inoperative once again.

20 At the time Joseph was preparing to carry out the final stage of a mortuary kastom for his sister. He was also readying the appearance of a tuhuan involved with an initiation event described later in this thesis.
Case 3: Diminishing Returns

Into this vacuum, *buibui* trading was launched as a clan venture in June of 1997. The store was founded as the result of a dispute over timber royalties within a clan. After complaints of unsatisfactory distribution of the logging royalties doled out by the senior man of the clan, two cousins living in different towns and both employed as managers, returned to Lambom and collected the next royalty payment that their clan was to receive. They invested the greater part of the money in term deposits (see chapter eight) and used some of the funds to build the trade store in the centre of the village, opposite the community centre and church. Built quickly, within the span of one month, the store was constructed of sawn timber and painted red and green. It cost nine hundred kina to build, and was supplied regularly during its inaugural few months. The initial person designated storekeeper was a young man of the clan but difficulties soon arose due to his irregular attendance during what were considered operating hours. One of his clan sisters took over as primary store keeper for a period but as a single mother she found the hours onerous and the fact that she was not being paid led her to withdraw herself from most of the prime store hours. Another sister took over the duties and worked the bulk of the time with the previous two storekeepers relieving her when she had other work to attend to. As none of these people was paid a wage there was little incentive for them to respond to the intrusions of customers into whatever else they might have been doing at a particular time. The first storekeeper helped himself to *Spia* cigarettes during his time behind the counter.

Lack of business acumen was a steady source of trouble for this store. Accountancy was attempted with records kept for the first five shipments of cargo, but no account was made to calculate the gross income generated from sales. These figures showed a case of steadily diminishing returns, with the proceeds of each cargo less than the money spent on procuring it. The amount of goods available and the range of these goods dwindled as the store went through subsequent restockings. As there was no way to figure out from the ‘books’ why this was happening the response was to raise prices, drawing complaints from the community in general. By early 1998, an infusion from the clan’s last timber royalty payment of four thousand kina was given to set the store straight. Clan leaders advocated a tally of the daily income as the best way to account and keep the books. This listing of gross income was kept in a store book, while the former
accounting of expenses disappeared altogether. The income generated by the store averaged around seventy kina a day from mid January through mid June of that year.

Despite the steady income and its status as the only trade store on the island for this period the decline of working capital continued unabated. With a limited paper trail to follow, interested parties mooted the source of the store’s diminishing returns. A primary reason pointed to was a dispute within the clan regarding cargo shipping. When the first storekeeper was replaced he was given the chance to use his brother’s new dinghy to ship the cargo from town. His limited experience and imputed excessive caution led to him taking two trips to town to supply what his clan’s competing established dinghy operator previously had carried during one trip. He enjoyed taking the dinghy out in the confines of the passage at every opportunity, and he had been instructed to do so in order to gain competence. However when it came time to go to town he was less enthusiastic, as the dangers of St George Channel are well known on the island, and the seas are more often than not rough. In effect shipping costs doubled the moment his dinghy took over the transport of cargo. This situation was exacerbated by the increase in smaller partial resupply trips carried out over the next few months. Even without the accounting acumen to quantify the cost ineffectiveness of this practice, matters reached a head and a clan meeting was required to sort out the shipping dispute. The original dinghy operator was immediately dispatched to town for cargo, with the newer fellow being a member of his crew. The aim was to get the store resupplied efficiently and at the same time teach the newer operator how to transport larger shipments of cargo. Scuttlebutt imputed an attempt to gain access to the trade store’s capital by the new dinghy operator’s family, but this never entered the public clan forum that decided the issue. Nevertheless, this belief undercut the camaraderie and the clan’s shared enthusiasm in operating the store, at the same time that the venture’s finances decreased.

A final difficulty that adversely affected the store’s financial viability was the expense related to tithing. Citing biblical admonitions, the ten percent rate that the store paid during Vartabar was based on gross income\textsuperscript{21}. During 1998, six months of trading led

\textsuperscript{21} The Old Testament source for the ten per cent figure is Leviticus 27:30; the New Testament source Matthew 23:23. Proverbs 3:9 are cited as the basis for the idea that tithing should be based on gross income. Although there is debate in wider Christian circles whether the ten per cent relates to cash income, this is the interpretation accepted upon Lambom.
to a tithe of three hundred and thirty eight kina paid to the church. In effect, not only was profit taxed, but also working capital was constantly being drained from the enterprise. With disproportionate shipping cost already a factor in the store’s bottom line, tithing encumbered the business with a significant surcharge.

The storekeepers’ dilemma: ambivalence and commodity exchange

Anthropologists in Southeast Asia have developed an analytic model concerning the trader’s dilemma. The difficulties involved in running a village store are summarized succinctly by Van Der Grijp as follows:

The trader’s dilemma is the quandary between the moral obligation to share wealth with kinfolk and neighbors and the necessity to make a profit and accumulate capital...Actually, these traders can only accumulate the necessary capital for their enterprise by cutting or circumventing the solidarity links within their social environment. (Van Der Grijp 2003:277-8).

In Lambom, this dilemma is complicated by other social factors at work. A few preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the above case studies of trade store enterprise. It is apparent that despite the accepted necessity of trade stores and the demand for their merchandise, their place in the community is not a secure one. Lambom islanders’ actions show that they have not easily come to terms with the aspects of commodity transactions, but that they are still looking for a means to do so. The primary difficulties, of dealing with kin, the intricacies of managerial practice within a wider context of local notions of sociality, reveal underlying tensions.

The issue of credit is problematic in a society where food is readily shared among kin. Gem, in effect the island’s daily bread, moves within kin groups freely, and unlike all other exchanges is not tallied or noted. People recognize in principle that bisnis operates under a different imperative, but clan members still ask their storekeeping kin to provide credit and most storekeepers do so. Storekeepers find it difficult to deny their kin food and end up carrying debts that diminish their working capital. The display of wealth in the realm of kastom, whether it is pigs for a feast or cooked produce, invariably precedes its dispersal and sharing among the clan and community. A trade store therefore
represents an anomaly, a gathering of visible, yet indivisible, foodstuffs. Besides being a physical disavowal of food sharing, its tangible presentation of collected wealth is felt to be the definitive spur to jealousy-inspired sorcery.

Clan labour is also an issue that imperfectly spans local and Bisnis moralities. Whereas one can expect one’s kin to provide labour for clan endeavours, the regular hours required of a storekeeper limit the ability to carry out other activities, particularly subsistence related ones that require trips to the garden. Though a form of opportunity cost is at work here, it is not articulated as such. Wages are not expected or asked for. Rather storekeepers of clan trade stores resist the limitation of their activities by simply absenting themselves from their duties.

The grey zone: Ol blak maket

A further difficulty confronted by trade storeowners is the proliferation of various “blak maket/ black markets”. Despite the intriguing imagery such a practice evokes, a blak maket in actuality on Lambom involves individual entrepreneurs selling mainly Spia brand cigarettes from their homes. The complaint made by the owners of trade stores is that these sellers do not have pepa/ permits to trade and thus such sales are illegal. With trade store supplies only irregularly restocked, and usually in bulk purchases, blak maket sellers who usually purchase a box or two of Spia sticks (an outlay of anywhere between K7 and K30), can replace their goods more quickly, as well as sell the individual cigars more cheaply (20 toea or 25 toea per smoke versus 30 toea or 40 toea at the stores). Though complaints are occasionally raised during village lain meetings (communal work day gatherings continued from the colonial period), judgements and exhortations against the practice of blak maket seldom are enforced. This is partly due to the general lack of enforcement by village ‘authorities’, but mainly due to the popularity of blak maket. Without such informal sales networks the supply of daily consumable commodities such as Spia would become untenable. And a village endeavour that would deprive its smokers of steady gratification would be patently unpopular to an extreme degree. As well, this form of small-scale trading is an easy profit-making venture. The cigars invariably sell quickly, and are priced quite cheaply, limiting the need and
opportunity for kin to ask for gifts or smokes on credit. When a family wants to raise a bit of cash in a hurry, Spia blak maket is considered the most efficacious way to go. Of over forty households surveyed during my village census, only two denied ever marketing tobacco informally. There are only a few people who continually blak maket Spia, with most such endeavours rotating through the villages. Whenever a boat arrives, the latest marketeers are quickly identified and the procession of smokers soon finds their way to their gratification. At any given time there are two or three blak maket operating, and this form of commerce is ubiquitous in Lambom daily life.

Enthusiasm for blak maket where Spia are purchased with tip (Lak: short lengths of shell money) is particularly pronounced. This is a popular way, among both buyers and sellers, to convert a commodity into shell money. I was encouraged to carry out such a blak maket when the need arose for me to gain shell money. I was assured that my Spia would be sold in one go, and this was certainly the case. Trading a Spia stick for an equal length of tip, my twenty kina box of Spia was traded within half an hour of my return with the goods from town. As I was told, this twenty kina outlay for tobacco returned enough tip to string together a pinas (Lak: ten prams/fathoms, each pram being the length from left breast to outstretched right hand) that was locally valued at twenty kina. Similar blak maket occurred irregularly during my stay, about a dozen times over two years, but always met with an enthusiastic response.

Another form of blak maket involves trading a range of goods for coconuts. The most prevalent form of this blak maket is the sale of fried flour dumplings, locally termed ban (TOK PISIN: bun). The standard exchange rate was one ban per coconut, and it was a source of amusement for many people to see people with their arms overloaded with coconuts hurrying to get some dumplings before they were sold out. The aim in holding this type of blak maket is for someone who may not have access to coconuts or precedence in a clan’s cutting queue to acquire a pile ready to be cut. This form of acquiring copra for sale also eliminates the usual labour requirements of clearing a coconut grove and gathering the nuts, leaving only the actual copra cutting, drying and sacking to produce market-ready copra. Several ban blak maket were able to accumulate large heaps of hundreds of coconuts within a day. The problem with this sort of blak maket

22 In general people did not sell shell money for cash, but they did use shell money as tender to replace cash in some instances. I discuss the relation of cash and shell money in chapter four.
maket was twofold. First, the requirement to cut the coconuts quickly was paramount (I will discuss why below). Second, the owners’ of the most readily accessible lain of coconuts at either end of the village, both prominent big men, complained that their dry coconuts were being informally harvested by people quickly darting to the nearest source of nuts in order to satisfy their ban cravings. This led to disputes at village lain meetings, and sporadic temporary injunctions against the practice of this sort of blak maket.

Just as I was preparing to leave the field one of my clan’s new leaders was readying his own innovative blak maket venture. Simon had purchased several hundred kina worth of cargo from town and shipped it to Lambom using the proceeds of his recent kapu earnings to finance his endeavour. His plan was to operate a blak maket on the scale of a trade store venture. Using a decrepit house that once housed a trade store, Simon stocked shelves with the goods he was willing to exchange for coconuts. He told me he had attempted a similar maket back in 1985 and had had good results. The amount of planning involved indicated a strategy not seen in other trade stores that used cash as tender. Simon had based his pricing on information he had received from a didiman (TOK PISIN: agricultural planning officer) in Rabaul a few years previous to this. The value of dry coconuts was set at fifty per one Kina, based on the primary value of five coconuts equalling ten toea. Simon reckoned that it took four hundred coconuts to produce around one hundred kilograms of dried copra that would fill one sack. Approximately ten sacks of copra were being sold in Rabaul for a sum of over nine hundred Kina at the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM FOR SALE</th>
<th>COST IN KINA</th>
<th>ASKING PRICE PER UNIT IN COCONUTS</th>
<th>PROJECTED RETURN IN COCONUTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugar 30 x 2 kg bale</td>
<td>K 48.00</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar 18 x 500 g</td>
<td>K 20.36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 packets of Twisties</td>
<td>K 19.00</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 packets of Paradais Bisket</td>
<td>K 38.60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals:</td>
<td>K 125.96</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Simon’s Blak Maket.

Simon had done the math and figured to net over seven sacks of copra, thus earning a sizable return on his one hundred and twenty five kina outlay. He reckoned that with the recent focus on gathering kapu for the previous few months that there were a lot of coconuts lying around waiting to be gathered. Since people were cashed up due to the
The Cash Economy and Income disparity

Modern village life on Lambom is contingent upon access to cash for a variety of reasons. The most commonly stated needs for cash earnings, school fees, money --- to pay the dinghy fare for travel to town, and cloth or store bought clothing --- are all related to family life. There is an increasing prevalence of store-bought goods in daily consumption. There is an inescapable need on an island without fresh water for tin roofs to channel rainwater for collection, and plastic or rubber containers for storage. At night in order to provide illumination, people have become dependent upon kerosene for lamps. People are capable and proud of their subsistence abilities, and consider it the base for their relatively high level of affluence as compared with others in the region. But they are at the same time increasingly aware that cash is needed to provide the
basics of everyday life, and that there is no going back to a world without money. The
time demands involved in earning enough money to meet local requirements coupled
with the time spent in basic subsistence activities have consequences for the practice of
kastom, and in particular mortuary feasting. I discuss the pressures modern village
existence puts on the capacity for time and resources relating to kastom practices in the
next chapter. It is worth noting at this point that the growth of a local cash economy has
come at a cost with regards to the ability to maintain the traditional manner of enacting
kastom.

A preliminary analysis of the most common form of cash earning practices, whether
copa cutting, kampang cooking, or kapu harvesting, show these practices to be
fundamentally secondary forms of production; they depend upon using labour to turn
owned resources into a saleable commodity. Most people depend on varying clan
resources for access to harvest the raw materials to produce these commodities. An
enterprising household is able to meet the requirements of the local cash economy by
means of these practices. However there are other consequences related to the emerging
cash economy on Lambom. One of these is an increasing disparity in income among the
households of the island. An examination of the scope of the cash economy on Lambom
as evidenced through data collected on household income reveals the disparity in cash
income among the people of the community.

The general scope of the cash economy on Lambom is ascertainable through an
examination of the process of tithing to the United Church known locally as Vartabar
(Lak: speak gift). The practice of tithing is as old as the church in New Ireland, with
reports for the south of the island dating back more than a century to 1887 (Threllfall
1975:58). The practice grew and the Methodist church in New Britain and New Ireland
was tithed 10,000 marks in 1898 and “the figure quadrupled by 1914” (Firth 1983:141).
By the late 1990s the practice of Vartabar was thoroughly embedded as part of Christian
life on Lambom; people told me it had continued unabated, except for the period of
Japanese occupation, since the island first received lotu. Everyone who was a member
of the church participated, and in practice that meant that all households on the island
took part (the Foursquare church members had relocated to the mainland after the
schism to be discussed in Chapter Four). I was told that people were meticulous in
calculating their tithes and that under-reporting one’s income was inconceivable. For my
purposes I will take this assertion on trust while adding the caveat that the data examined below depend upon this assumption of faith.

For the year 1998 the two quarterly Vartabar I was able to observe give a general idea of the size of the cash economy on Lambom that year. Vartabar is a tithe of ten percent of an individual, family or group’s gross income. The Vartabar totals for the quarters I gathered give a general approximation of the gross cash income on the island, an estimated island GDP of sorts. The data are based on a sample tithing by sixty-one households in total. However forty-three households took part in the first and fifty took part in the second. The discrepancy was explained to me as being the result of particular household heads being absent from one or the other Vartabar. I was told that this often happened, and that people would ‘catch up’ when they were able, with total records for the year audited by the church leadership on an annual basis.

On March 3, 1998 the cash total for the quarter collected was K1310.10. This sum was collected from 43 family units with the highest tithe being K214.98 and the lowest being K2.50. The next highest tithe was for K99.74 by a family that operated a dinghy service and had done a roaring trade in January returning people to town after the holiday season rush. The biggest tithe came from a family that had recently cut copra and owned a copra oven that was busy after the holidays as copra was cut for school fees. Ten of the fourteen households that tithed less than ten Kina were headed by elderly widows living on their own or with children to look after them. The four households tithing over K70 combined to pay K469.59 or over thirty five percent of this Vartabar. Two of these households ran both Trade store and Dinghy businesses; the other two had recently cut copra and owned copra ovens. Disparities in income distribution are apparent, however brief the time-span this Vartabar represents. However a total cash flow of approximately K13,100 over two months gives an initial picture of the scope of the local economy. The Vartabar held four months later adds to the picture and shows the same households earning relatively high cash incomes.

The Vartabar of July 7, 1998 reported tithes from fifty family groups as well as levies on six church salaried employees, four businesses, and tithes and free will offerings from several individuals. The amount of cash collected during this Vartabar was

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23 Data were not available for 1996 or 1997 due to a fire at a Church leader’s home that destroyed the records as well as part of the cash collected during 1997.
K2262.06 in total. It should be noted that this tithe includes the windfall earnings from the sale of *kapu*.

In the following pie chart (Figure 4 below) I combine the data from both *Vartabar* and calculate the cash total paid by households that only tithed one time as their total yearly tithe to date. As well, I exclude the tithes paid by businesses as well as the levies and free will offerings included in the second *Vartabar*.

The majority of households were earning between one hundred and four hundred kina for this seven-month period. Only seven households, approximately eleven percent of the households tithing, reported earning less than one hundred kina for the period in question. Another twenty six percent of households were earning between four hundred and a thousand kina during this timespan, and the top seven cash-earning families were taking home an income of over one thousand kina. In general a solid majority can be seen as a middle class (the ‘reds’) with regards to earnings, with a small struggling class (the ‘yellows’) earning less than this group, and over a third of the island’s households earning more.

![Pie Chart](image)

**Figure 5: Range of Cash Income.**

These data show an income range well beyond that reported in the *Papua New Guinea Rural Development Handbook*, where the people of Lambom are grouped with other
coastal Lak people and placed in the “Low Income” category of “21-40 kina/person/year” (Hanson et al. 2001:249). The windfall from timber royalties and kapu sales in 1998 may have been a temporary factor skewing the numbers for Lambom. Alternately, and I believe this is the case; Lambom appears to be better off with regard to cash earnings when compared with the rest of Lak.

The disparity in earnings becomes more apparent when the share of income made by each grouping is calculated as displayed in the chart in table 5. The ‘reds’, representing half of the community’s households only take home a quarter of the gross cash income of the island. This disparity becomes more pronounced when the opposing extremes are taken into account. The wealthy ‘greens’, seven households representing eleven percent of the community’s families are earning thirty eight percent of the total cash on the island, more than a third of all the money on Lambom. The struggling ‘yellows’, likewise representing seven households, take home only one percent of the total cash income for Lambom.

![Figure 6: Percentage of total cash earnings according to household earnings range.](image)

Class differences appear to crystallize when the data is presented in this manner; whether these differences have hardened is not apparent (contrast with Foster 1995:66).
The effects of timber royalties and *kapu* sales may represent a temporary aberration and this may be reflected in the apparent disparity of cash incomes on Lambom. Regardless, what is apparent is that some households have proved to be better at capturing a significantly disproportionate share of the available income during the timeframe examined here. The fact that these households have interests in trade stores and dinghies is of note. This might allow them to take advantage relative to other households in times of increased earnings overall. If the effects of cash on the local economy have been ‘domesticated’ (Parry and Bloch 1989:18-9) relatively successfully with regards to households’ ability to meet the basic demands required by Lambom modernity, emerging class distinctions may be the wild pig threatening the garden of this bucolic setting.

Yet there are means available to limit visible demonstrations of incommensurable wealth. On Lambom there is a partially completed pre-fabricated house. The owner of this house works on Lihir Island in the mining industry. I was told the house would never be completed because someone had used *balapial* magic on the owner. This Lak form of magic makes a person forgetful, and in this case a bit of betel spit and red ochre had been rubbed into some of the house’s wooden frame, causing the owner to forget his desire to complete its construction.

Although wage labour will be discussed in more detail with regards to the logging camp in nearby Metlik, some aspects of this phenomenon need to be briefly addressed with regards to how this plays out in the local context. Gewertz and Errington express the potential for regret for villagers at Chambri Lake if wage labour associated with a planned nearby hotel eventuated. They are concerned that “Chambri would have to be induced to sell their labor as menials” and that “for the first time class relations would be created *at Chambri*” and that this “would facilitate a further transformation of the system of commensurate differences into one of incommensurate differences (1991:205; italics in original). On Lambom this concern is not expressed among the locals. Wage labour as we have seen tends to be a group based endeavour. The hiring of groups and the provision of a shared meal is viewed more along the lines of sponsorship for the group’s activities rather than one involving employers and employees. The wages are pooled towards achieving whichever project the particular group is planning or saved as

24 In Chapter Eight.
part of the general funds for the group. In this case it is readily apparent that the relations between those who pay wages and those who work for them in no way imply incommensurably between the parties involved.

In this chapter I have presented the practices that take place on Lambom within the domain of *bisnis*. These have been put in context with the work involved in daily life such as gardening. It is apparent that activities relating to *bisnis*, the practices that produce cash incomes on the island, are informed and affected by the logics of other domains of existence; in particular those related to clan relations and church requirements. As I turn to the next chapter about *kastom*, the interactions between these domains will continue to emerge as Lambom people carry out their activities of living in a modern village.
Chapter Three

OUR PLANS HAVE COLLAPSED: KASTOM AND CHANGE ON LAMBOM

In this chapter I examine the changing ways in which Lak people use the term kastom. The main areas of social practice in reference to which they used the term during my time on Lambon were: wol (Lak: ‘plan’), referring to the sequence of mortuary feasting events; and pidik (Lak: ‘secret’), referring to activities related to the two men’s cults, one is based on the tubuan masks, and the other talun involves bullroarers\(^25\). Both of these aspects of kastom were in the process of ongoing adaptation and evaluation within the Lambom community in the 1990s.

Mortuary feasting on Lambon\(^26\) traditionally consisted of a primary feast, angan (Lak: to eat) that followed a funeral within a few days after the death, and was carried out by the deceased’s sub-clan with support from the deceased’s affines. The spouse’s sub-clan would present a pig for the angan feast, in order to purchase the corpse’s passage from the mourning house into the cemetery. The big man of the deceased’s sub-clan would organize his group’s resources for the feast, as well as drawing upon the sub-clan’s wider affinal network to provide the required number of pigs to feed the entire village with the cooked pork from the angan. Similarly, shell money was gathered and then divided amongst the men attending the feast, with extra broken lengths of shell money given to pall bearers and grave diggers. Angan was the culmination of an initial period of mourning and its performance led to the lifting of taboos placed on the entire village after a death; these included a ban on sweeping or burning rubbish, loud talk, and any

\(^25\) See Albert (1987, 1988) for a full examination of the mortuary feasting complex among the more traditional east coast Lak of Siar and Matkamlagir village.

\(^26\) Albert reports that on the east coast angan was the initial feast carried out in other villages beyond the home place of the deceased. He lists three feasts being required within the village of the deceased to complete the primary rite: one to remove general mourning, another to allow the village to be swept, and a third to allow garden work to resume Albert (1988: 162,174). In comparison the Lambom Lak have amalgamated these and carry out a feast meant for sub-clan kin in other villages. I was told that this change has occurred within the living memory of most people, since independence in 1975.
garden work beyond merely gathering food. I was told that *angan* allowed people to *pinisim sindaun sori*/*end* the condition of sadness, so that people could then get back on with the activities involved in daily life.

Secondary rites focused less on mourning and more on sub-clan leadership. *Tondon* rites were usually held several years after a death, and involved the exchange of live pigs with the big man who had held the *angan*, replacing the pigs he marshalled for the initial feast. The Lak system allowed alternate *tondon* to be held so that a relative of closer lineage relation could challenge the initial sponsor’s right to control over sub-clan land. This final rite involved the erection of a scaffold called *lalamar* where the personal possessions, and photographs of the deceased where placed and sub-clans hung up lengths of shell money that was to be exchanged.

However this orthodox sequence of *wol* events no longer operates as the guiding principle of mortuary feasting as practiced on Lambom. On Lambom the focus on leadership claims associated with the secondary rites is being transposed onto the primary *angan* feast. *Tondon* had not been held on Lambom for several years prior to my arrival in 1996, and I was told that they were unlikely to be held in the future except in the case of two or three senior big men who themselves had hosted many of these *kastom* events. The last *lalamar* scaffolds constructed on Lambom involved commemorating several different sub-clan’s dead with the addition of a new final stage called *simen* (TOK PISIN: cement) that involved building a concrete slab over the grave of the deceased. I was told that this would be the way of the future. An option in *simen* would be the construction of a concrete cross on top of the slab.

The people of Lambom say that now they must use combined rites or truncated versions of particular feasts, in a process that they term ‘short cuts’ in order to carry out the work of *wol kastom* today. The main reason given for these innovations in their mortuary feasting was a perceived shortage of the resources required in fulfilling the standard sequence. As Lison, a senior man of *kaptu* clan phrased it “*As bilong kastom em i pik*/The basis of our custom are pigs”\(^{27}\). Lison’s statement was a recognition of the constraints on time and resources current in Lambom’s modern economic context. Other men told me that their ancestors did nothing but *kastom*, and with today’s requirements

\(^{27}\) Contrast this statement with what Foster was told on nearby Tanga Island, “the basis of custom is death” (*olgeta kastom i kamap antap long man i dai*). (1995:25).
for cash in daily life in the community, they had to do both garden work and earn money through cash cropping, *bisnis* ventures, or *wokmani* wage labour. Even with the ‘short cut’ taken in combining the functions of primary and secondary feasts into the initial *angan* event, the people of Lambom have had difficulty in recent times with carrying out mortuary *kastom* that satisfies their sense of appropriate action.

In the following case I present an attempted ‘short cut’ innovation. It illustrates the ways that certain aspects of *wol* in this event failed to satisfy the feast’s host. As well, the discussion that followed this *kastom* event turned onto a wider concern with the value of shell money and its place in the economy of the community and a wider world. After an examination of this initial ‘short cut’ I will turn to a case that highlights innovation in aspects of *pidik* practice, and in particular the realm of sorcery.

**Ep Wol ki Pung: Our Plan has Collapsed**

Melin Tokarabus died in May of 1998. A woman in her mid-thirties, Melin was the mother of six children, and was in the early stages of pregnancy with her seventh. Early one morning, after a day of clearing bush in her family’s copra block, Melin experienced debilitating pain in her stomach and was rushed by dinghy to the aid-post ten kilometres north at Lamassa. Lambom’s own aid-post had remained unstaffed for the previous five months since the previous nurse quit and took another job in a less remote location. Around three o’clock that afternoon, the sound of an approaching dinghy from the north was heard. Immediately upon its coming into sight, a wailing began, and cycled louder and louder, as people saw the black flag flying from the mast at the stem of the boat. The typical calm of the village during late afternoon was replaced by the cacophony of screams and howls of grief as people rushed to the boat launch where the dinghy was heading. People were streaming to the south end of the village, and the incoherent wailing was interspersed with cries of “Melin, Melin!” I stood stunned in the door of my house as I watched the people of Lambom hurry along the village path down to the shore, including Melin’s husband Iksil carrying their youngest child Jude.

After awhile, I made my way down to where the dinghy had landed. People were standing around in stunned shock; the wailing was unbelievably loud, and came in
waves of intensity. Melin’s corpse was already wrapped in laplaps and a canvas drop sheet. It was removed from the boat and carried by some young men up the hill towards her family’s home. The doctor, a man from Buka whom I had met before, greeted me and stood with the boat’s driver on the shore. He told me Melin had died of massive septic shock, brought on by the death of her unborn child at least a week ago. He had tried his utmost, and had radioed for an emergency helicopter flight to come from Kokopo, but she died soon after that, and the helicopter was cancelled before it had even taken off. He felt there should have been some earlier symptoms of Melin’s precarious condition, but that without a nurse on Lambom there was no way of getting help to her until it was too late. The doctor chatted briefly with some other bystanders as the crowd of people and centre of attention moved up the island to the dead woman’s house. After talking briefly with some of the island’s senior men, and being thanked for his efforts on Melin’s behalf, the doctor climbed back into the boat and set off back to Lamassa.

The scene at Iksil and Melin’s house was flurry of activity and grief. People were dispatched to summon various relatives from gardening or on other tasks around the island. Through the open doorway of the house some of Melin’s sisters and aunts could be seen crowding the small room, wailing and repeating her name again and again. Iksil stood underneath the house in the middle of a group of men, all grim-faced and sombre. Iksil said nothing as the men around him organized the immediate events required by Melin’s death. The canoe of a young member of her clan was sent for, as well as tools and spare lumber, to serve as the makings of her coffin. Young men were sent to several of the island’s trade stores to purchase rice, tea, and sugar for the vigil that was to be kept that night until her funeral the next day. Young women were sent to gather firewood, and enough cooking utensils to prepare the food that would be needed for those who would sing hymns throughout the night. All of this was carried out amidst a constant coming-and-going of people; more of Melin’s near relatives and relations arrived, taking up the wailing and climbing into the house to see her body. The constant keening of grief increased when two of Melin’s teenaged daughters rushed up the hill and into the house. People attempted to console Iksil, who sat in stunned silence underneath the house, holding his two-year-old son Jude on his knee. Several young men were sent off to find the couple’s eldest son Junior, who had gone to the mainland.
to gather betel nut, as well as to inform her mother and one of her sisters who lived there in the Foursquare community.

Benches were arranged in rows outside the house as the afternoon faded into evening. The constant flow of people continued unabated, as pots of rice were boiled and several men worked on the canoe, sawing off its ends, and preparing planks for the coffin’s lid. Iksil became a bit more animated as he and his son Junior sat together amongst a group of their clan mates. Discussions began about the kastom that was now required, and plans were made to meet the following day at the house with all the men of his clan. Around 7 PM the members of the church’s youth group arrived with their hymn books and wearing their Sunday finery. When a dozen or so of the group had arrived they sat along the rows of benches and began singing hymns, their harmony punctuated by the intermittent wails and cries of older women. The numbers of the youth group continued to swell until there were close to fifty young people arrayed on the plank benches, and their singing became louder and almost drowned out the other sounds of activity at the house. Melin’s daughters and other women of their clan busied themselves with preparing rice and fish, and moved throughout the rows of the youth group, delivering cups of tea and biscuits to the assembled young men and women. The procession of women up the house’s ladder and into the room with her nearest kin continued well into the night. After a break to eat plates of fish and rice and tinned meat, the youth group continued singing hymns through the night until the sun rose the next morning. Iksil sat underneath the house cradling his sleeping youngest child, surrounded by several young men of his clan, talking quietly throughout the long night.

Melin was buried the next day. In the morning several young men were assigned the task of digging her grave in the island’s lone cemetery adjacent to the men’s house enclosure. The tolling of the church bell early that afternoon signalled the commencement of the funeral. The funeral procession moved down the hill from her house, her coffin carried by several young men, mostly housemates from Junior’s bachelor house. When it reached the main village path, the Pastor and two elders of the church took their place ahead of the coffin and proceeded to walk slowly towards the church. Different young men took turns carrying the coffin on the way to the church. They were followed by Iksil and his children, as well as Melin’s sisters and mother. The pathway was lined with brightly coloured flowers gathered by the younger girls of the
village, and woven into simple arrangements by their older sisters and relatives. Family groups joined the procession as it passed their households and wound its way through the village.

Inside the church a table had been set up where the altar usually stood, and Melin’s immediate family as well as several of her sisters and mother sat to the sides of the table where her coffin was placed. The service followed a standard pattern of a brief introductory prayer, a series of eulogies representing family, clan, Church Women’s group, and individual sentiments. The service concluded with a short prayer and a hymn. The coffin was then taken up by some young men and carried out of the church and along the path to the cemetery. As the procession approached the men’s house enclosure, the men walked the last fifty metres or so to the graveyard, while the women stopped beside the first bachelors’ house at the edge of the enclosure. At the graveside the coffin was laid beside the hole dug that morning. Men gathered around the grave blocking it from view of the women down the path. The pastor read the brief liturgy from a sheet of well-worn paper, his voice rising and carrying so that the women could hear what he was saying. When he finished the coffin was lowered into the grave by ropes, flowers were thrown into the grave by most of those assembled, and then earth was scooped, shovelled and pushed with digging irons on top of the coffin. Men took turns doing this, others pushing the pile of excavated earth towards the grave, then down into on top of the coffin. Many of them now cried, but there were no voiced lamentations, and while this was going on, the women rose en masse and walked quietly back to the village.

With Melin now buried, a quiet descended over the village as a set of mourning taboos came into effect until the completion of the first mortuary kastom. These taboos restricted the planting of new gardens, the use of fire to burn ground cover or rubbish, any loud talk or rambunctious behaviour, singing, and the wearing of bright clothing. Near relatives also faced specific restrictions regarding shaving or the cutting or combing of their hair. That evening the men of Iksil’s clan met at his house to plan their role in the kastom. They decided whom they would nominate from Melin’s clan to lead the kastom, and discussed the resources they need to marshal in order to fulfil their obligations, primarily fathoms of shell money and pigs. It had been decided that there would be a meeting the next day at the men’s house to formally plan the kastom, and
once their immediate business was done most of the men left, leaving Iksil with the group of young men from his son’s bachelor house to talk and then sleep. The rest of Iksil’s children had already been sent to sleep with various sisters and aunts of their mother.

The meeting at the men’s house the next day produced several surprises. Since the big man of Melin’s clan had left the island to join the Foursquare church, and had divorced himself from all customary obligations, the decision as to who should lead this kastom was not clear cut. The remaining most senior man of the clan was a bachelor in his late-thirties, and the senior big man of his moiety approached him, recognizing his seniority for that clan, and throwing a fathom of shell money at his feet, invited him to take up the responsibility of leading the kastom. This man rose and said that he had no experience in the work of kastom and that he was unwilling and unable to carry out a leadership role in this work. He bent over, retrieved the shell money and walked back to his moiety’s pre-eminent leader and tossed the fathom of stringed shells back at his feet. This action was greeted with much murmuring, but the moiety big man quickly motioned for quiet, then walked over to another man, one of Melin’s brothers, a young bachelor in his twenties, and tossed the looped shell money at his feet, asking him if he would now take up the burden. This man looked genuinely shocked. He sat for a moment before rising, and then speaking softly he said he too was not experienced or capable of such important work, and picking up the shell money he walked back to the moiety leader and dropped the bundle to the ground. Again a murmur of disquiet arose. The big man stood, picked up the shells and after a moment walked over to Melin’s son Junior and repeated his request and the tossing of the shell money in front of him. Junior sat for a moment; several young men near him spoke to him quietly as he sat still. When he rose, he quickly picked up the shell money and strode back to the big man, declining the offer, saying he was too young, once again tossing the bundle at the senior man’s feet.

There was a brief pause as the moiety big man conferred with a couple of other senior men before standing again, and taking up the roped shell money. This time he walked towards Alois Todowe, a man in his sixties and a senior big man who had led many kastom for his clan. Alois was a member of a different clan, but his and Melin’s clans were closely linked, as Alois’s clan had been the clan from which Melin’s had split approximately a century or so earlier. Alois stood and addressed the gathered men. He
said he was ready to take on the leadership role in the kastom, but that as his clan and Melin’s were small in number he suggested that they try a new approach, and pool the entire moiety’s resources in fulfilling the requirements. Furthermore, he suggested that if they followed that innovation, it would be necessary for the opposing moiety to combine to carry out the obligations of Iksil’s clan. Alois said if they followed this shortcut he would lead the kastom. In quick succession senior men of both moieties rose and agreed to this in turns. Once this was decided, Alois set the date of the kastom for the following week, and directed each moiety to meet right away, gather and count the shell money they had available and plan the allocation of pigs for the kastom. The meeting then adjourned, with the members of Alois’s moiety planning to immediately gather their shell money at the men’s house, and the members of Iksil’s moiety to meet underneath the house of one of his clan brothers.

The day of the angan (Lak: ‘to eat’) arrived the following week after a flurry of preparations. Each moiety provided pigs and looped bundles of shell money for the kastom. The pigs had been gathered and then penned in temporary enclosures in the middle of village. Taro, sweet potatoes and yams had been cultivated from both groups’ gardens. The morning of the kastom saw gangs of young men dispatched to climb and retrieve betel nut and kulau (green coconuts), as well as gather enough banana leaves to cover up the mumu (earth oven), and serve as a setting when the prepared food was laid out at the men’s house.

A large bonfire was started and rocks from a pile gathered for the occasion were heaped on top of it to ready the mumu. At the same time, the pigs were taken from their pens, had their feet tied, then were slung on poles and carried to the men’s house. One especially large pig was carried to the shore and placed in a dinghy that had just returned from the mainland with betel nut and coconuts, then transported to the men’s house by sea. Young men then dispatched the pigs. The pigs were muzzled with bits of ropes, some suffocating this way, others requiring young men to stand on bamboo poles pressed against their necks. Axes and knives were used to butcher the pigs at the shore’s edge, while the removed intestines were cleaned in the saltwater, and then quickly placed on the hot stones to be grilled by young boys. Holding onto the lengths of viscera like a bit of fishing line the boys flipped the intestines back and forth until they were smoking hot and well cooked. As leaves were used to gather up the blood of the pigs
and placed in bowls for later cooking with the tubers the women were preparing, the gathered men and boys munched on the grilled intestines as they finished preparing the pigs for the *mumu*. Soon the sides of pork were ready for the oven, and they were hauled and placed onto the hot stones. This involved much direction from senior men, with the stones being arranged by large pieces of split-bamboo ‘chopsticks’ called *kios*; the gutted pigs placed in order for them to be cooked properly. Once this was done more stones were heaped on top of the gutted pigs, then the entire *mumu* was covered with banana leaves and finally a sheet of damp copra sacks. There is an air of excitement to these happenings as pig butchering and communal *mumus* are largely confined to funeral feasts.

**Picture 1: Pig for *Angan kastom***

With the preparations for the feast now complete, men washed up then gathered adjacent to the beach in a wide circle around a clearing between the men’s house and the bachelor’s house at the edge of the *trium* men’s cult area. A young man from each moiety was chosen to participate in the first rite preceding the *angan* feast. Senior men chose two *kulau* of equal size and gave one to each of the two young men. As they stood side-by-side, they were told to prepare themselves, and each bent and banged his *kulau* against the ground cracking their husks but not splitting them to the point where they
would leak freely. They raised the green coconuts, and a senior man said ready, go! The two men began to squeeze their *kulau*, exerting enough pressure for the coconut juice to flow as they drank as quickly as they could. This contest elicited shouts of support for each moiety’s representative, and further shouts of victory when the first man, having drained his *kulau*, tossed it to the ground. There was backslapping, and joking as the race finished and the two men sat back down amongst their kinsmen. Betel nut and *kulau* were now shared out to all assembled, and as everyone settled down to drink and chew, some men shared tobacco and *Spia* sticks among themselves. A big man of each moiety now rose and laid out the gathered lengths of shell money in the middle of the clearing. They then began breaking the loops of money into arm lengths. Once this was done, they started from opposite ends of the clearing and moved in front of each seated man and boy, breaking even smaller lengths of shell money and tossing them on the ground before moving on to the next person. They distributed the lengths of shell money to recipients in this manner regardless of the moiety membership of the recipients. This took some time, as there was a large amount of shell money to be divided, and then distributed to all present. At the completion of this distribution, a brief lull preceded the formal speeches involved in the *angan* rite.

*Picture 2: Kulau drinking contest*
The first man to speak was Alois, the leader of this kastom. He began his speech by repeating twice the same phrase: *Ep Wol ki pung* (Lak: ‘Our plans have collapsed.’). He went on to list the failings of the current kastom. Several pigs that had been promised for the kastom had not been delivered. The shortcut taken in pooling moiety resources as opposed to using those of individual clans was meant to meet the requirements of the kastom. Yet there still were not enough pigs. The size of the pigs for the feast was not adequate. Several were smaller than desired, and there was not an especially large one to “go pas/go first” in the procession to the men’s house. There were enough lengths of shell money for the kastom, but for the size of the groups involved, entire moieties, there should have been more. Alois concluded by stating that if this was the way it was going to be in the future, it might be best if they quit holding kastom, and instead share a smaller, church-centred fellowship instead. In response, two men in succession said that they could not get their pigs to come to shore on the mainland to be brought to the island. They blamed the Foursquare young men who had been hunting with dogs, and must have frightened their pigs, causing them to go wild. Another man, said that not too many young men went to the mainland to feed their pigs often enough. He reminded all the gathered young men to think of their elder kin, and be ready with pigs for the kastom that may be required. The next senior man to speak said it was now a time of money. Several of the pigs for the kastom had had to be purchased from neighbouring villages. He exhorted the young men to save money to be able to buy pigs when it was required of them. Another man complained that a pig sent by his relatives in Siar village, had been replaced on the mainland by a smaller pig. One man explained that the pig he had marked for the kastom was pregnant, and he wanted the offspring to give to his children so that they would have pigs. The last man to speak regarding pigs explained why the pig his son had sold for the kastom was not as big as promised and required as the pig that would “go pas/go first”. His explanation changed the direction of the discussion to one focusing on external economic factors affecting the value of shell money.

This man explained that his son had agreed to sell his largest pig for four hundred kina (at the time approximately 250 Australian dollars). He had only received three hundred kina, and three *Pinas* (Lak: a bundle of ten fathoms of stringed shells) of shell money. When he heard that what he had received was to be the full purchase price, he substituted a smaller, but still large pig, in its place. The man said his son had set a price
in paper money, in kina, and the substitution of shell money was not agreed upon. Regardless of that, he argued that three pinas, valued at twenty kina apiece, still only added up to three hundred and sixty kina, and was short of the agreed price. His argument was responded to by one of the men who had organized the purchase of the pig in question. He argued that with the recent devaluation of the kina (close to 40% in a matter of months), the value of each pinas had risen to thirty kina. In support he pointed to the fact that bottles of the individual shells used to string into shell money had risen in Kokopo from twenty kina to thirty kina at the market. The Tolai people who extensively use a very similar type of shell money had convened a meeting, and the value of ten fathoms of shell money, equivalent to a pinas had been officially set at thirty kina now. In response, the father of the man who had sold the pig asked whether there had been a meeting or toksave (announcement) on Lambom that Lak shell money had changed in valuation. He argued that it had been standard practice for some years across the entire Lak region for one pinas to be bought or sold for twenty kina.

![Gathering shell money](image)

**Picture 3: Gathering shell money**

This statement led to a range of opinions being offered as to the proper valuation of Lak shell money and its relationship to wider economies. In support of the new valuation, one man explained that a sack of rice that cost less than twenty kina a few months
before, now was selling for over thirty kina in the trade stores in Kokopo. Another argued that the practice of selling Spia cigarette sticks for equal lengths of shell money required that the value of a *pinas* to be increased to thirty kina. Before the devaluation, a twenty kina box of Spia would get enough shell money in return to be re-assembled into a *pinas*. Now it took a thirty-two kina box of Spia to get enough shell money for a *pinas*. The man whose son’s pig was the basis of this debate weighed back in saying that no one on Lamtob or in Lak had decided on a new valuation. He argued that the shell money in question was their shell money, not the Tolai’s, nor that of the Chinese who ran the trade stores in Kokopo. He felt that if the valuation had to be changed, it would require the meeting of the concerned people in Lak; that it was not up to people from other places, or individuals in Lak to decide this change for all of Lak. In conclusion, he stated that if the value of a *pinas* rose too high, people would not have enough money to buy it when required, or would be hesitant to pay too high a price for something with their scarce cash resources.

**Picture 4: Breaking and distributing shell money**

His arguments led to much discussion amongst the men sitting around the clearing at the men’s house. A few minutes of this less formal discussion continued before the next senior man rose to speak. He said that the arguments for a local valuation of shell money
were correct, that a meeting should be held on Lambom in the future and that people of other Lak villages should be involved in deciding this important issue. However, he also believed that the arguments for the valuation of a *pinas* at thirty kina should stand for the time being. He pointed out that the Lak had originally had a quite distinct form of shell money from that of the Tolai, and that the term *sar*, now used for the current shell money, originally designated the smaller red shells now termed *mis*, like those used by the people of Lihir and other large islands off the east coast of New Ireland. The ancestors of the people of Lambom had decided to follow the Tolai people by using the current form of shell money, he stated. He felt that they should continue to follow the Tolai people in placing a new value on their shell money. The next man to speak supported his view. His assertion was that if the people of Lambom did not change the cash value of a *pinas* that in a short time it would be of no more value than a bottle of Coke, or a small packet of rice. This would be no good, he argued, because then a *pinas* would become “*samting nating*” (Tok Pisin: ‘worthless’, ‘of no value’, or ‘trivial’). He pointed to the fact that many recent marriages on Lambom had involved a cash component, whereas in the past bride price was paid totally in shell money, three to five *pinas* being the older norm. Now, in addition to the shell money cash was being demanded, and within a couple of years had risen from a twenty or fifty kina supplement, to a recent request for three hundred kina. He concluded: “*nogut yumi kamap olsen ol hailans ya, ol i save baim wan meri long hamas tausen kina na wan handret pik. Dispela pasin i no gut tumas/We don’t want to end up like people from the Highlands, they pay bride price of how many thousand kina and a hundred pigs. This type of practice is very bad*”.

With this speech, the official speeches of the *angan* were completed. Alois thanked everyone for their words, and said there was much to talk about and to decide because of this new thinking they were faced with. He called a close to the speeches and told everyone to relax, as soon they would have to take the pigs out of the *mumu*, and begin the distribution of food throughout the village.

This outline of the events surrounding the death of Melin Tokarabus, and the initial *kastom* it entailed, points to a range of issues affecting the place of Lambom in a range of wider systems. A preliminary analysis would highlight the crisis of village services and the access to health care in remote parts of PNG. Also of importance are the wide-
ranging effects of the schism produced when the new evangelical church arrived in Lambom on customary leadership and the management of resources (particularly pigs) required to meet customary obligations of mortuary feasting (see next chapter). The division of the community, with followers of the new church rejecting *kastom* events, has led to a crisis of leadership for those who still advocate mortuary feasting. The requirement of large sums of cash to carry out these *kastom* is a recent change that has wide-ranging effects. Finally, the effects of world-economic forces upon the valuation of the nation’s currency are intrinsically linked to more local and traditional forms of wealth in societies undergoing a transition to a cash economy. All of these factors are further linked into concepts of land-ownership, stewardship, and the process of traditional leadership that directs relations between, individuals, clans, and the land of a people.

![Image of women delivering taro](image)

**Picture 5: Women delivering taro for the Angan**

A few weeks after the *kastom* for Melin, a less public display of traditional practice was enacted for the young people of her clan. Without forewarning, the husband of one of Melin’s sisters instructed the young men of her clan to return with their sisters and mothers for an important meeting. The purpose of this gathering was not explained to either the young men or the women they were sent for, only the urgency of an immediate
meeting was communicated. Melin’s brother-in-law had planned it, when he approached another brother-in-law of another clan in order to discuss danger to their wives and children. The death of a young woman of Melin’s clan during childbirth a few years earlier was linked with Melin’s death and the fear that a sorcerer was targeting the women and children of the clan. The second man was member of a clan that included an elder man known to have significant knowledge of defence against sorcery. In secret the three of them discussed what needed to be done, and the first man was sent off to the bush to gather bark of a particular tree. The second man went to the mainland to a secret spot and returned with a small bit of red ochre. The night before their summons of their wives’ clan the ingredients were mixed together by the elder man, then incantations and other secret acts were carried out to prepare the concoction. Gathering behind one of the houses in a remote hamlet early on the morning of their summons, they were told that a sorcerer was trying to kill off their clan by attacking pregnant women. In order to protect themselves, their in-laws were going to use defensive sorcery on their behalf. The elder man was identified to those gathered as the source of the knowledge for this form of protection and he was the only man to have this save currently. They were asked to ingest a small bit of earth and bark which was put into their mouths by the elder man. They were told they now should not worry and in particular that the women should not be afraid to have children. This utilization of kastom in the form of esoteric knowledge was considered to be of a different order than the work involved with the preceding mortuary kastom. As the following case will show, although these two aspects of kastom were considered discrete as orders of knowledge, they often were called into practice as a result of the same particular event.

**Mortuary Kastom, Sorcery and Change**

The death of Pendingson Towilly was sudden and unexpected. Pendingson was a prominent young man of Lambom, who had government work experience in the provincial capital Kavieng, but lived most of the time on Lambom. In his mid-thirties, Pendingson had left work as a bureaucrat with the provincial government to take up a management position with Metlak Development Pty, the local landowners’ company dealing with the timber contractor Niugini Lumber. He had served several years in
Metlak’s management before returning to live on Lambom after a restructuring of the company. In early 1997 Pendingson went to work for the opposition politician Ezekiel Waisale, and Ephraim Apelis, the candidate standing for the national electorate of Namatanai against the Prime Minister and incumbent Sir Julius Chan. The national parliamentary elections were scheduled for early June of the year, and Pendingson’s job was to organize the opposition campaign in Lak.

Pendingson was instrumental in arranging the visit of the leader of the opposition, Sir Michael Somare, PNG’s first prime minister, to Lambom on the day before balloting on the island. Sir Michael’s arrival by helicopter was a big event on Lambom, and several hundred people attended the rally planned for the visit (discussed more fully in Chapter Five). The nation’s founding father made a huge impression, as his coming had only been rumoured, and his actual arrival showed the opposition’s ability to deliver on its promises. In a stunning reversal, the people of Lambom voted against Sir Julius for the first time in twenty-seven years, and the opposition candidate Ephraim Apelis won in what was considered the national election’s greatest upset (Post Courier, June 1997). Sir Julius’s Peoples Progress Party (PPP) had a well-established base on Lambom, but was able to only tally fifty-three of Lambom’s votes out of a total of two hundred and eighty cast. As Sir Julius lost by less than a hundred votes, many local pundits asserted it was Lambom’s swing to the opposition that unseated him. Pendingson was immediately hired as a part of the new Member of Parliament’s office, and had moved to Port Moresby soon after the election results were known.

In January of 1998, Pendingson was back on Lambom visiting during the holiday season. One day he had made plans to round Cape St George by canoe and overnight on the mainland with his cousin and a nephew. His cousin, a young man in his twenties, and his nephew a youth in his teens, were to precede Pendingson to the mainland opposite Lambom, and then they were to round the Cape later that afternoon. As the afternoon wore on, Pendingson’s two kinsmen waited for him at a stretch of beach on the mainland. They spent the time climbing for betel nut and fishing the reef, keeping an eye on the passage for sight of his canoe. It was getting late, and as soon as they saw his approaching canoe in the distance, the two of them decided to shove off and round the Cape and wait for him on their block of land on the other side of the mainland. They spent the night on the beach near Matataii, and were surprised when Pendingson did not
arrive by that evening. Reasoning that he must have gone back to Lambom for something he had forgotten, they were not concerned and bedded down for the night.

In the morning they hailed a passing canoe, to ask whether Pendingson was still planning on coming to their block. Word travelled to Lambom that Pendingson had not arrived on the mainland, and this aroused concern back on the island, as he had left the previous afternoon in his canoe. It was around noon that a dinghy arrived at Matataii to find Pendingson, and when it was certain that he was missing a search began, and Pendingson’s two young kinsmen rounded the Cape again to see if he had landed on the mainland and crossed overland to the East coast. They could find no sign of his canoe, or a campsite, and their worry mounted. By mid-afternoon a full-scale search had begun, with five of the island’s dinghies circling the island and the coastline of the mainland. Lambom was in a state of uproar with Pendingson’s kin shocked and their anxiety mounting. The search was widened with two dinghies heading south towards the open sea and Buka, and another heading west from the backside of the island, following the current of St George Channel headed for New Britain. By nightfall the dinghies returned and reported no sign of Pendingson.

That night at the men’s house, there was a meeting at which Lambom’s leaders discussed what had happened to Pendingson and what to do next. It was decided that a boat would go to Kokopo to ask for assistance in the search, and that dinghies would again be dispatched from Lambom to search the nearby seas. Word was sent across to the mainland, to be carried further up the East coast, and along the West coast towards Lamassa to keep on the lookout for any sign of Pendingson and his canoe. Despite these plans, the emerging consensus was that Pendingson was dead; that either his canoe had capsized or a shark had attacked him. Most men felt they would be better able to ascertain what happened after finding out what the next day’s search revealed. Back in the village, a group of clanswomen and in-laws had gathered at Pendingson’s parents’ house. There was much crying and comforting of the family and each other. Pendingson’s father was certain that his son was dead and that a shark had attacked his canoe. His repeated assertions of this opinion made those gathered very apprehensive, and the scene was one of mournful unease.
The next day ended without any sign at all of Pendingson or his canoe. Discussions at the men’s house turned to plans for a church service for his death, as it was considered unwise to allow a person to die without marking the occasion with prayer and the formalities of the church. It was decided that a funeral service would be held for Pendingson the next afternoon. The church’s youth group was organized to go and sit with the family at Pendingson’s parents’ house; they would spend the entire night singing hymns outside the house until the sun came up. The following morning saw the return of the dinghy from Kokopo. The authorities there had assured the boat’s crew that airplanes and ships in the vicinity would be informed by radio of the missing man and would be on the lookout for any sign of him.

In general, the church service that afternoon followed the sequence of a typical Lambom funeral, but with slight modifications. Without a coffin to carry in procession into the church, Pendingson’s family walked with the pastor holding his bible, along the flower-lined path and inside the church. The service itself was standard, as several of Pendingson’s kin sat at the front of the church facing the congregation, some standing in turn to briefly eulogize him, before the Pastor led prayers and followed the church service to its conclusion. Since there was no coffin, people dispersed after the service instead of moving to the cemetery for a burial.

After the church service, the men were called to the men’s house to plan the *kastom* for Pendingson. It was quickly decided that the senior big man of Pendingson’s clan would lead the *kastom*. A man in his seventies, he agreed immediately to sponsor the *kastom*, and accepted the fathom of shell money presented to him to seal his acceptance of the task. This big man had sponsored many *kastoms*, and he took charge setting the day for the *kastom* and calling a meeting of his clan’s men to organize the specifics involved at his house. Most other men remained at the men’s house, and the discussion now turned to the nature of Pendingson’s death. There was general agreement with Pendingson’s father Willy that a shark had killed him. For the people of Lambom, such a verdict meant only one thing: the dead man had been killed by *Iniet* sorcery. In response to my query regarding how one can tell a shark attack that has been brought about by sorcery from the actions of a shark alone, I received looks of disbelief. A senior man told me: “*Sak ino save kilim man, em man tasol* Sharks don’t kill people, people kill people.” Several men now pointed to other signs implying sorcery: the lack of any trace of
Pendingson or his canoe; his importance as a government leader, and the jealousy that that would evoke; the cries of a type of red-eyed blackbird heard in the triun at the south of the island some days before Pendingson’s disappearance. All these things pointed towards sorcery. It was agreed that a divinatory ritual would be held to ascertain the sorcerer after the kastom for Pendingson was completed.

It was several weeks after the kastom for Pendingson that the divination rite was planned to identify the sorcerer responsible for his death. Talk centered on Pendingson’s role in opposition politics that must have led to him being targeted for sorcery. Another young man from Lamassa had died suddenly during the campaign leading to the election. A dispute over the use of a clan boat for campaigning was the central issue involved in that death. Using a traditional Komkom (Lak: ‘sorcery’, ‘rite involved in identifying a sorcerer’) divination rite. The man responsible had been identified in Bakok village after a procession carrying a specially prepared post through the village ended with it pointed at his house. Although the accused denied responsibility, his family paid compensation and he left the region in fear of retaliation. Sir Julius’s local campaign manager also was the victim of sorcery, as he was involved in a car crash that seriously injured him and killed two of his passengers. Linking this to a plane crash that occurred during a previous election, the word spreading throughout Lak was that Iniet could find you on land, sea, or in the air. It was the consensus that someone had paid a sorcerer to use Iniet to kill Pendingson for similar reasons. Now it was up to the men of Lambom to find out who the sorcerer was.

It had been several years since a Komkom divination was held on Lambom. There was a fair amount of vocal resistance to holding the traditional form of divination because of its links to sorcerous knowledge. As well, the construction of the pole and the type of necessary materials required, and the words used in preparing the bamboo post were based in Iniet practices. This was considered to involve too much reliance on Ol Tewel (Tok Pisin: ‘devils’), in contrast to Lambom’s avowed Christian beliefs. A young man who had some knowledge of various other sorts of non-lethal magic, mainly love spells and weather magic, proposed a way out of the bind. He had learnt of a form of divination during his time at High School in Kavieng that did not involve the use of materials and spells considered incompatible with Christian values. This form of divination also had the added attraction of being able to identify potential targeted
victims of the sorcerer in question. He was asked to show the apparatus he would require to carry out the divination.

After a quick trip to the nearby bachelor’s house where he slept, he returned with a large piece of cardboard rolled into a cylinder, and the broken bottom of a round glass bottle. Unrolling the cardboard, he showed the assembled men the letters of the alphabet printed in rows across one side of the board. He explained that a senior man of the dead man’s clan had to ask questions concerning the next victims, and then he could ask for the identity of the sorcerer. The young man, himself a member of Pendingson’s clan, would join with two other members of the clan, and each would place a finger on the glass, which would move on its own to spell out the answers. It was quickly decided to immediately proceed with the divination. The first question asked concerned other potential targets of the sorcerer involved. As the young men sat next to their sheet of cardboard, surrounded by a large group of men, the name of a married man was spelled out. This was met by gasps, and the concerned look of consternation of the man identified. Again, the question was posed concerning other targets, and the next name spelled out was the brother of the first man identified. Both these men were the Ba (Lak: mother’s brother) of the youth who organized the divination. There were shouts of anger and cursing, and a general murmuring that was quickly hushed when the question of potential victims was asked again. This time there was no answer, and the glass skidded aimlessly off the cardboard sheet, out of the hands of the youths that had been touching it. Now the question was posed regarding the identity of the sorcerer who had killed Pendingson and who was threatening the two brothers. The name of a man who had recently left Lambom was spelled out, and this time the murmur turned to sustained shouts of anger.

The man identified as the sorcerer was a member of Pendingson’s clan. To work Iniet depended upon the sorcerer targeting members of his own clan. The man had left Lambom in a scandal, absconding with several hundred kina that had been raised to buy supplies for the island’s Sunday school. As a youth he had gained a reputation for being involved with another form of virulent sorcery, Tena Buai, that involved the poisoning of betel nut, and that could be lethal as well. One man recalled that a certain type of bird would call when the alleged sorcerer walked through the triun; a definite mark of a sorcerer. The death of a man, who had fallen from the top of a coconut palm a few years
previously, was now brought up. Again his clan links to the revealed sorcerer supported the divination. It was noted that the man was married to a woman from Siar village, and that he must have learned sorcery from other clan members in that village still renowned throughout all of New Ireland for its powerful sorcery. Another man related an incident that had occurred in Kokopo. He had been drinking with a group of Tolai men, and when he said that he was from Lambom he was asked whether he feared the identified sorcerer. He was told that the man had bragged one night when he was drunk that he knew Laskona Iniet, and that his sorcery from the southern tip of New Ireland was more powerful than the Tolai form, and that he had killed several men. All of these factors pointed to the efficacy of the divination, and those assembled felt that they had identified their nemesis. Several men vowed to kill him if he came back to Lambom. The father of the two men just recently identified as the next victims offered to use sorcery to kill the culprit. He would use a type of older sorcery little known, and no longer practiced, to redirect the poison aimed at his sons back at their attacker. Several men concurred but nothing was done at the time, and the meeting broke up as angry men made their way back to their homes in the village.

The events surrounding the death of Pendingson point out the changing factors surrounding the practice of divination and sorcery in Lambom. The role of politics in creating the jealousy and enmity that spurred allegations of sorcerous attacks is of note. The initial reluctance of the use of traditional sorcery-based means of divination due to Christian precepts is important. Lambom often defines itself in contrast to other Lak villages, in particular Siar, due to the disappearance of sorcery on the island. Lambom has grown to a community of over five hundred, far and away the most populous village in the Lak region. Other villages such as Siar and Matkamlagir have remained small, numbering no more than a hundred residents, much the same size as they are considered to always have been. The ability to carry out a divination rite that did not seem on the surface abhorrent to Christian concerns was made possible by the experiences of a young man who came by his knowledge while in town at High school --- in particular, the ability to provide the Ouija-board-like paraphernalia, pointing to connections beyond the traditional knowledge of the arcane arts of sorcery. Furthermore, it was through the divination that he carried out that an older form of sorcery, known to only a very few of
the oldest men of Lambom, was brought out into the open, once again to take its place in the repertoire of Lak lethal sorcery.

**Pidik**

Aspects of the two men’s cults practised on Lambom remained largely hidden from public view between 1996 and 1998 while I was on the island. *Tubuan* masks had reportedly attended the combined *lalamar/simen* mortuary feast I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, but the appropriateness of their participation in the future was a matter of debate. The local head of the United Church had made it clear that if *tubuan* did participate in future *simen* that the church would prohibit the erection of a cross as part of the *simen*. His argument was that “evil spirits” inhabit the masks when they are constructed and that certain accoutrements to the *tubuan* particularly the *ep sur* (Lak: lit, ‘Bone’) spear, and the blowing of ensorcelled *kampang*, involved “disturbing graves”. Despite the fact that the current *ep sur* kept in the men’s house had their ‘bone’ hafts carved from wood in the shape of a femur and did not include an actual bone, he remained adamant about banning the *tubuan*. The context of the schism involving the Foursquare church (see next chapter) had a part in his decision. However it is also true that based on his knowledge as an initiate of the *tubuan* cult he found aspects of it incompatible with church doctrine. Though no *tubuan* made a public appearance during my stay on Lambom one did appear in late 1998 within the secret confines of the *triun*.

As I was preparing to leave, Joseph Laiman decided that it would be a pity if I did not get to see a *tubuan* while on Lambom, so he put into effect the process that would lead to my initiation. Alois Todowe as my classificatory father on the island paid the shell money fee for my initiation and I provided a pig. Most aspects of the initiation are still considered secret on Lambom and I was asked not to reveal any of these, but I was given permission to write about the appearance of the *tubuan*. My initiation, and I was accompanied by a few other young boys and men, was termed “*baim lek long triun*’purchasing my steps into the *triun*. What happened was quite similar to what Albert experienced during 1986 when he was “initiated into the lowest grade of knowledge, what is called ‘buying the eye of *tubuan,*’ i.e. the right to see it in the *triun*” (Albert 1987b:18). I was told the name of this *tubuan*, which I was asked not to relate,
but allowed to photograph it and given permission to reproduce it. I was told that it was a great mother *tubuan, a kambentuktuk* form of the general type, *nataka*, which is the local term for *tubuan*. Neither of these terms had glosses --- they were categories for the masks they represented --- but both were Lak terms and I first heard them during this initiation. Part of the initiation did reveal aspects of the *tubuan*’s being that supported the church leader’s contentions about its nature. The men said they would continue the *tubuan* cult despite potential restrictions on its future public appearances. Soon after my initiation Alois Todowe purchased this *tubuan* from Joseph for cash and shell money.

![Picture 6: Penias and the kambentuktuk](image)

**Picture 6: Penias and the kambentuktuk**

Not long after this event the death of an elderly *bongian* woman occurred and this prompted the visit of the *talun*, the being at the focus of the other secret men’s cult.
the women were singing during the evening wake before a funeral planned for the following day they grew nervous and began to look around at each other. The cries of the *talun* could be heard from beyond the men’s house area. A series of massed, cascading whistle sounds rose and fell then grew louder as its source apparently came nearer. Soon the sound of the bullroarer could be heard and at this point all the women immediately gathered their young and ran inside the adjacent houses and closed all the doors and windows, extinguishing any lamps that were lit. As the keening combination of whistling and roaring grew louder, men arrived and put out the fire and the lamps that had been left unattended by the fleeing women. The sound surrounded the house and rose to a crescendo over a few minutes before retreating back the way it had come from.

The following day I was initiated into the *talun* cult along with over fifty other boys and young men. Again, aspects of the initiation and the secret of the *talun* were stressed and we were enjoined not to reveal the secrets involved with the cult. I noticed that one of the young men was the son of the church leader who was trying to restrict the *tubuan*. The leader was there as well and had paid the fee for his son’s initiation. Later when I asked him why the *talun* was acceptable as opposed to the *tubuan*, he offered a similar rationale. His response to my question was that the *talun* did not involve dead people’s bones. When pressed about the spiritual aspects of the *talun* he replied that the spirits involved were clan spirits and not other “satanic spirits and *tewels* (TOK PISIN: devils)”. This man’s understanding of the two cults and their practices was most certainly based on a wider experience than my own, and his opinion did hold more than a modicum of influence on Lambom; but other aspects of his differentiation between *tubuan* and *talun* were at play. These aspects are nested within the context of the church schism discussed in the following chapter, but suffice it to say for now that according to a select few elder cult leaders, though the *tubuan* appears to be the senior cult in Lak, the *talun* is actually older and more powerful. Why a distinction based on this knowledge may help explain the church leader’s actions in banning one cult’s appearance in mortuary practices while allowing the other will be taken up in the next chapter.
Short Cuts and the changing place of Kastom

As exhibited in other New Ireland ethnography (see Albert 1987, Wagner 1986, Clay 1986, and Foster 1995) the importance of mortuary rites for New Irelanders cannot be overemphasized. Often spectacular, as in the Malagan rites of northern New Ireland, or the feasts Wagner describes for the Barok people, mortuary customary events have been the focus of much of the anthropological work done in the region. Mortuary kastom is crucial in the process of social reproduction. Clan relations are affirmed and created anew in the related exchanges, which are regarded as necessary in order to finish the dead, to retire the exchange relations and obligations implicit in a person’s life set within a sub-clan. Leadership and land rights are expressed, challenged and confirmed through the series of ritual exchanges entailed in mortuary kastom.

Yet on Lambom certain principles regarding mortuary kastom have become secondary to more mundane concerns. When it comes to enacting kastom, the Lambom Island Lak have come to accept the practice of a range of ‘short cuts’. In rationalizing these they point to an understanding of the demands of everyday life in modern Papua New Guinea villages. Melin’s kastom was structured in a unique manner in order to overcome the leadership deficit within her clan and moiety by the defection of its leader and many of its most energetic young men. The reality of the divided nature of the community forced an innovation in an attempt to overcome a particular difficulty related to the schism. The aim was to carry out an efficacious kastom despite the lack of the leadership required within a particular clan. In retrospect, the fact that the kastom failed to satisfy many of its participants was not considered surprising by several of these men. The problem of leadership for this clan remained, but it would take a “narapela rot/a different path” to rectify this, and that was seen as an issue to be resolved by the clan when they next had to meet kastom requirements. The kastom did succeed in several ways. First, it provided a consensus that a similar approach in the future would not be attempted, and pointed to the work needed to correct the shortcomings of this particular event. In the angan speeches that followed, it allowed the issue of comparative value of cash and shell money to emerge as a problem that needed to be addressed. Most importantly, it pointed to the continuing implications of a religiously divided community. The schism between
the United Church and the Foursquare church was foregrounded, and I turn to these in the next chapter.

Within the context of a divided religious community, the implications of a range of *kastom* knowledge and practice had to be worked out. With the Foursquare disavowal of all *kastom*, members of the United Church had to figure out how *kastom* fit within the context of their form of Christian practice. Tensions between the United Church and certain practices involving *kastom* had to be addressed and ameliorated. Both the use of defensive protective sorcery in the case of Melin's clan, and the divination carried out for as a result of Pendencieson’s demise caused angst as to how these acts fit with Church practice. Criticism from the Foursquare congregation made those on the Island sensitive to the charge of paganism.
Chapter Four

SCHISM AND DISCONTINUITY: CHURCH AND
REFORMATION ON LAMBOM ISLAND

In the previous chapter the United Church leadership was shown to be involved in a critical relationship with *kastom* practices. Certain *kastom* events were shown to be the subject of contestation over whether particular forms of knowledge and performance were appropriate practices for a Christian community. Some beliefs and events were denigrated as not being truly *kastom* because of their external origins. Other aspects of *kastom* were judged to involve acts or knowledge considered incompatible with Christian tenets. The incidents described were only the most recent that show the tension between *kastom* and Christianity. The United Church’s attitude to *kastom* has been evolving and practices deemed acceptable only a few years before are now subject to proposed sanctions for those who are involved with them.

This changing dialectic between Church and *kastom* has not emerged in a vacuum. As the realities of modern political economy described in Chapter Two led to pressures to modify *kastom* events, through the trying of various short cuts, so does the wider religious context on Lambom inform the moral evaluation of *kastom* in people’s minds. The impetus for Church critiques and attempts to control *kastom* emerge from attempts to clarify the island community’s position towards traditional ways. This process is occurring within the context of contrasting United Church beliefs and practices with those of the recently established Foursquare church. Much of the difference between the United Church and the Foursquare church revolves around their contrasting views on *kastom*. Yet this is only part of the story when it comes to the way the competing churches are shaping the everyday life of the Lambom community today. The basis of this schism is the subject of this chapter. The role the schism plays, and its contextual shaping of current attitudes to traditional ways, goes some way towards explaining the impetus for United Church attitudes towards *kastom*. However that is only one aspect of
the way the schism affects life today for the Lambom community. It is to the wider ranging dilemma that this schism plays that I turn to now.

It is not exaggeration to say that Lambom Island is in the midst of a deep crisis. It is the topic of much conversation, and aspects of it are evident on a daily basis. The crisis of faith for the community permeates every strand of social structure as well as most aspects of everyday life. Unity has been breached with the acrimonious division of the community into two villages based on membership in rival churches. The people of Lambom first fell under the sphere of influence of the Methodist Church during early colonial times. Most of New Ireland was evangelized by Catholic orders during the German era of the late nineteenth century. However, it was the nearby mission station established by the Reverend George Brown at the Duke of York islands that became the entry point for Christianity into the south and west of New Ireland. As the Methodist church merged with other protestant denominations and became the United Church (locally referred to as UC), the people of Lambom celebrated the centenary of their church in the New Guinea Islands along with PNG's independence in 1975 (Threllfall 1975). While their Lak kin on the East Coast of New Ireland were predominantly Catholic, there was little animosity between the churches in the Lak region, and each church respected the sphere of influence of the other. The Lak region in general had maintained this status quo from well before independence until the recent past, despite the spread of other churches, such as the Seventh Day Adventists (referred to locally in Tok Pisin as Sevende), in other parts of the Islands region. The religious denominational map of the south of New Ireland had remained stable for at least one hundred years by the mid-1990s, and the region was free of factional squabbles that had arisen in other parts of the country. With the arrival of the Foursquare Baptist Church on Lambom Island in 1994, all of that changed.

Within a year of the establishment of the new church, Lambom Island was rocked with conflict. Numerous houses were burned, dozens of canoes were smashed, and several people were severely beaten. The situation got so out of hand that the riot squad, based three hundred kilometres away in the provincial capital of Kavieng, was called in to settle the community. The immediate result of the violence was the division of the community into two villages, with the Foursquare members being expelled from the island and establishing a village across the passage from the island on the mainland. The
division of Lambom into rival camps on opposite sides of the passage represents a split that is greater than the mere physical space that separates the two communities. The passage is a tangible mark of the division that remains to this day. Their dispute has turned bloody on numerous occasions since the initial schism, and continues to literally divide families. The physical gulf separating the two churches is surpassed by the depth of mistrust, suspicion, and animosity that many members of each hold for the other. The schism is particularly painful because this divide has led to the separation of families, with siblings riven from siblings, and parents split from their children.

In order to understand the nature of this divide and its significance for the people of Lambom, I will begin by outlining some recent events relating to the schism. Then I will turn to an examination of how the schism relates to the differing structures and practice of the rival forms of worship. The role of the United Church in the social structure of daily life, in particular in ordering temporal and social groups, will demonstrate why a rival church is perceived as such a threat on so many levels. An examination of the events surrounding the establishment of the Foursquare church highlights the confrontational potential of radical change to a received hegemony. As well, the differences in the rival churches’ worship practices will be analysed to reveal the opposing worldviews each hold as reflections of how the different communities interpret and understand their encounter with modernity in daily life.

In concluding this chapter I will examine the recent steps towards a détente between the churches through the activities of the UC youth group. Analysis of this event allows an appreciation of the continuing, underlying factors at work in keeping the community fractured.

_Ples i bruk: Schism and social fault lines_

Almost any dispute that arises at Lambom in recent times can be fit within the wider frame of the ongoing schism between the UC and the Foursquare church. Customary events that require clan leadership and resources, such as the exchange of pigs or feasts providing pork, point out some of the consequences of the social division within the community. Certain clans have lost their senior big men to the new church, which has
disassociated itself from *kastom* practices, including all traditional rites and exchange obligations. The founding of the Foursquare community on the mainland and the establishment of their gardens there has led to disputes over pigs. The Lambom community has kept its pigs on the mainland since before independence, letting them roam the steep mountainsides during the day, and then calling them to the beach to be fed each evening. Now there are gardens on the mainland and pigs do not seem to consider religious affiliation when they are hungry. Inevitably, this has led to disagreements, revolving around whether the pigs or the gardens should be fenced in. This has led to competing claims for compensation for pigs and damaged gardens that are seldom resolved. Although the Foursquare members no longer keep pigs, the young men among them still hunt. What is considered a wild pig is in the eye of the man holding a spear, and the hunting dogs chase whatever pig they scent. It has happened more than once when a *kastom* event is imminent and the difficulties of locating enough pigs for the event or a capable big man to lead it become obvious, that the emergence of the Foursquare church is seen as being at the root of the problem.

An attempt by the Island community to call the mainland hunters to account occurred near the end of my field stay. In response to a message passed to the Foursquare community decrying the case of a recently killed pig, the following note was received in return on the island. The Foursquare members who wrote it responded to the call for compensation by recasting the particular case mentioned explicitly into a wider frame of the ongoing dispute between the two communities.

*To Komiti,*

*Tenkyu tru long toksave i kam long mipela long pik. Dispela emi maus bilong mipela ol boys. Mipela i bin killim ol pik—olsem—bai mipela ino nap kam long ailan long tirinde. Risen, olsem you gat toktok long mipela, you mas kam long tirinde, wantaim ol lain pik blong ol, na karim pe bilong olgeta gaden start long 1997 ikam long 98 tirinde (cash money plis). Em tasol bai mipela i wetim yu istap—tenkyu,*

*By ol boy’s*
To Committee leader,

Thank you for the message that came to us about pigs. This is the voice of us boys. We killed the pigs—but—we will not be able to come to the island on Wednesday. The reason, if you got words for us, you must come on Thursday, with the all the pigs' owners, and bring pay for all gardens from 1997 to 98 Wednesday (cash money please). That's all we await you—thank you,

Signed the boys

The komiti read this reply out to the people gathered at lain that Wednesday. It was met with angry calls for action. A particularly hot-headed young man who had been involved in the initial fight with the Foursquare members was sent for so he could hear the news, but he was nowhere to be found and the meeting ended with the usual assignment of work. I believe that an immediate expedition to the mainland would have been led by the young man if he had been located. As it was the tension soon broke out into violence.

A dispute within the Kamrai clan of Lambom and the East Coast village of Matkamlagir turned violent when mapped onto the Lambom UC/Foursquare divide. A Kamrai man was staying with his in-laws on Lambom Island before leaving the next morning to sell copra in Kokopo. The outboard boat which his clan had purchased with funds from their timber royalty was tied up at the shore by his in-law's house. During the night, some Kamrai men from the Foursquare community on the mainland had come and unmoored the dinghy, stealthily paddling across the passage, where they held it. A message was sent to the island the next morning saying that the division of royalty within Kamrai clan was being disputed by Lambom clan members. They planned on holding the boat until a meeting with the clan leadership could be arranged to discuss a settlement. The man from Matkamlagir and his crew and passengers were quite upset, and organized the island's komiti (local government leader) and some other men to go to the mainland and reclaim the boat. Several young men volunteered to go along, including most of the island's reputed toughs. None of the island's members of the Kamrai clan, belonging to a different sub-clan, went along. As the boat left, one young Kamrai man told me it was clan business, and he was not happy to see other clan's raskols (Tok Pisin: hoodlums) get involved. A standoff ensued when a large group of Foursquare men, most of other clans than Kamrai as well, refused to allow the removal of the dinghy from their beach.
A fight erupted; several young men were bloodied, the most serious injuries being an islander losing some teeth and a mainland receiving a broken jaw. Upon their return to the island, the fight was no longer considered a Kamrai issue; rather it was being portrayed as a Foursquare attack on law abiding UC members. Again, police were involved, and when the Lambom’s *komiti* next visited Kokopo, Foursquare members made a complaint to police and he was arrested and held in the station’s cells for several days before being released. The *komiti* was eventually released and charges were not brought against him but this did not end the general lack of good will between the church communities.

A Foursquare gathering at Lamassa, about ten kilometres north of Lambom, provided the field for the continuing drama to be played out between the rival churches\(^{28}\). In order to disrupt the gathering, a group of men schooled in weather magic had combined their talents to make the seas rough, and thereby discourage travel from various communities to the Lamassa meeting. Lambom Island’s pre-eminent weather sorcerer, a youth of approximately fifteen years of age, showed me the ritual paraphernalia he had gathered to make the winds blow and the seas dangerous. He was acting in concert with the man from Lamassa who had taught him weather magic. This occurred during February of 1997, and Cyclone Justin which remained off the Queensland coast for several weeks, made travel from Lambom Island impossible for over four weeks. The wind destroyed gardens, blowing away and drying out crops; canoes were unable to safely navigate their way to get water, it was impossible to fish or gather food from the reef, and even walking in the bush was dangerous because of the steady fall of coconuts—most paths being vulnerable to a veritable carpet-bombing of the nuts as well as other debris. My young sorcerer friend was quite impressed when told that ‘his’ wind had made the radio news. When I tried to say that the storm was not local but located several hundred kilometres away, he explained to me the singular nature of several weather sorcerers combining their individual powers across widely spread focal sites of their magic. When the winds finally did subside, and the Foursquare gathering belatedly began, a dispute arose over the placing of a temporary latrine upstream of the land of a UC member. In the end, the toilet was blown up with dynamite liberated by a vacationing serviceman from his base, originally earmarked for lagoon fishing, but applied to the service of his
co-church members. Another fight erupted, with several Foursquare members injured in the attack led by the serviceman. Peace was eventually restored with the dispersal of the Foursquare celebrants marking the onset of an uneasy local truce at Lamassa.

This is just a sampling of some of the events that occurred during the time of my fieldwork that involved opposition between the Foursquare and United Churches. It is not overly dramatic to state that the tension between these churches is simmering constantly, and only awaits the spark of specific disputes and particular incidents, a constant state of tension ready to boil over into violence. Evidence of the ubiquity of the tension related to church affiliation in Lambom is displayed in the views expressed by members of each group about the other’s religion. The incendiary nature of these views, and the vehemence with which they are expressed, sheds light on the volatility of the current situation in Lambom. In order to provide a fuller basis for understanding that situation I now turn to an examination of the differences between the rival churches and the events that led to the establishment of the Foursquare church and the subsequent schism of the community.

**Opposing churches and manner of worship**

As a preface to my account of differences between the two churches and their manner of worship, it is relevant to note that my perspective of this is based on a continuous placement within the UC community. I only saw Foursquare practices when UC people saw them, as I was based on the Island. The UC community was my home during my fieldwork and members actively discouraged me from being involved with Foursquare people and activities. This discouragement was carried out in a manner not dissimilar from the way members of the UC community watched each other. There was active monitoring of UC community members’ contacts across the passage, and such connections were often discussed. Once I have described these material and behavioural differences, I will return to analyse how these practices ground the opposing views these churches hold of each other. My aim is to analyse this identity opposition for the Lak

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28 Similar village divides existed elsewhere in Lak with new Foursquare church communities being established separate from their villages of origin.
and show how this religious divide is materially and actively produced in the wider Lambom community.

Despite the division within the wider Lambom community followers of both churches still share a common place on the shores of the passage between Lambom and the southern tip of the island of New Ireland. They live in a common space and within an overlapping landscape of place, gardens, coconut lains, and fishing reefs. The separate worldviews each church displays through their order and actions reflect upon each community’s current understanding and engagement with modernity. It is the way that modernity is differentially experienced and interpreted through this religious schism that I argue underpins the schism.

The United Church and the structure of daily life

The United Church building on Lambom is a structure which is standard to UC in the New Ireland and New Britain region. It consists of a wooden frame built on a cement foundation. The outer walls are painted white with a sky blue trim. There are tall paired doors opening to a room of benches fronted by an altar on a raised platform behind which are arrayed a small curtained doorway to an alcove with benches on either side that face back towards the rows of benches for the congregation. The space is airy, with tall windows, and a high inverted V ceiling that opens further with the tower of a steeple visible over the front dais.

To understand why this religious schism presents such a crisis of existence for the Lambom community it is necessary to appreciate the organizing role the church plays in all aspects of daily life. Firstly, the UC provides the organizing framework temporally, through its weekly schedule, and annual cycle of religious commemoration. As well as this ordering of time, the UC provides the basic principles for ordering people into classificatory groups --- groups that manifest themselves visibly, and in a regular fashion, that is not apparent with other such groupings on Lambom.

When describing the way that the week is ordered by church imperatives, the overwhelming importance of Sunday as the Sabbath day is apparent. Sunday is a day of rest; all things considered work are forbidden. After breakfast with their parents the
young men collect their Sunday finery and head off to the men’s house to wash, shave and dress. Young women prepare breakfast before tending to their morning toilet, then dress themselves in their brightest *meri blaus* (Tok Pisin: woman’s smock) at their parents’ house. This is the one day when it is expected that people will take pride in their clothing and everyone will look their best. Canoes full of families land at their various relatives’ beachfront, and people take special care not to get their clothing wet as they disembark. Married women ready their children for Sunday school or services, and then lead their families to church. Most married men gather at the men’s house for a wash on the beach and a chat and to dress, before they file down the village path back to church.

The church bell is tolled three times to mark the beginning of the three introductory phases of Sunday services. This procedure occurs twice during the day, as there are morning and afternoon services, featuring different preachers, and lasting about an hour each on most occasions. After the morning service women and girls finish preparations for the mid-day meal, and little girls can be seen carrying covered plates back and forth throughout the village, from household to household, as kin share their special bounties with each other. These plates are washed and kept and returned with a reciprocal meal the following Sunday. This meal usually features a variety of foods, and is considered an opportunity to give thanks for the blessings of the lord. It is an opportunity for the head of a household to give grace for his gathered family. After this meal, there is a general washing up, then people will rest and nap, until the afternoon services at 3 pm. The general tone of the rest of the day is one of quiet reflection and family gatherings. At night, the leaders of the church meet to assign various tasks, such as visitations to pray with the sick, and allow various preachers to discuss and work on their upcoming sermons.

Other activities that are church-centred fill out a significant portion of the rest of the week. Monday night is set aside for devotion: a combination of Bible study and prayer meeting that is attended by various members of the community. On Tuesday nights the church’s ministry group meets in the church, to practice songs on their instruments, and plan out their program of performance for the rest of the week.
Wednesday mornings are set aside for the church lain (Tok Pisin: roll call), and the assigning of community work specifically for the benefit of the church. In contrast to the Monday morning lain which deals with general community work, the entire community regularly attends this work muster. Slackers are summoned whereas the Monday lain informally tolerates truancy within limits. Wednesday evenings are devoted to meetings of the UC’s women’s group; a prayer meeting and organizational planning for the activities of the church’s women. After dinner on Thursdays, family fellowship is held, with various households grouping together to sing hymns, share Bible readings, and pray together. Some older members of the community dislike this form of worship because close in-laws violate requisite taboos and come within proximity of their appropriate sense of personal space. One younger member of the ministry group (see below) chastised such behaviour saying he would not let such beliefs keep him from the lord’s work. In response more conservative people were not surprised by his statement. These men mentioned that the young man in question did not let anything keep him from drinking and selling bootleg to the boys from one bachelor’s house. Only a certain amount of cheek is tolerated. But there is a new economy of holy exuberance and self righteousness that some older members of the community find unappealing.

Friday night sees the gathering of the Youth group, where songs of praise are sung, and followed by a service and fellowship meeting held within the church. Saturday is invariably spent fishing and visiting gardens, in order to gather the foodstuffs for Sunday’s meals. The UC provides the content and sets the rhythm for the entire week’s events. As well as this weekly structuring of time, the annual cycle of holidays and events are marked through church-centred events.

The United Church’s influence on ordering Lambom’s social structure also extended to the classification and composition of social groups. Though this ordering in many ways mirrored traditional ways of thinking about how people are variously categorised, it allowed for the gathering of members of these categories into manifest assemblages.

The women’s group within the UC is the largest of the church’s official segment. It is composed predominantly of married women. Although this is a category that is considered to exist regardless of church definitions, in practice the grouping of women regardless of clan affiliation into such a large conglomeration is unprecedented. The
women elect their own leaders for this group, following guidelines set down by the UC hierarchy. The activities are mainly focused upon planning events that allow the local women to participate in the wider UC calendar of activities. Much fund raising is done, with the women holding markets once or twice a month, to sell garden produce and cooked meals, getting cash for their treasury. Once a year there is a regional circuit wide women’s meeting, were all the women attend to meet as members of the UC community for the region. This type of travel has no pre-cursors outside of the UC framework. Leaders of the women’s group travel to a variety of church sponsored meetings apart from the wider community’s membership. A group of 70 women travelled to the provincial capital of Kavieng to march in a special church gathering in 1996, and no one could remember that number of women travelling such a distance prior to that occasion.

**Picture 7: Women’s groups marching at the annual circuit meeting 1998**

The UC youth group is the next largest group within the church’s various subdivisions. The youth group is made up of all the unmarried men and women who are old enough to have finished primary school (approximately fourteen or fifteen years of age). Several of the youth group are aged in their forties, with more than a few members noted as ‘waitgras’ (Tok Pisin: grey-haired). Again there is some correspondence between prior
categorizations of unmarried people as a group: bachelors traditionally, and continue to, live apart from the rest of the community, in communal bachelor houses located in the men’s house enclosure. Yet there is no precedent for the gathering together of both men and women within a single grouping. In fact, the UC youth group is the only venue for these unmarried men and women to gather together that is considered appropriate. Youth group Friday services are unique in that male and female members are allowed to, and actually encouraged, to sit side-by-side in the church. In actual practice though many youth are reticent to sit next to members of the opposite sex, and admit ‘semi/shyness’ in remaining segmented into groups of men and women, some mixing does occur. This is in contrast to all other public church organized gatherings, and regular Sunday worship, were men sit on the right hand pews and women sit on the left side. Besides the weekly youth services, the group raises funds for the attendance of youth conferences within the local church circuit as well as province wide youth retreats. Within their weekly youth service, they add to the usual preaching and Bible readings, a range of activities including drama and quiz nights, singing praise songs that involve ‘actions’ such as hand movements and controlled stepping to the songs words, as the basis of their fellowship. Many people point to the role the group plays in making people ‘hamamas/joyful’ in their church activities and gatherings.

The smallest group that exists within the UC structure is the ministry group. There are seldom more than a dozen members of this group. It is made up primarily of young men, though there have been occasions when young women and senior men have been a part of the group. The ministry group is responsible for providing the musical component of various church services when required. They also have a directive to minister to the church community at large, but what this actually might entail seems to be unclear. The young men who made up the group during my stay on Lambom lived together in a small ‘haus pasindia/visitors house’ in the middle of the village, adjacent to the church. There they store their guitars, keyboards, and drums and microphones, and practice their songs acoustically when they are not preparing on their electrical instruments inside the church when the generator is running. One unique feature of this group is that of the members who joined during my time on Lambom, all had recently committed some sort of moral transgression before becoming part of the group. One educated youth leader who had spent a fair amount of time in town told me that the ministry was like a ‘rehab’ for the
island’s sinners. He said it was a way for those who had made moral transgressions to re-enter the island and church community and reform themselves. Aside from this fact, the ministry was a small group that limited its membership; current members decided when and if to accept prospective members. One young man told me that many people wanted to join the ministry group because of the access to electric musical instruments, and the chance to perform in front of the community on a regular basis. The ministry did not travel widely as part of its function, and there were no circuit or province wide formal organizations dedicated to its interests. However, it was common for the ministry group to coordinate an exchange visit with the nearby community of Lamassa, whereby Lambom’s ministry would visit there once or twice a year, on the same day that Lamassa’s ministry would perform on Lambom.

In addition, all these aforementioned groups exist as corporate bodies that can be hired to do labour such as clearing ground, gathering coconuts, and cutting coconuts for copra production. A good portion of the funds raised by these groups is raised in this manner.

There is a group that is not formally named, consisting of all the community’s married adults, that I term elders. It is sub-divided into three categories, based upon one’s standing within the community along the grounds of church obedience and participation. The senior most grade, are the leaders of the churches various groups, its executive office holders, and older people considered especially devout. The next grade includes most married people who attend church regularly, take part in most of the church’s work, and have not been guilty of any moral transgressions. The last group is a temporary gathering for those who have recently sinned in a manner that has become widely known. It is probationary in that members of this grade are expected to attend meetings and repent their sins, and avoid various sorts of sins for a period that varies between a month or two. This is the smallest group within the elders, and people are assigned to it by a vote when their sins require the attention of the group.

Overall, these orders within the UC structure formalize age grades and gender groupings. They define and allow for the expression of particular interests within the United Church membership, and aim to address the range of daily life experiences that exist within the population as a religious community. The central role of church structure and practices for life on Lambom is accepted by most of the island’s
The centrality of the church in ordering daily life was challenged with the arrival of the International Foursquare Church of the Gospel in 1994. The founding of the Foursquare church on Lambom led to a division within the community that festers to this day, as is evidenced in the resistance by UC leaders of attempts to heal the schism described later in this chapter.

The Coming of the Foursquare Church and the initial Schism

The Foursquare church on Lambom is the local version of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. This church was founded by the first evangelist of the airwaves, Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, in the 1920s. The church was established in PNG in 1956 by American missionaries. According to the Foursquare website there are currently 1,125 churches in PNG today with a membership of 56,222 people (http://www.foursquare.org/). The church also runs two Bible colleges in the country, and a visit to one of these by a young man from Lambom was the first step in its introduction to the region. At that time this young was a youth leader in the UC group on Lambom. He had used church support to go to the town of Madang on the New Guinea mainland in order to take Bible study courses. As the current UC pastor told me, he took advantage of a UC initiative to reward future church leaders and support their religious studies. Once in town he abandoned his UC studies and signed up for courses at the Foursquare Bible college.

Upon his return to Lambom in the early 1990s he took up his leadership role in the UC youth group and immediately began to preach the imminence of the end times. He exhorted the youth to personally experience God through the powers of the holy spirit. His directions manifest itself in a type of worship that involved individuals expressing the presence of the holy spirit while they prayed. The youth would sway and move about

29Sister Aimee the founder of the church led what was a national phenomenon when she took to the airwaves. In many ways she was a precursor to the media evangelists of the late 20th century America. She built a fabulous cathedral in Los Angeles. A charismatic populist, she was a pioneer not only due to her media path breaking and her gender, but also in the national scope of her power. She forced Hoover to reverse a decision to close down her broadcasts. She also fell from grace in a manner similar to some of her media savvy successors who used television in the 1980s to become national power brokers: Sister Aimee was involved in a sex scandal when she disappeared to Mexico with the married leader of her cathedral’s choir. Her influence waned but her church has continued to grow since her passing.
performing actions as each worshipper would preach his own sermon while accompanying the singing of hymns by the choir. This type of frenetic prayer and unsynchronized movement was a new thing on Lambom. It became the focus of much talk and attention for the wider UC congregation. The central beliefs he preached and the form of worship he introduced to the youth group became of growing concern to UC church elders. The question arose whether this new type of worship, this new thing, was actually a new religion. It was decided by the UC hierarchy on Lambom that the actions of the youth group were not appropriate or in accordance with UC practice. The church leaders called the youth group to a meeting and pronounced their decision that this type of worship was to be forbidden and the youth leader should step down from his position.

It was revealed at the meeting that the concerns of elders were well founded, that this was indeed a new lotu. The youth leader stated as much. He agreed to step down from his leadership in the UC youth group and subsequently organized his followers to move to the mainland and build a church on the land of one of his supporters. About forty people took part in this initial move. However the move was not done with alacrity, due to the basic logistics of a lack of shelter. As people came to terms with the impending split tensions continued to rise. The spark for outright hostilities and conflict was the youth leader’s attempt to enter the trium/men’s cult tabooed area. He entered with a group of followers approaching the men’s house and loudly saying he was coming to expose the devil worship involved with the tubuan cult. This was an assault on the core of kastom at its heartland. The big men present that day called upon the nearby bachelors to stop the interlopers and a fight ensued. The Foursquare were badly beaten and chased away. The Foursquare contingent was forced to leave the island. As families were split and fence sitters forced to make a decision tensions remained high. Houses of those who had already left for the mainland were burnt on the order of UC and kastom leaders. This led to further disputes and supporters of the Foursquare were forced to move to the mainland. Canoes were burnt as well, and an uneasy truce eventuated with the subsequent arrival of the riot squad from Kavieng, which threatened to burn UC houses if the violence was not ended. In the ensuing year a number of UC members

\[30\] The Lak experience here is comparable to events reported by Errington and Gewertz on Karavar in nearby East New Britain a few years earlier where “policemen were intervening in conflicts between members of evangelical churches and those claiming to be the followers of “custom.” These conflicts had become sufficiently chronic and acute that one government official characterized them to us as “the holy wars.” (1995:133n9)
defected to the Foursquare church with the new village on the mainland reaching a population of approximately one hundred people. This represented close to twenty percent of the resident population of Lambom prior to the schism.

During 1995 the Foursquare congregation worshipped in a temporary structure as houses were built for the burgeoning community. In 1996 they began construction of their own church. The Foursquare community constructed their church on the mainland following the standard plans provided by their order. The church was an open-air structure, with drywall board sides set on a concrete frame with posts supporting the roof above. Each of the four walls had one of the symbols of the church. They held services seven nights a week using electric music to accompany their marathon worship sessions.

The leadership of the church was known on Lambom with several young men prominent, but the structure and hierarchy of the Foursquare movement was not fully understood or visible to the island community. One group that was visible and the topic of much talk on the island was the Foursquare equivalent of the Rumai Dalwan, the Waria grup/Warrior group. The young single men on the mainland lived separately from the family houses. This was a similar arrangement to the island practice of separating bachelors into rumai dalwan on Lambom. On Lambom these bachelors are the primary workforce for kastom endeavours. They live a life of leisure in general, punctuated by periods of fulfilling the demands of their clan leaders in meeting the strictures of kastom. Their counterpart bachelors on the mainland were charged with the inverse task of actively confronting the aspects of the environment deemed satanic by their church. The Waria were reported to roam the landscape at night, congregating at masalai places, sites linked with particular spirits. There they would commence shouting and testifying to the power of God in an attempt to chase the spirits away. According to Islanders, they had attempted this at Wat Longor, the southernmost point of the island, in order to banish the snake masalai Alirpukai. They had also attempted this form of exorcism on the mainland near the lighthouse at Cape St George, hoping to dispel the influence of Kaburling, another snake masalai. The purpose of these missions was relayed to a group

31 According to their website the Foursquare Church believes in: a literal reading of scripture; the trinity; original sin; Jesus’ sacrifice; salvation through grace alone and not works; repentance; being born anew in Christ; daily Christian life; water baptism; baptism in the Holy Spirit; the Spirit-filled life; the second coming; divine healing; evangelism; and tithing. (http://www.foursquare.org/landing_pages/4,3.html).
of UC bachelors when a party of ‘two squares’ visited them one afternoon. They admitted their shared belief in the reality of these spirits and their fear in confronting them. They also admitted that they were unsure if their actions were successful in banishing the masalai and said there were plans to continue these attempts to clear the land of evil spirits. They mentioned that a future site might be the small island of Latau, where bun latau, the old man of Latau spirit resided. In some sense this type of activity was interpreted as similar to the attempt to violate the triun, but to date this has not elicited a similar reaction from the UC and kastom leadership. The island community saw these spirits as beyond their control, and accepted these masalai as the source of potentially dangerous and capricious actions.

The views

Though there have been very few opportunities for UC members to observe Foursquare worship firsthand, this has not limited the number of people holding strong opinions about the new church. From the point of view of many members of the United Church, the Foursquare Church is an interloper in their region of New Ireland. One man jokingly refers to the Foursquare as a ‘collection church’: “they collect members from the other churches, the Catholics and the UC”, he said. “Ol i save brukim banis bilong ol narapela lotu/They trespass on territory that belongs to other faiths” (tok pisin). A UC leader says they are jealous of, and seek to become like, white men:

Dispela lain, ol i laik kamap olsem masta, yah. Sapos yu lukluk long pasin bilong ol, ol ino save kaikai buai, na ol ino save pasim laplap. Nogat, yah. Ol i bilas olgeta taim long singles, na tit bilong ol i wait nogut tru, na skin bilong ol ino blek tumas nau/This group, they want to become like Europeans. If you look at their practices, they don’t chew betel nut, and they don’t wear laplaps. No way. They dress up in shirts. Their teeth are very white, and their skin is lighter.

Much of their preaching is done in English, another man noted, supporting the view that the Foursquare church is outside and above the rest of the community. This points to the

32 The UC designation for ‘backsliding’ Foursquare members who smoke and chew betel nut when they come to the island. A comparable case of ‘backsliding’ is noted amongst evangelicals on Karavar (Errington and Gewertz 1995:133n7).
perception amongst UC members that the Foursquares consider themselves better than their fellow Lak.

Another source of anger against the Foursquare is their withdrawal from customary obligations, and their criticism of all kastom as devil worship. The UC pastor epitomizes this view when he says that the Foursquare act “holier than thou”. The pastor points to the Bible’s dictum of leaving judgement to God, and argues that the Foursquare is a “false church”. He contrasts them with the Catholic Church in New Ireland, which has co-existed with the UC for a long time and does not try to steal its members. He states that the UC church is a real church: “Mipela ol man bilong Kristen sios tru. Lotu bilong ol, em i samting bilong asde tasol/We are men of a true Christian church. Their religion is something that just arose yesterday”. He believes the Foursquare church is a cargo cult, because they all want to change their skins, they have withdrawn from their community and schools, they focus on collecting money through business, and constantly preach of the imminence of the End Times. His logic mirrors that identified by Lattas amongst the Kaliai cargo cultists of New Britain: “The black man here seeks to make himself into the double of the white man, that is by entering that space of movement and identity occupied by the white man’s body” (1992:36). In this sense the Foursquare behaviour becomes decidedly un-Christian in that: “it becomes a magical rite designed to discover the bodily form which empowers the white man and to discover those secret rituals which the white man hides from the black man (Lattas 1992:36).

Several people point to what they perceive as hypocrisy amongst many members of the Foursquare church. They talk about the younger men who come to the island and chew betel nut without lime, so their teeth won’t redden. Or who surreptitiously smoke when on the island then rinse their mouths with saltwater so they do not smell when they return to the mainland. The running joke is to refer to these guys as two-squares: “Ol i hap foa, tasol!/They are half fours, that’s all!” The criticism levelled here is that their church leaders preach one thing and are willing to condemn other people, but not all of their own members follow what they profess. These views are expressed mockingly and with contempt.
The views that Foursquare church members hold regarding the United Church are similar in their tone of condemnation. The chief criticism is that the UC members are only part-time Christians. One young man told me: "Ol i save beten long taim ol i stap insait long sios. Tasol long taim ol i lusim lotu, dispela maus ol i bin singautim long tok bilong god, bihain ol i save tok nogut na tok pilai/They pray when they are inside church. But when they leave worship, those mouths that proclaimed the word of God, then they swear and tell dirty jokes". The leadership of the United Church is considered especially hypocritical. One assertion of Foursquare church members is that the elders and office-holders of the UC are also leaders of the secret men's cult. They associate with and summon bush spirits and devils and they manipulate various materials to effect changes of nature. This association with kastom and ritual, the performance of mortuary rites and sponsoring of singsings (Tok Pisin: ritual dance performances) involves them in the work of Satan. As one man put it: "Sapos yu lukluk long dispela lain ol i save go pas insait long sios bilong ol, ol han bilong ol lapun ol i save guria nogut tru. Em mak bilong ol man ol i bin holim pompom, na samting bilong Seten tasol/If you see these leaders at the front of their church, their hands shake violently. This is the sign that they held ritual dance implements, things of Satan’s work". For the Foursquare men, most of whom have been initiated into the men’s cult themselves, the accoutrements of kastom and ritual are definitively related to devils and Satan. The tenets of the Foursquare faith, as they understand it, allow for no compromise between kastom and Christianity. They mark the separation as a break with things of the earth, or dispela graun. Their religion makes much of signs and revealed truths regarding the proper Christian way of life.

This distrust of kastom was evident at the school closing ceremonies held in December of 1996. This was the first time since the initial schism on Lambom that members of both churches took part in a shared event. After the initial speeches and presentation of scholastic prizes, the members of the Foursquare church withdrew from the gallery and collectively turned their backs when the performance of several kastom line dances and songs began. They could be heard clearly, muttering "Seten/Satan", and began to pray and sing hymns until the performances were over. Their own performances were "dramas", short plays portraying the spiritual race to win redemption, with a focus upon those who fall aside on the way to salvation. For the members of the Foursquare church these pitfalls along the road to salvation are predominantly things relating to graun
things of this earth, such as dancing and *kastom*, and associating with evil spirits and various devils. For them, these associations leave visible marks that set apart the saved from the damned. It is these visible signs amongst their UC relatives that mark them, and in contrast the absence of these markers allows them to assert their own true way. And it is these signs that are the focus of their critique of what they view as a half-hearted Christianity; and which they denounce as the mark of Satan upon members of the UC congregation.

**Analysing the views**

This brief survey of recent events and current opinions demonstrates the chasm that separates the rival churches within the wider Lambom community. An analysis of the opposing views shows the way the opposition is grounded and maintained in differing worldviews, and opposed understandings of their place in time and space.

The UC see themselves as living moral Christian lives, ready for the rapture, and practicing their *lotu* righteously. Their church has an accord with the practice of *kastom*. Their attitude to *kastom* is part of an evolving process. Yet they maintain links to the traditional ways of understanding and acting in their place. They see no need for a radical disjuncture with *kastom*, adapting religion and *kastom* to carry on the ways in which their ancestors earned leadership of clans, and distributed rights to land. They feel the size of their community compared to the rest of their region is a sign that they way they have been doing things is right, and that the leaders they have, are part of God's plan. They are not blatant or explicit in asserting knowledge of the specifics of the divine plan. They feel they are progressing in the right way through time, and living the right way in the place they have made. This is reflected in their calm form of worship and their trust in their proper religious practices. They strive to be constantly prepared, ready for the coming of God’s kingdom in his time. They present this assuredness through the practice of their religion, maintaining their sense of Christian community, while working to stay ready for whatever may arise.

In contrast the Foursquare community displays a frenetic energy, assured of the imminence of the end of the world as it has been known. Times are ending, and they
believe they must actively take part in readying the way for the rapture. They have separated themselves from their neighbours, and from kastom ways associated with the physical world of graun. Ironically, the new beliefs are consistent with kastom ways in their focus on the appreciation of revelation and secrecy. In the past, clans used to fission from existing clans in a way that the Foursquare split with the UC. The difference is that the latter division cuts across ties of family and generation in a manner more comprehensive than clan fission did. In cutting themselves off from the rest of the community, the Foursquare are engaged in actively re-shaping the world in which they live. Their radical disjuncture with ways of the past takes the canvas upon which that past is often marked, the landscape of their place, and attempts to transform it through a process of erasing traces of graun life. They are cutting their links to their past by chasing away devils, and cutting their buai trees and uprooting their brus. Most of their children have been withdrawn from the school. ‘Learn enough to read the Bible’ is their motto.

It was noted as the end time of my own stay on the island approached that there had not been any babies born in a while among the Foursquare community, leading to speculation that another thing of the ground was being left behind, in the quest for an ethereal existence.

The Foursquare critique was a two-pronged attack on the leadership of church and kastom, it was nothing less than a revolution against the accepted hierarchy. The evangelical church members do not deny that masalai and men’s cult places have power, and are real. One has to have belief to be a heretic. Rather they are at work erasing what they find inconsistent with the furthering of their imminent ascension. Demons are being acknowledged then banished. A radical editing of the landscape is underway. Only the names remain in an effort to protect the innocent.

There can be no doubt about the desire of many Papua New Guineans to transform their current existence through Christianity. If single-minded zeal and active determination to physically and spiritually cleanse their graun is a measure of this desire, the Foursquare church community on Lambom are serious about changing their world through a radical break with their past and place. In a discussion on a revival movement amongst the Mountain Ok people Jorgensen pointed to that movement’s denial of the issue central to
the Foursquare critique of the situation at Lambom. Among the Ok, the issue was not a choice of whether “to remain culturally authentic by remaining as they ‘always’ were or to give in to history and cease to be themselves. It is precisely this dilemma that Rebaibal Christianity refused” (Jorgensen 1996:204). Within the wider Lambom community that choice appears central to the schism, the UC position aims to maintain a meaningful link to their past; the Foursquare church in contrast has its goal as severing the link with the past in order to transform themselves and become something more in their eyes.

Errington and Gewertz describe a similar conflict between rival churches, on the nearby Duke of York islands, that likewise had no clear resolution33:

In the Karavaran case, this collision between imported and modern and local and traditional models formed an important aspect of the contention between the members of the New Church and the United Church...the efforts to achieve reconciliation proved ineffective; the balance remained elusive. (1995:130)

Whereas on Karavar the United Church:

...had been able to articulate Christianity with their men’s ritual organization...Members of the New Church did not wish to change their position. In their embrace of what were, in fact, many of the values of Western individualism, local evangelicals were striving for change rather than compromise. (1995:130).

On Lambom this dynamic played out differently with the UC eventually acknowledging some aspects of the Foursquare critique on kastom with the approach of the year 2000. Yet it is clear that the Foursquare church on Lambom like the New Church on Karavar were interested in a transformation rather than accommodation.

Here it is useful to examine the reconfiguration of the UC accommodation with kastom. The current pressure from the UC on kastom described in the last chapter is directed toward defining it carefully. The UC community feel the sting of the condemnation of their kastom practices and resist being under attack as people of the graun. The UC leadership is responding by carefully re-evaluating kastom in terms of the historical pedigree of a practice or set of beliefs in the community. They also are evaluating whether a practice depends upon the material use of profane items, or the use of spirits

33 Other comparative cases of sectarianism drawn from beyond the Islands region of PNG will be addressed in my concluding chapter.
that are of the *grau*n. The *tahm* cult is acceptable in this light whereas the *tubuan* is not. The central importance of the use of *tewels* or evil in this evaluation is obvious. If a *tubuan* comes to the *simen kastom* then a cross cannot be put on the grave. Yet there might be something more to this. Albert notes that many of his informants told him that the *talun* was present in their *kastom* when they existed as an interior people prior to relocating to the coast (Albert 1987a:35). Though no one explicitly made this link when discussing whether the *tubuan* had a place in modern *kastom*, Alois Todowe mentioned that the *talun* was older and really the true men’s cult for Lak. Therefore it may be the case that part of the current evaluation of the *tubuan* depends upon the perception of it as external to true local practice.

**Underground Movement: youth and détente**

I now turn to the incidents that surrounded a recent event that show an attempt to reach across the schism, and display how it is maintained and continues to play out in the Lambom wider community.

The youth of the island had been to a UC sponsored retreat with the youth of Lamassa. Preachers had come from Kokopo and there was Bible study, nightly services with choir singing, ministry band performance, and dramas. During the hymn singing the usual actions were expanded upon. These usually involved restrained side steps and swaying and hand actions --- putting one’s hand to one’s heart, holding them together as in prayer, and raising them above one’s head with a slight trembling toward the lord on high. Now the preacher encouraged them to jump up for the *holi spirit*, let the spirit fill them as they sang. The youth still stood along the inner walls of the church not moving into the middle of the church as they had reportedly done on Lamassa, but their actions become more involved and energetic. This involved a type of pogo-ing, with arms at one side. The leaps into the air were sudden and energetic. In the hothouse atmosphere of the revival both young men and women took part in this ecstatic display of church spirit. When the group returned to Lambom the youth instructed to maintain the revival and carry on the *holi spirit* dancing to a few of the regular Friday night hymns. But on Lambom only the girls continued the practice. The young men said they were too shy but came in larger numbers than usual in order to be there when the young women did.
dance. This performance drew the attention of a larger than usual crowd of school aged children who came to see the new thing. A couple of days later I saw a small group of grade three girls singing and jumping up in *holi spirit* fashion as they made their way home from school for lunch. Elders came to watch, and though none of them subsequently took to the jumping ways the practice was much commented upon and became the subject of monitoring. Soon after this other changes began to take shape in the youth group.

The UC youth group had served as the avenue for the introduction of the new church into the Lambom community in 1994; in July of 1998, the group’s new leadership were planning to make an attempt at reunification. The new leadership of the group had only recently taken office after a successful "strike" against the previous executive. A young woman office holder had been revealed to have "warwarai" (Lak lit. send word), carried a message from another young woman to a young man, in order to arrange a romantic rendezvous. The leader of the strike and his cadre of bachelors had raised the issue during a planning meeting for an upcoming youth sports day. They demanded the collected funds in the youth treasury be handed to them until there was a change in leadership of the group. Their argument was that such action demonstrated that young women were not suitable for leadership roles within the church’s youth wing and that the current president, also a young woman, although in no way implicated in the scandal, was equally unsuitable, and had to resign. This did not go over well with the general members of the group; many pointed out that the strikers were marginal to the group’s fundraising activities and questioned their intentions for the funds they were demanding. The insurgents remained steadfast, denying they had any ulterior motives for the funds, other than suspending the group’s actions until their complaint was addressed. The young men’s unwavering commitment to their position forced the issue, and they were presented with the funds and immediately declared a strike from the youth group until the current leadership resigned.

By the following week, the leaders of the youth group had capitulated, they resigned en masse and a meeting was held to elect a new executive. The strikers returned the money to a person appointed as acting treasurer. After a round of nominations, the only person willing to stand for the presidency was the leader of the strike. All the other potential nominees begged off due to various reasons, usually citing other commitments. The first
order of business for the new leadership was the planning of a sports day. Events such as sprints, egg relay races, volleyball, basketball and touch-football were all suggested and approved. The new President suggested they invite the Foursquare youth from across the water to participate. A fellowship meeting was planned to take place in the evening following the athletic events of the day. Everyone seemed enthusiastic and the meeting was adjourned.

The first signs of trouble emerged during that week’s Wednesday lain. These Wednesday gatherings for community work were designated for church related endeavours, as opposed to those on Monday which dealt with general community business. The matter of inviting the Foursquare youth to participate during the island’s youth day was raised by an elder of the UC. He argued that the Foursquare had separated themselves from the island community, and it was not the place of the youth group to invite them back. The discussion that followed revolved around the perception that the youth group had overstepped their bounds by not consulting with the UC general leadership before planning such an invitation. The leader of the youth group eventually agreed that this was so, but argued that the invitation had already been made. He said that cancelling the invitation would show that the UC was afraid of the Foursquare church. This point was discussed at length, and several senior men expressed their anger at the suffering that was caused everyone when the Foursquare members had divided the community. Eventually, a consensus was reached that the invitation would stand, because the UC was strong and did not want to seem frightened by the possible influence of Foursquare beliefs upon the island’s youth. However, a fellowship involving worship with the Foursquares was strictly forbidden. It was again stressed that the youth leadership was under the authority of the general church leadership, and all such future plans should be discussed with the senior leaders before being acted upon.

During the next few days, I heard many opinions offered on the actions of the new youth leadership and the concerns of the UC hierarchy. The youth leader was adamant that Foursquare youth were part of one family, and that it should be alright for members of different churches to gather together for fellowship. The pastor expressed concern that the plans for a combined fellowship had originated on the mainland, and that it was an attempt by members of the Foursquare church to ‘pull’ UC youth into the new church.
He was not alone amongst church leaders in suggesting that the new youth leadership needed to be watched closely.

That Friday evening, two young men from the mainland came to the island and joined in the youth service. The two men sat quietly and participated in the singing of hymns and listened to the preaching of a member of the youth group. After the service, as the youth emerged from the church, several church leaders were gathered near the entryway in a small group. Greetings were exchanged with the two young mainlanders, and the congregation quickly dispersed. One of these leaders had noticed that I had left the service early that evening. I had wanted to be in a position to observe what was going on outside as well as inside the church. He interpreted my exit as understanding that something wrong was going on, and congratulated me on my appreciation of the situation. I was just tired. This was the only explicit indication that night of disapproval for the visit by the Foursquare youth. The senior men went their own ways immediately afterward.

The next day, while I was visiting the men’s house, several men commented upon my appropriate withdrawal from the youth services of the night before, and let me know that something was going to be done about the disobedience of the youth group. That Sunday morning during church services it was announced that a special meeting of the youth group was to be convened that evening.

The meeting was opened by the pastor, and immediately the issue of the disobedience by the youth leadership was raised. In angry tones a senior man stated that the youth were underneath the authority of the church leaders, and that the visit by the two Foursquare youth was a serious breach of that authority. He demanded that the youth leader explain to all assembled why he had not followed the decision made at Wednesday morning’s meeting. The youth leader rose, and offered his apology. He explained that the two men had come to have dinner at his house to discuss plans for the sports day. The meeting had gone well, and afterwards the two men expressed a desire to come to Friday night’s services with the island’s youth. The youth leader stressed that this had not been planned, and that he was ashamed to tell them they were forbidden to worship on the island. He stated that it was his belief that the two men’s attendance at the service was a good thing: that it signalled a willingness on the part of Foursquare church members to
rejoin the United Church and an end to the community’s division. He finished by apologizing again, and restating that there was no plan for the men to attend services in the church. This did not go over well with the senior men. Another church elder said he did not believe this, that the youth leader had shown he would not obey the church’s leaders, and that the sports day would have to be cancelled. This in turn did not go over well with the general membership of the youth group.

One young man rose, and stated that the sports day should not be cancelled because the youth had done nothing wrong. He said that there was no ‘underground movement’, the visit by the two Foursquare men was not part of a plan, and that it was good that family members went to church together. The youth leader spoke next, and he was less apologetic than before; he stated that he had done nothing wrong, and that if the sports day was cancelled, then the youth group would disband. He argued that the church leaders shouldn’t be afraid of the actions of the youth group, and that if the sports day was cancelled that the UC would only be divided again. This threat was taken seriously by the pastor who suggested that cancelling the sports day was not a good idea. After a number of youth and senior men expressed a similar sentiment, a consensus was eventually reached. There would be a sports day, but the youth had to obey their elders and not have a fellowship with the Foursquare youth. The youth leader concurred, and stated that he accepted that the youth group had to obey the church leaders. The pastor closed the meeting by stating that it was good that the youth should obey their senior leaders, and then led a concluding prayer.

The following Sunday there were signs that some sort of plan was being put into action. A group of young men from the island’s southernmost bachelor’s house had gone to the mainland in the morning to attend church with their Foursquare kin. These young fellows included the only five people who did not attend UC services regularly; in fact several of them hardly attended church at all. One senior man joked that if they couldn’t endure the hour long UC service he found it hard to believe they would enjoy the four hour long Foursquare program of worship. He pointed out that this group of guys liked chewing betel nut, smoking, and drinking too much to become Foursquares, and reckoned that they had travelled further a field in their regular pursuit of finding a free feed. However, he felt that their actions were not coincidental, and that they were a part of the youth group’s plan. It was noted that the youth leader had spent time at their
bachelor’s house the previous day, and had been seen there by many men. Word of the bachelor’s action spread throughout the village, and was a topic of conversation at the men’s house that afternoon. It was decided that another meeting with the youth would be called, and that leaders of the Foursquare youth would be invited to explain their part in the events of the last few weeks.

That night’s meeting filled the community hall. As well as the ranks of the youth group and senior church leaders, many parents of the young people attending gathered around the open walls of the building to observe what was happening. The Foursquare delegation arrived, four young men including the two who had attended the youth services the week before. After an opening prayer by the UC pastor, a senior man addressed the meeting. He welcomed everyone in attendance and thanked the Foursquare men for coming across the passage in order to ‘straighten’ out what was going on. He said it was good that the youth of island and mainland gathered together, since everyone was ‘one family’. Then he said that the youth of Lambom were the future leaders of the community, and that they must learn to obey their leaders; the church leaders were the ‘papa’ (Tok Pisin: father, boss), and the youth leaders were the ‘pikinini’ (children), and were ‘ananit’ (beneath) the authority of the church. He stressed that it was the decision of the church elders that there would be no combined worship between UC and Foursquare youth. He noted that it was the Foursquare who had left the United Church and that they were welcome to come back, but that as long as there were two churches, there would be no combined formal worship. The UC youth leader addressed the meeting next. He said that he had not planned to disobey the church elders, and that the attendance at the prior youth meeting by the Foursquares was not planned.

One of the Foursquare men rose, and said he himself had not attended the youth service last week, and knew of no plan for members of his church to attend the service. He then said that he thought a shared fellowship amongst the community’s youth would be a good thing. The End-times were very close, he said, and everyone needed to pray for salvation. In response, another senior man agreed that prayer was good, but that the Foursquare had built a new church so there were now two places to pray because of the new church. You like your kind of prayer, and we have our kind of prayer, he argued. The Foursquare leader answered that the youth of the island must be ‘hungry’ for
something because they wanted to pray with their Foursquare relatives in the community. A retired UC circuit pastor stood abruptly, and held up his Bible for all to see: “sapos ol yut, ol i hangre, em orait. Kaikai i stap. Kaikai i stap insait long dispela buk, na insait haus lotu bilong ol! If the young people hunger, that is good. Sustenance is here. Sustenance is present in this book, as well as in their house of worship!” This was met with a murmuring chorus of “em nau, em stre/v/that’s it, that is true”, and no one spoke for a moment. Any searching by the youth should lead them to settle on the good book, no need for anything else.

Then another senior UC man spoke, and asked the assembled Foursquare men, whether there was an ‘underground movement’ to attract the UC youth into the Foursquare church. Again, the Foursquare leader stood, and he denied any knowledge of such a meeting, but said it was good that the youth wanted to pray together. He concluded that the year 2000 wasn’t very far off, and that everyone should be ready to pray together. The UC man who had just asked about the underground movement retorted that it was up to the Foursquare to rejoin the UC, that their division of the community was painful, and had hurt many people. His voice rose and his eyes welled as he said it was the fault of the Foursquares that the “plies i bruk/village is split”, and he did not want them to confuse the youth and pull them away from their mothers and fathers. The Foursquare leader responded that there was no plan to pull the youth from the island to the mainland. He said it might be time for the Foursquare members to come back to the island, but it was not his decision.

This drew a round of murmuring once again from the assembled crowd, and the UC pastor rose, and asked if the Foursquare leaders agreed that there would be no shared fellowship between the two churches youth groups on the sports day. The Foursquare leader agreed that he would tell his youth group to come to the island for the sports day, but that they would have their own fellowship back on the mainland that evening. The pastor thanked the Foursquare leader, again stressed that the youth must obey their elders in the church, and called for the meeting’s end. He led a concluding prayer, and the meeting was adjourned.

There was much discussion that evening on Lambom Island about the meeting’s events. Several senior men and women expressed suspicion of the Foursquare leader’s words;
they felt that there had been an attempt to entice the UC youth to join the Foursquare and were not satisfied that an underground movement wasn’t planned between the UC youth leader and the Foursquares. Other people were discussing the possibility of the Foursquare church disbanding and its members returning to the island and the United Church. One man mentioned one of his Foursquare relatives telling him that there was a division amongst the mainland’s pastors, and that one in particular wanted to return to the UC as the End-times were very near. This was discussed at some length, with people sharing various stories of how different relatives were considering a return to the island and the UC. One woman reminisced about how full the island’s church would be at both Sunday services, with plenty of people forced to stand in rows outside the church’s doors to take part in the congregation. The Foursquare men made their way down the village path to the landing where their canoes were pulled ashore, greeting relatives along the way and shaking hands with many people.

The youth sports day was held a couple of weeks later, and though a brief prayer was said by a Foursquare youth during the communal lunch break, the Foursquare contingent returned that evening to the mainland, and there was no shared fellowship prayer with the youth of Lambom that night. Subsequently, I was informed by several members of the UC youth group that there had been an ‘underground movement’ and that their youth leader had been planning to go ahead with the fellowship despite the objections of the church’s leadership. However, after the community meeting attended by the Foursquares the plan had been called off. There was a feeling that the plan would only cause another fight. When I asked the youth leader about this later, he admitted as much. He complained that the church elders were afraid that the youth would leave the island. He pointed out to me that that was why the original break had occurred; that it was the fear and intransigence of the church leaders to listen to the youth and allow them to introduce changes to their worship that had driven the earlier youth group to start a new church. He too believed that the year 2000 was not far away now, and that the people should re-unite, but it was the elders who stopped it.

The youth group’s active attempt to bridge the community divide foundered on elements of its character. It was centrally identified as searching, and this implied that something was missing. As well the worship the youth group had recently taken up after the revival at Lamassa displayed frenetic elements of holi spirit possession. This was similar to the
beginnings of the Foursquare entry into the community. Likewise, youth displayed a willingness to resist the direction of their rightful elders and seniors and leaders while operating underground. The stable edges of the UC community were maintained by redirecting this questing into the settled supremacy of the Bible and the UC church. The answer is here, no need to look elsewhere. The boundaries of appropriate UC practice had been asserted.

When I left Lambom in November of 1998, the community remained divided. For the youth, some kind of re-unification remained a goal that they hoped to achieve. For the church elders, they felt that their authority had to be maintained. They were suspicious of the motivations of the Foursquare church, and continued to be vigilant in their observations of the actions of the UC youth group. The focus for them was still on the blame involved with the leaders of the Foursquare church in fracturing the community. Yet they too were hopeful that the community could be re-united, but only when the Foursquares apologized for the harm they caused, repented, and returned to the UC fold.

**Duelling Lotus**

The arrival of the Foursquare church on Lambom led to a division of the community. As they have come to say on Lambom, *Ples i bruk/The village is split.* The division implies a choice of religious affiliation, a question people on Lambom now have to answer for themselves.

This opportunity of choice in *lotu* was relatively novel for Lambom, in that unlike other rival churches, the new Foursquare church had taken root in the community. It gave a group of young religious leaders the opportunity to crash through the thatched ceiling of *kastom* and church seniority, and take on meaningful and substantial leadership roles in a new hierarchy for the Foursquare community. Their putsch was founded on an end times' view of the world and gained a foothold because of the youthful zeal and revolutionary nature of its program and leadership. The Foursquare church has established itself as a real alternative form of *lotu* for Lambom. The opportunity to follow an opposing *rot/path* with regard to *lotu* came about because of a particular connection to the national scene, and from there to an international evangelical church.
The choice confronting the Lambom community is based on two opposing views regarding the nature of the current situation there. In effect, the choice depends upon a moral evaluation of the current sindaun long ples/living conditions of the village. If you believed that your neighbour on that church pew across from you was living a life that led to damnation in a demon haunted world full of sin approaching the end times, you went foursquare. If you were willing to give your fellow congregant the benefit of the doubt regarding his place on a blessed-versus-damned scale, and expected that he would extend to you the same courtesy, you stayed with the UC.

Current leaders of the UC and kastom were wont to defend the status quo, asserting that they were living a proper life. They had an accepted accord between the two spheres of influence and the social structure they were both constitutive of. In their eyes the accommodation between lotu and kastom was a link to their past, and an extension of their righteous way of being Christian. It was an affirmation of the way they had been doing things.

The Foursquare church wanted a radical break from things as they were, they wanted to tear up the accord between lotu and kastom as it existed on Lambom. This status quo was by definition unacceptable: an obstruction to the requirements involved in ushering in the rapture.

The Foursquare Church brought a biting critique of the UC status quo that explicitly confronted the existing community leadership. Double credentialed as leaders in both kastom and church on the island, the UC hierarchy resisted this moral evaluation of themselves as leading the community into a condition of sin.

In a situation of moral condemnation from the new Church towards their fellow Lambom Islanders, it came down to how the modern Lak world was perceived. The status quo is viewed as either a sign of relative blessings within the region and nation, or as unacceptably tied up with graun. Lambom either represents a sindaun bagarap/a crisis in need of radical reform, requiring a break with the ways of the present and past, or the continued leadership of a blessed community.

The Lambom community is still divided. It remains to be seen which church represents the road to salvation and the proper means to a Christian way of life. The efficacy of
either church will depend on the Lak way of understanding truth claims and legitimacy. The relative situations of the rival churches’ sindaun will be monitored, interpreted and assessed by interested observers on both sides of the passage and divide. Whether the schism is resolved or perpetuated will depend on the particular way the Lak assess the way things turn out for both churches.

In this chapter I have examined the central role that the current schism has in the everyday life of a community divided into two villages. Chapter Two outlined the basis of modern political economy and increasing commoditization on Lambom. The material imperatives of this changing economic situation were analysed, and some of their effects on kastom were the focus of chapter Three. The contentious attempt to reconceptualize kastom beliefs and practices described there displayed how imperatives of the cash economy put pressure on time and resources to carry out full kastom. The capability to carry out kastom was under threat, and those motivated to continue mortuary feasting had to look for innovative short cuts to achieve their aims. My account in this chapter of the current schism in lotu is intended to provide further context for understanding these changes in people’s approach to kastom, showing how its moral foundation has come into question. The current intra-UC community reappraisal of kastom is situated within the context of church rivalry and competing identity claims fuelled by a critique that is condemnatory. The next chapter will examine another context from which the community can ponder its identity, namely, its relations with gavman. There was a national election in 1997 and the community again was faced with a choice regarding leadership and the rot to be followed in the coming years. It is to the particulars of that choice, and the consequences for identity in relation to the concept of gavman in general, that I turn to in the next chapter.
Chapter Five

HAPPY GECKOES: GAVMAN ON LAMBOM

The aim of this chapter is to examine what Gavman/government means for the people of Lambom. Gavman is the most explicit context from which Lambom Island is situated within the modern nation state. It is possible to unravel the connections from Lambom to wider systems of political economy through various overlapping government structures and practices. Government is enacted in local, regional, and national contexts. I will analyse two cases to outline the nature of the interplay between these contextual realms. Both events took place in connection with the national elections of 1997, and both explicitly involved villagers taking part in maintaining and enacting the state. National elections are infrequent happenings, but their intensity, and the actions they impel are wide ranging and marked. However, in the context of everyday life on Lambom, and on a day-to-day basis in the community, Gavman is more commonly experienced through encounters with schooling and health care provision. In this context, both the activities involved with providing these services, and the presence of government in the form of the buildings used on the Island are tangible manifestations of Gavman.

The national government holds elections every five years. The events surrounding the 1997 national elections give insight into the way Lambom encounters government in actual practice. Aspects of the campaigning, both through national candidates’ visits and local meetings, through Election Day, and its results, allow local notions of governance to be examined and various aspects of identity to be expressed.

Another, more quotidian encounter with Gavman occurs through the presence of the school and the aid post. The material nature of their presence on the island will be analysed with regards to notions of the status of relations between the community and the modern nation state of Papua New Guinea. In this case the framing of local identity
is posited from ideas surrounding personhood. The same ways in which people see their relations amongst each other are applied to the community’s relation with the state. I will argue that Lambom Islanders use a trope of proper interpersonal relations to evaluate the status of their connections to Gavman.

Two Sirs with Love: The National Election of 1997

For Lambom Islanders, a central issue in the national election of 1997 was the importance of change. Many different opinions were expressed regarding the relationship of ples to the rest of the nation and those who governed at that level. Formal as well as informal campaigning took place. Rival rumai dalwan (bachelor houses) provided a framework for the playing out of various issues and oppositions, linking national divisions with local ones.

Arrivals

In the lead up to the national election of 1997 Lambom Island was unexpectedly to host the elite of PNG’s political hierarchy. This backwater village, Laskona tru, saw visits by the nation’s founding father and first Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare, as well as by his successor, the second and then currently serving Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan. Joining these two eminent personages in the campaign in Lak was Ephraim Apelis, a provincial bureaucrat and politician from central New Ireland who was married to a Lak woman from Matkamlagir village. During preliminary campaign visits, villagers noted the striking contrasts between the upstart Ephraim Apelis and the honourable Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan. At first invidious for Apelis, these contrasts were couched in terms of the relative sophistication of Chan, against the backwoods simplicity of Apelis. The urbane and proven national leader, a successful multi-term prime minister, was running against an unproven villager. Later when Sir Michael Somare entered the scene as the leader of opposition against Chan, the same oppositional contrast of kanaka versus sophisticate was used, but in this context what initially was denigrated now was valorised. In essence the kanaka identity projected by Somare, a man who is one of the
nation’s wealthiest individuals, was seen as connecting him to the locals in contrast to the aloof manner of the suave and gentrified, and similarly wealthy Chan.

The Incumbent: Sir Julius Chan’s first visit

Sir Julius Chan arrived on Lambom on his new yacht late one afternoon in November of 1996. A member of his parliamentary staff, Gaius Toaligur, a Lambom islander, had accompanied Sir Julius to Brisbane earlier in the year to purchase the beautiful ship. Rumour had it that they yacht had cost over one million Kina. Children ran from all ends of the village, excitedly crying out: “Sipsel, Sipsel! /Sailboat, Sailboat). Most of the rest of the island’s population made their way to the shore to see the arrival of Sir Julius. Important men and village leaders congregated to greet Sir Julius as he came ashore. The prime minister was dressed formally; he wore a long-sleeved dress shirt, navy slacks, and leather loafers. Sir Julius announced that he had come to find out what the people wanted prior to the upcoming election, and suggested that the community gather in the centre for a meeting. The church bell was rung, and one young man took it upon himself to blow the conch shell to call people to the meeting. The typical afternoon bathing and meal preparation were put on hold as Sir Julius made his way to the centre accompanied by his regional party boss and local eminent men.

The meeting began with Sir Julius inviting suggestions for how to use the island’s share of his development fund (popularly termed slush funds)\(^34\). The first speaker raised the fact that Sir Julius had promised to build a seawall along the village shoreline in order to prevent erosion. Nothing had been done about this. Sir Julius replied that he had not forgotten the request. His plan had been to send the army construction unit to build the wall, but they had been busy in nearby Bougainville and had been unable to spare the time. The general murmur was that that was stret/fair. Sir Julius suggested that he provide the funds to buy the required cement, and pay local young men to collect the necessary stones, and labour on the construction of the wall. Sir Julius proposed a figure of five thousand kina as sufficient to get the job done, and promised to bring it when he visited again nearer to the election. A young man asked about the dinghy that had been

\(^{34}\) Each Member of Parliament is given an amount of money annually to spend at their discretion within their electorate. At this time the amount was K500,000.
promised for the United Church’s youth group, and was told that it had been sent. Sir Julius asked what had become of it. When no one replied, Sir Julius chastised the people for their lack of care of the several boats he had given them. He stated in no uncertain terms that the people of Lambom would not receive any further boats from him. The consensus afterwards was that this was a fair criticism, and a reasonable statement on his part. The meeting was quickly wrapped up, and Sir Julius made a few personal greetings on his way to retire to his yacht. He overnighted on board the ship, and was not seen again prior to his departure at sunrise the following morning.

The rival Candidate: Apelis enters the scene

The campaign of Ephraim Apelis began rather modestly with a visit to Lambom in late 1996. Apelis arrived soaking wet having rounded Cape St George by dinghy with his kinsmen from Matkamlagir on the afternoon of November 25 at around 4pm. The village was busy with preparations for the festivities planned for the school closing, and many émigrés were back for the *singsing*. He stopped briefly on his way to Lamassa and said he would return tomorrow to Soim Pes/Put in an appearance, not to give a speech or campaign.

When he returned the next day the village was quiet as most folk were off preparing for the coming *singsing*. Coming ashore mid-morning, only a few men were still in the village. Betel nut and greetings were exchanged. Apelis, a stout man of medium height, was dressed in a turquoise t-shirt with white bleach stains, and a pair of grey shorts, and was barefoot with bandages on his shin. An outsider would be hard pressed to tell, by his appearance, the difference between his status and that of those assembled to greet him.

Most people had left to work in their gardens or elsewhere and Apelis addressed a crowd of less than a dozen people in the community hall. He announced that he was considering whether to stand for election. He had met with people at Metlik and Lamassa on his way to Lambom to discuss his potential candidacy. Joseph Laiman, a village elder, suggested that all present go sit in the community centre to hear what Apelis had to say. When all had gathered there Joseph formally introduced Apelis then
asked him to address us. Apelis said there were three reasons he was considering standing for election:


Point number one: the country isn’t following the path that is required. The country is like a ship. You all have canoes and dinghies, similar to ships. A strong rope anchors the ship to the reef. Who is at the wheel, whoever is captain must release its mooring. Must make the correct decisions. If the ship begins to fill with water, he can make it safe or it will founder and sink. This is an analogy. Lots of troubles beset the country. We give the rights to leaders. Law and order, this society is sick. Our basic laws are sound, but in practice the goods aren’t being delivered. An example: if a father forbids his children from chewing betel nut in the house, but chews away madly himself, the children will be disobedient and disrespectful. The Bougainville crisis isn’t the sole problem of previous Prime Minister Rabi Namaliu, he isn’t its source, it arose earlier: the government failed to fulfil its promises regarding the concerns of the landowners. The strength of our currency, devaluation, has decreased buying power with regards to commodities such as tinned fish. They aren’t concerned, the government. They are worried about the foreign currency reserves, one hundred million kina, and getting twelve million more, the total sum rises but its relative worth is declining. These reserves are held outside the country in Asia, why is out of the country, overseas? What do they do with it? The money is in an international bank in Taiwan, and the profits, who is controlling this money? A boss must decide where to steer the boat, right? We must struggle.
The second reason is political reform. He is opposed to independence for the island region, he is for attention to the islands. He had been jailed, but he was happy, he didn’t steal bread, he was imprisoned for standing up for the rights of the people. For taking power and control. The current system takes our power from among us and gathers it in Moresby, one man has the power. He alone has knowledge of the situation of ours in New Ireland. This centralization is just like it was under the kiap order, teachers aren’t paid on time, service provision is too slow. No change has occurred yet. We must know how much money there is, and what and why it is used for, to help us all.

The third reason, it is my opinion and belief, the work that has happened in Namatanai electorate given to our leaders to work for us it hasn’t been done properly for thirty years. The slush fund is being misused, to buy what? 8 dinghies for Namatanai and a schoolbus. This costs 117,000 kina in 1995, the other 180,000 kina where is it? We must ask! We must stand up and open our mouths. Give the power back to the people. The basis of the idea of community government, the money and power to use it must reside with the community. We have three levels, a national for national interests, provincial for provincial interests, and community government to look after the villages alone. This is clear.

Apelis’s brief campaign pitch concluded with a focus on dissatisfaction with the region’s development under Sir Julius. He identified himself as Laskona. "ples i stap olsem yet. Twenti-seven yia pinis, Sir Julius i bin markim yupela, tasol yupela no save lukim planti senis I kmap long ples". Apelis stressed that it was time for change. He handed out copies of his resume, a single page photocopy with a list of his education
and public service position attainments, adorned with a picture of Apelis in the upper corner. He shared a cup of tea afterwards. Apelis was gone from Lambom less than an hour after his arrival, heading back south and around the cape to continue his political coming out. Several observers noted that Apelis was asples, and grasruts.

Sir Julius Chan’s second visit

Word had come from Kokopo by boat that Sir Julius would be coming to campaign on Lambom the next day. So on the following morning, a Saturday, December 28, 1996, the sound of an approaching helicopter roused the villagers from their daily rounds and people hurried to the school field to see the landing of the helicopter. Sir Julius was flying in a chartered Islands Airway helicopter, a company in which he holds a controlling interest. The dapper Sir Julius emerged from the copter looking refined in grey woollen slacks with a colourful print shirt opened at the neck to expose a white mesh t-shirt, gold chain. On his wrist he wore an expensive looking black-leather-banded watch. His campaign staff followed with boxes full of cigarettes and stick tobacco, brands from companies that he holds the distribution rights for. All these proprietary relations of the Prime Minister were pointed out to me by more than one observer. “Em i bisnis man tru! He is a real businessman. As well, there was an ample amount of betel nut carried in bilums and quickly shared out amongst those crowding around the helicopter. In response to my query I was told that Sir J always arrived for campaigns with similar offerings or “gris bilong hamamasim ol pipol/patronage to please everyone”. “Em i save laik bilong mipela!/He knows what we want!” I was enthusiastically told.

Sir Julius didn’t waste much time before moving towards the school classrooms and pointing out the new solar powered lighting and electrical power installed about two months earlier. “Dispela sola, em i wok bilong mi yet/This solar panel is my doing alone” he asserted, “Tingim long taim bilong votim/Remember it when it’s time to vote” he added. Sir Julius then stated that he needed to speak to the leader of the community and people said that Alois Todowe was on his way from the village. As we awaited Alois’ arrival Sir Julius moved through the crowd shaking hands and greeting those he recognized by name. He explained to Joe Ritako, one of the teachers, that the solar has
enough power to operate a refrigerator. Again addressing the crowd he said, “Disla sola em olsem wara, i go antap, kapsait em, bihain pulimap gen. I no gat kost nau/This solar power system is like water, it fills up, empties, then gets filled again”. Scanning the crowd, he spotted an old widow and called her by name asking “Tapsi, yu orait?” and walked over to her to shake her hand. As she let go of his grip she quickly moved her hands behind her back, but several people observed that he had slipped her an indeterminate Kina note. I was told that her husband had been a captain for many years on one of Sir J’s copra boats and had died while picking up copra at the Duke of York Islands, the victim of apparent sorcery. Talking to Tapsi later, she showed me the bill Sir J had given her, it was one of the new K50 notes, informally known as a Somare because of the portrait of the first prime minister that was its main feature. The irony was not lost on Tapsi, since Somare was the leader of the opposition against another term for Sir Julius and thus his birua/enemy. She joked “Em moabeta tapes Sir J i wokim wanpela nupela mani olsem wan huntret kina wantaim piksa bilong em yet i stap long en!/It would be better if Sir J created a new Hundred Kina note with his own picture on it!”

Sir Julius said he had several other villages in the region to visit today so he would have to leave soon. When Alois arrived he was quickly ushered to the front of the throng surrounding the PM. Sir Julius called for everyone’s attention and raised a cheque in the air for all to see. He said:

Yupela bin askim long K5000 long wok bilong wokim dispela seawall long protektim nambis bilong yupela olgeta. Tasol mi yet mi putim K10,000 long halpim komuniti na infrastructure long hia. Dispela K10,000, dispela moni nau, em i pinisim ol laik bilong yupela long dispela elektion.

You asked for K5000 for the work involved in building a seawall to protect the shore of your community. But I myself present K10,000 for helping the community and for infrastructure here. This K10,000, this money right now, it fulfils your request for this election.

After waiting a moment, “Em strett!/Is that right?”, he asked, and when the response affirmed his statement, he concluded “Em tasol/That’s all then” and handed the cheque to Alois. “Maski long misusim ol funds nau papa/Don’t think about misusing these funds father” he added in aside that all could hear. “Baim material, waia, simen pastaim. Bihain baim sampela wokman, ol i laik karim ston long wall. Putim waia na
Sir Michael’s visit

On the July the 13\textsuperscript{th}, the day before the election, the people of Lambom were surprised to see the arrival of Sir Michael Somare for a campaign visit. There had been rumours that Somare would visit before the election, but with voting to commence the following day, by that point most people were understandably sceptical. The sound of the approaching helicopter left no doubt that the rumours were about to become reality. People flocked to the school grounds, as the helicopter circled over the passage in its approach to landing. A few dozen people were on hand when the helicopter touched down, but within minutes over a hundred people had congregated to see the arrival of Sir Michael Somare. Accompanying Somare on his visit were Ephraim Apelis, the National Alliance candidate who would oppose Sir Julius for the Namatanai electorate, and Ezekiel Waisale who would stand for the New Ireland Open seat in the coming election. Waisale, a Lak man from Matkamlagir village and director of the landowner’s company, was making his first belated campaign stop on Lambom. Apelis was wearing trousers and a button down vest on this trip and smiled as he walked through the crowd greeting people. He seemed a bit dazed by his helicopter ride and the enthusiastic greeting given his party this time. But he was quite content to let Sir Michael take centre stage; this was Somare’s show. There was little doubt that all the attention was focused on Somare. He cut a charismatic figure and strode confidently into the throng with a broad smile on his face. He wore a tropical-patterned short-sleeved shirt, a Zulu lap lap, and leather sandals, and shook hands with everyone who approached him as he made his way to the schoolhouse to address the gathering.
Somare's speech was brief but stressed several key points. First he outlined his background as father of the nation, couching this in terms of opposition to ol mastalexpatriates. He pointed out that his creation of Pangu Pati was against the advice of the Australians, and it was this sort of leadership that had led to PNG's independence. He stressed his belief that PNG should be governed by, and for, Papua New Guineans. However, now due to recent changes he would have to stand for prime minister once again to make sure that the government was to serve grasruts villagers. He said his goal was to re-focus government attention upon the establishment of village services. He made a point of asking about the condition of the school and its classrooms and told the headmaster to make a list of what was required because when he was elected all of the nation's schools would be properly provided for.

Picture 8: Sir Michael Somare campaigning on Lambom July 1997

In summing up the role of national politicians in the campaign of 1997 several points are worth making. Lambom Islanders had a new appreciation of their place in the nation. The participation of the candidates in direct campaigning on Lambom was not unusual. The presence of eminent personages was not unique, in that Sir Julius Chan as the electorate's long-serving Member of Parliament was rightly considered a person of the highest national stature. What made this campaign singular was the local participation
of an opponent of equal stature to Sir Julius. Sir Michael Somare’s similar status to Sir Julius was self-evident. He was PNG’s first Prime Minister, the accepted Father of Independence. The fact that both these esteemed gentlemen made the effort to visit Lambom Island within a short space of time was taken to be an unprecedented show of interest in, and recognition of Lambom’s importance. As the results of the election would subsequently show, this self perception of their importance did not escape the notice of community members.

As well, the approaches of candidates and campaigners involved at this level exhibited their perception of the people they were pitching themselves to. The talk revolving around the concept of grasrut in particular struck a chord with the Lambom community. The events surrounding the local scope of the campaign show how these identities were picked up, evaluated, analysed, and played out in another context.

**Local Campaign**

In addition to the campaign events in Lak featuring the actual candidates, Lambom Island saw an attempt by local PPP supporters to formally air their platform during a community meeting. This type of event followed a pattern familiar to rural New Ireland politics for at least a decade. During the 1987 election MacQueen observed:

> The basic vehicle of campaigning was the village meeting at which candidates, or their representatives, by prior arrangement, would spend usually between one and two hours addressing the villagers and answering their questions. The meetings were invariably conducted in a decorous manner with prayers preceding politics and appropriate courtesies being shown to the village elders. (1989:217)

The event on Lambom prior to the 1997 election follows this standard form. During a regular Monday morning lain/village meeting the local PPP establishment presented its campaign platform. Similar to events in prior campaigns elsewhere in the province, “...supporters staged rallies at which speeches were made by ... PPP campaign executives—most of whom were relatively educated men in their thirties and forties—and other prominent local residents” (Foster 1996:152). On Lambom this involved four men from one particular rumai dalwan/Lak: bachelor’s house, who were to be paid
collectively by the local PPP campaign agent. Their presentations were brief and furtive, with each speaking to a specific aspect of the proposed structural reforms that PM Chan had recently enacted. The topics related to health care, education, community government, and the proposed de-emphasis of provincial government. This focus on 'reform' served to create an impression that the PPP were the agents of change despite the fact that Sir Julius was the current prime minister. Chan supporters were continuing a strategy used in previous elections to "mobilize the well known sentiment of anti-incumbency in Papua New Guinea" (Foster 1996:156). However, the questions by sceptical listeners turned the discussion from wider national issues to specifics grounded in the local scene.

One man asked if the educational reforms, moving grades seven and eight from high school to a new level of 'top up' schools, would see the building of such a school on Lambom. Another asked whether the fees for such schooling would be similar to primary school fees (a nominal amount, roughly K20), or as expensive as high school fees (up to several hundred Kina), and if so, who would help local people pay for such fees. A prominent local PPP organizer, and church elder, often stepped in to field these questions when the paid campaigners were unable to respond in a satisfactory fashion. His answers invariably asserted that loyal support of Sir Julius would see his continued patronage for the village and provisions of all necessary requirements. The rally ended when one man suggested that current promises be ignored for the moment, and asked what happened to a copra dryer that Sir Julius promised to the community during the last election. The fact that the components of this dryer were visible to all, sitting under the garden house of the very same local leader of the PPP, left the man speechless. His obvious distress was ended when a chorus of murmurs called for a prayer to end the meeting, and he was able to recover sufficiently to lead those assembled in a blessing. In general this was the end of active campaigning by local folks on the island outside of their attendance at the previously mentioned brief visits by esteemed national personages. However, informal campaigning of a sort did continue throughout the election period, particularly after the voting on Lambom was finished during the two-week time frame allotted for voting elsewhere in the province and the nation. This expression of party support carried on right through the ballot counting phase until a final winner was announced.
The contest for the Namatanai Open electorate was the closest it had ever been since voting began in 1972 prior to independence. Local people listened expectantly to the provincial radio station to hear the tally as it progressed. It became apparent that the occupants of the two rumai dalwan north of the village were supporters of Apelis, in contrast to the residents of the southern rumai dalwan who had campaigned for Sir Julius at the village meeting or lain. According to the residents of Lambom such a divide had not occurred during the previous five national election campaigns or for any of the provincial or community government contests. As the tally seesawed back and forth between the two candidates the residents of the competing bachelor houses would take turns entering the village and making noise, calling out the name of their candidate or his party, blowing air horns, and generally rallying in a cacophonous, joyful fashion. Their behaviour in general was characterized by light-hearted rivalry; certainly no confrontations or bad sentiments were expressed when the rivals came into contact. The young men seemed to be taking an opportunity to play to the wider village community, to display their momentary ascension to what they hoped would be an appreciative audience.

Foster described similar expressions of party affiliation elsewhere in New Ireland as:

> The assertion—temporary and tentative—of a novel social identity... a jocular deflation of the rivalry between the two political parties. Indeed, playfulness and irony very much characterized the ethos of trying on party identities...In retrospect, the election campaign arguably allowed Tangans to experiment with their social relations along lines other than the familiar ones of kinship, affinity, ceremonial exchange... (1996:157).

On Lambom the party affiliation expressed by the bachelor houses evoked both the extension of one form of inter bachelor house rivalry, ceremonial dancing, and the denial of such rivalry in the cross-cutting support for Australian Rugby League State of Origin sides\(^{35}\). Although it is not always the case, when young men dance ceremonially they tend to organize their lains/squads upon bachelor house residence, which always crosscuts lineage, clan, and moiety affiliation. The competition is friendly but intense, and various spells and fetishes are used to support one’s own lain and thwart the efforts of others. Bachelors dancing in front of young women put a certain amount of their pride at stake and aim to outdo their rivals. But the rivalry of competing lains is limited

\(^{35}\) The importance of Rugby on Lambom is more fully explored in Chapter Six.
to the period immediately preceding, and including the actual performance, and ends soon after the particular ceremony does. Dancing lain composition changes from ceremony to ceremony, as does rumai dalwan residence.

Foster notes a similar performative aspect of campaign affiliation:

The transience of the campaign, and hence of the social identities it brought into being, thus enabled Tangan to stand at some critical distance from what they were doing as they were doing it—as if they were self-consciously performing roles in a play. No matter how vigorous the public show of support... campaign context in which it such demonstrations acquired significance was ultimately ephemeral. As soon as the election results were announced, as soon as ‘the game’ ended, the relevance of party affiliation to everyday Tangan social life would become less obvious and less compelling. (1996:157-8)

Likewise, the performative nature of State of Origin allegiance was both vigorous and ephemeral. However in the case of Rugby League alliance, support for the Blues or the Maroons crosscuts all visible social ties. The intensity of such support can be surprising, and certainly affords the opportunity for the loudest expression of competitive support for one’s side. Lak people tend to keep their opinions, no matter how strong or on what topics, close to their singlets. As the vote count continued the margin between the candidates remained extraordinarily tight. The back and forth of vocal support between rival supporters played out in a similar fashion, and over a likewise extended time frame, much like an Origin series that is tied after two matches and is moving towards the final, deciding round. Careful listeners heard the tally for Lambom from ballot box NIP 0029, where Apelis received 232 votes to Sir Julius’ 52. At that point, PPP supporters did not focus on the swing away from their candidate that had occurred since the previous election. The overall total was what they held out for, and they were confident that victory in the end would be theirs. As the final days of counting passed, the rest of the village seemed to grow tired of the random outbursts of noise generated whenever a tally was broadcast on the radio. Finally on the 30th of June the final tally was announced: Apelis received 7,969 votes, while Sir Julius garnered 7,859; the margin of victory was a mere 110 votes out of the 21,225 cast in the electorate. As several men noted, the swing on Lambom from almost complete support of Sir Julius to

36 The annual all star match between Queensland and New South Wales, with players representing their literal states of origin. The mania in PNG surrounding this series of matches in particular, and rugby league in general, is taken up in Chapter Six.
almost complete support of his opponent was enough to account for the margin of victory for Apelis. Lambom Island had ended the near three-decade reign of Sir Julius Chan in national politics in Papua New Guinea.

**Happy Geckoes**

To end this discussion of the national election as seen from Lambom Island, I offer the following story. It shows the subtlety and humour that is often expressed when Lak people evaluate their place in wider Papua New Guinea society. They are not merely passive seekers of handouts, nor unwitting victims of government neglect. The people of Lambom have an appreciation of irony, and a critical perspective regarding their relationship to government. These events occurred several months before the actual polling, during the extended Christmas holiday season, when most villages in PNG are host to many of their scattered urban relatives who return home to the holidays to experience the special attractions of their own ples.

The lights were left on for the entire night after the school’s new solar panels had been installed. A few people came by to look at the system, commenting on the unprecedented brilliance lighting up Lambom’s nightscape. Strangely, very few people spent more than a minute or two inside the classrooms. The glaring brightness made the curious visitors uncomfortable, for the harsh illumination made those inside the classrooms visible to those outside, and those outside invisible to those inside. People milled through the classrooms then moved on, to stand a bit away in the dark and from there appreciate the blazing light. Eventually a group of men, mostly younger men from the nearby bachelors’ house, gathered on the porch of the aid post about one hundred metres away. Firmly situated within the accustomed darkness of a Lambom night, talk revolved around the nature of the school’s new lighting system. The rumoured cost of the lights, solar panels, switches, control panel, fuse box, and deep-cycle batteries was bandied about. The workmen had variously proclaimed the system to be worth between ten thousand and fifty thousand kina. The actual value was debated, and several men ventured their opinions while others mooted plans to price the value of the system at
stores in Kokopo and Rabaul. Talk then turned to the possible benefits of the lights to the school.

Most everyone agreed that electricity was a good thing for the school in general. There was a distinct absence of talk about the specific ways the school would be improved, until Misalou, a man in his twenties, raised the first note of dissent. Misalou was a high school teacher returning home during his holidays. He was currently teaching at a school near Lae in Morobe province. Misalou asked whether students would take classes at night now. He wondered aloud about how the teachers planned to use the lighting to improve Lambom’s woeful advancement rate of students from primary school to high school. He pointed out that two of the three classrooms had neither desks nor chairs for the students. The two junior grades of students were forced to learn to read and write while sitting on the cement floor. Misalou concluded by saying he did not know how the students would benefit, but at least the geckoes would be happy! This drew uproarious laughter from the men assembled, and was repeated several times whenever the laughter began to wane, its hilarity not willingly released.

A national election campaign is the most dramatic example of the notion of Gavman for Lambom Islanders. It impels a series of actions and draws upon a set of notions that place the concept of Gavman directly in the experiential world of the Lak. Yet there are other means for Lak people to address the idea of Gavman that are less dramatic, but more rooted in the everyday life of the Lambom community. It is to these more mundane aspects of Gavman that I turn now in order to broaden our view of Lak thinking on the subject.

**Gavman Sited: School and Aid post in the local landscape and imagination**

In his paper on the 1992 national election in Namatanai electorate Foster cites a story told to Diamond Jenness regarding the intangibility of government:

An ordinary Indian can never see the ‘government.’ He is sent from one office to another, is introduced to this man and to that, each of whom
sometimes claims to be the ‘boss’, but never sees the real government, who keeps himself hidden. (1996:145)

Foster’s response to this quandary is to ask:

What are the means by which the idea of the state is communicated? What are the means by which this idea is made experientially real, naturalized as a taken for granted feature of everyday affairs? Or, what are the means by which ‘the state’ becomes visible in the course of events? (145-6).

His answer is to examine the process of voting as a ritual of statehood, a visible manifestation of the idea of the state for the people of Tanga Island. He argues “the act of voting constitutes ‘the state’ as an experiential reality—however temporary—for people who otherwise rarely encounter state agents or agencies…as a salient aspect of their everyday lives” (146). Having examined the campaign on Lambom for the 1997 national election as a similarly imagined, temporally bounded process of government tangibility, I believe there is a complementary frame from which local people can view government outside the limited timeframe of election campaigns and as a “salient aspect of their everyday lives”. This is possible by looking at the School and Aid post as the most visible, tangible manifestations of Gavman within village life. The fact that both Sir Julius and Sir Michael made the school the focus of their brief campaign visits suggests that the candidates themselves make this connection. Further, since the Lak view constructed structures and people themselves as the material outcomes of particular social relationships, and the relation between people and their government in PNG is often seen as a relationship between client and patron (Clark n.d.; Cooper 1996), a moral evaluative discourse as to the state of that relationship is possible. It is this type of assessment that emerges when people on Lambom talk about their school and aid post.

This discourse often runs counter to official Gavman pronouncements about the function and proper activity and ends of these institutions. The contrast between these two discourses points to an evaluation on the nature and efficacy of these institutions, from critiques of their ability to attain the ends they propose, to ruminations regarding the actual desirability of those ends, and what those ends might actually be. Talking about these sites as assemblages of various social relations affords the Lak a way to create a discourse about Gavman in a manner familiar to local sensibilities and practice.
My analysis will piece together the local thinking about the composite nature of these sites as contextualized in Lak thinking in general about sites. My aim is to foreground the local view of *Gavman* grounded in the material exigencies of daily life on Lambom.

Like most places in PNG Lambom islanders experience government through the practice of elections, the operation of local councils and village courts, and in the payment of various taxes. However in a material sense *Gavman* exists on Lambom most tangibly in the structures built on the island to facilitate the provision of education and health services: the school and the aid post. These buildings manifest these services and *Gavman* in its most concrete form. They are the primary material representations of *Gavman* encountered in daily life. As such, the Lak find it sensible to view them from a perspective grounded in local conceptions of the concrete and corporeal. Reflecting wider Melanesian notions of personhood as partible or fractal persons (Strathern 1988; Wagner 1991), Lak concepts as evidenced through the symbolism of mortuary ritual (in particular the *Tondon*, where a deceased person is symbolically reconstituted as a platform draped with tambu shells, photos, personal objects, then disassembled and distributed) portray the physical body as a corporeal manifestation of the social relations enacted in its production (see Chapter Three on *kastom*). Likewise the school and aid post are seen as tangible representations or manifestations of multiple social forces and agents, foci for reflection concerning the nature of government in terms of social relations.

Lak people, like most folks around the world, are used to talking about the various sites that make up their physical environment. Whether it is gardens, houses, coconut groves, copra dryers, or reefs, places are understood to be under the purview, and manifestations, of various social relations. Places have social genealogies that reflect the actions of a range of agents, whether clan or individual, thus grounding these places firmly in a world of social relations. Though most Lak people will recognize a set of rules governing the relation between people and land, in practice there are evident strategies that test the bounds of strict rule-based interpretations. This difference between stated norms and practice places this discourse within a moral context to serve as the basis for evaluating the nature of any link between particular interests and a specific piece of land. Rights in land are directly related to a set of obligations in the form of acquisition histories and ongoing upkeep of that land. It is within this context
that talk about Gavman, vis-à-vis its most concrete local manifestations as school and aid post, is situated. Thus when Lambom Islanders turn their attention on the school and aid post the discussion likewise turns to one of rights and obligations. More often than not, a standard critique emerges that focuses on the validity of the rights being asserted and the obligations that have been abrogated. This is the basis of the moral conclusions subsequently expressed. From this discourse it is possible to discern a local perspective on the moral behaviour of Gavman, on whether or not it is playing its expected part. To begin, the school site is located south of the main village camp on ground marked by the colonial government for its construction. Set on the island's second largest expanse of relatively level ground, the school buildings and its field spread across an area approximately two hundred metres wide, by one hundred and fifty metres deep. The size of the field was nearly doubled by the bulldozing of close to fifty metres of hillside by the logging company in the early 1990s. The main infrastructure consists of two school houses set on concrete foundations, one a single classroom built prior to independence in 1975, and the other a double classroom constructed during the 1980s with funds reputedly provided by the descendants of Italian survivors of the Port Breton colony. The double classroom building has lighting and a power source drawn from the large solar panels and deep-cycle batteries bestowed upon the community by Sir Julius Chan during the lead up to the 1997 election as described above. There are three kit houses built for accommodating the teachers: one, largely derelict now, was built during colonial times, and once boasted its own tank and plumbing, including a shower; the other two were built in the mid 1990s by the logging company, and share a water tank. These houses now include fluorescent lighting and electric outlets, the headmaster taking advantage of the electric supply to power his video player and stereo. The teachers ran a line from the school's solar system to their houses soon after the school gained electricity. All these buildings are made of wood with corrugated iron for roofing. There is a small garden tended by students that surrounds the flagpole; the most striking bilas/decorations in it are the massive gears left behind by the Port Breton colonists over a hundred and twenty years earlier. The aid post is set just south of the school’s field, nestled among the rising hills that steepen nearby into the mountainous terrain that makes up most of the island. It was constructed around the time of independence, and a local big man who served in the provincial legislature at the time proudly claims it as “wok bilong mi/my accomplishment”. The main building is made of
brick and contains a storeroom, an examination room, and two rooms with beds for patients. The aid post has fluorescent lighting fixtures wired both inside and out, a refrigerator provided by UNICEF, and its own water tank and plumbing for a sink. Behind the aid post, slightly up the hill is the main doctor’s house, likewise made of brick. This house boasts screened doors and louvered windows, and has three bedrooms and its own tank and plumbing, as well as wash basins and a toilet. There also is a decrepit two-bedroom fibreboard house built on steel posts, which was provided for nurses but is no longer occupied. A block of two toilets is also made of brick and had its own small tank and plumbing. The tank has long since been appropriated to serve as a copra oven, and only the steel frame left on the toilet block roof remains.

Both the school buildings and aid post are visibly damaged and obviously incomplete. Both the condition of the buildings and the quality of the services provided reflect a lack of effort that local people refer to as haphap/half done; sloppy. The evident decrepitude of these facilities is locally attributed to neglect and mismanagement by the outsiders who have occupied them as staff/Gavman personnel. Similarly, local people speak of the salaried Gavman officials, teachers and doctors, as doing this with their own lives as well. Teachers take too many days off to go to town and get their pay. One young teacher on his first assignment arrived two weeks late, taught for a week then promptly went to Kokopo where he sponsored a drinking party for a group of bachelors that lasted almost another week. People accept that the remoteness of Lambom puts strains on local teachers and aid post personnel—they have no gardens and depend on trips to town for their pay and supplies—they just wish that the trips would not be so frequent or extended. Older folks see the situation as getting worse; the young have no reference point, but they do note recent declining schooling opportunities and health services. At the end of the 1996 school year only four sixth grade students out of a class of twenty-eight qualified to carry on their schooling at high-school. Fewer students are going to High School than had been the case in the past. This general failure to advance in schooling results in a markedly diminished chance to qualify for, or actually find, work opportunity. The remoteness of laskona life is accepted as a fact of brute geography, but the resulting neglect is also linked with human and institutional shortcomings.

When viewed within a patron/client context it is apparent that Gavman is not holding up its end of the bargain. Local people organize school and health committees, collect
school fees, and pay for uniforms, notebooks, pens, and medicine. The children spend an afternoon each week gathering firewood for their teachers. The people of Lambom expend community effort by dedicating one *lain* of workers each month to cut the grass at the school and the aid post. They send their children to school on the majority of occasions, such as garden clearing and copra cutting, when their labour would be most advantageous to their families. They feel they are meeting the expectations that *Gavman* has for them, yet just as clearly accept that *Gavman* is not providing the services they expect in return.

People on Lambom recall the era when Alois Todowe represented them in the provincial legislature. Alois was Lak’s original provincial government representative serving two terms in Kavieng from the lead up to independence. It was during Alois’ time in government office that the aid post was first constructed. He was also the government member when the school teachers’ housing was constructed, and was seen as a member of the PPP to be an ally of Sir Julius, and on a winning team. After Alois retired from government, services and infrastructure development are rightly perceived to have entered a state of decline. Whether Alois’ withdrawal from participation in government is the reason or it is part of a general, slow decline in the ability of the state to make a difference in village life, he is seen as a crucial factor in Lak memories of a better relation with *gavman*. Subsequent Members for Lak followed Alois in representing other parts of the electorate. It was not until the late 1980s that Lak was again represented in the Provincial Assembly in Kavieng by a Lambom man, Ezekiel Mandring. Ezekiel no longer lives on Lambom. He is best remembered as being the man behind the *sola* affair. Ezekiel let it be known some time around 1990 that he had arranged with an overseas development agency (some people say it was American others European) to provide electricity for the village. If the people would clear a large area within a few hundred metres of the village the overseas agency would pay for, deliver, and install a large array of solar panels and provide the wiring for all the houses on the island. People were excited by this news. A site was selected on a patch of ground above the village that was considered too steep for gardening and work began on the arduous task of clearing. Lison remembers the work as being extremely difficult, with the people told of the need to pull out tree roots and not merely cut the vegetation and burn the refuse. A time limit was imposed according to word sent from Ezekiel and
people worked for several weeks, eventually clearing an area over fifty metres wide and twenty metres deep.

The date for the arrival of the solar panel came and went. This was not initially of great concern; but as months passed and there was no sign of a work crew or the solar panels they were meant to install, people started to complain. Ominously there was also no word from Ezekiel and no response from him when word was passed along to Kavieng expressing people’s concerns regarding the completion of the project to electrically power the village. The solar panels never did show up, and Ezekiel was not re-elected, being replaced by another Ezekiel, this one surnamed Waisale (who plays a large part in the coming of logging to Lak discussed in Chapter Eight). The new cleared space above the village eventually was designated free ground for who ever wanted to garden there. Its nearness to the village was weighed against the difficulty in working on such a steep grade, and several gardens were planted. People took to calling the area sola in commemoration of the never-delivered solar panels. What they had instead of electricity was a questionably appropriate plot of ground for gardens.

By the late 1990s gardens remained on the slope, but people had noticed the increased runoff from the slopes directly into the village during steady periods of rain, and particularly during the annual monsoons of July and August. Ezekiel has only returned to Lambom for brief visits in the last few years. Yet this experience has added to the scepticism of Lambom people when they think of expected gavman projects. The arrival of Sir Julius’s gecko gratifying panels at the school only support local people’s notions of the failure of gavman to truly deliver the goods for Lambom.
Chapter Six

TRAVELS

In this chapter I will discuss the role travel plays in the project of Lambom Island identity formation. My aim is to outline and analyse the way different aspects of travel present a range of contexts from which Lambom people can think about their relative position in the world. The basic fact of being in other places forces Lambom people to reflect in different way upon their own place. I will analyse the implications of disconnection for the community by focusing on an attempted journey to acquire relief during a period of climate-induced food shortages. Lambom’s condition as a marginal place within the region and nation became apparent during this episode. A focus on the role of dinghy operator will highlight the combination of traditional aspects of masculinity with a new stage upon which to express these capabilities. As a further example of the role of travel in masculine identity formation, I will outline a trip made by a large group of young men to the small town of Namatanai. This will lead to an examination of how Lambom’s young men present themselves on a regional scale, and see themselves within an even wider context as rugby playing athletes.

Moving through the Region: Tenuous links and Laskona identity

The importance of Lambom’s connection to the world is starkly apparent through the experience of life on the island at times when those links are severed. The people of Lambom are from time to time forced to deal with the implications of not being able to travel. The events surrounding such a period of isolation in early 1997 serve as an avenue to examine the exigencies of a daily life disconnected from the wider world. This discourse of disconnection highlights the aspects of a Laskona identity which are focused upon isolation. Such constructs are in contrast to other glosses of Laskona that
revolve around evaluating connections, as distantly and tenuously engaged. I will begin this section by outlining the events and local implications of a disconnected Lambom. Next, I will describe the attempt to overcome this isolation, and the resultant truths that people of Lambom came to express as a result of this attempt.

In February of 1997 the importance of Lambom’s connections to a wider community became apparent in the wake of cyclone Justin. The cyclone itself was situated several hundred kilometres away from Lambom, centred off the coast of Queensland, but its effects on the local climate in Lak were marked. What was usually a doldrums period saw the return of predominantly south-westerly winds, and these winds were unusually strong. As the cyclone remained in one location for over a month, on Lambom the combination of high winds and rough seas led to a crisis in the local subsistence economy. Gardens were extensively damaged, with crops uprooted and dried out. Especially hard hit were the staple root crops such as taro, yams and sweet potato. Fruit trees that provided pawpaw were unable to hold onto their heavily laden produce, and banana trees were easily uprooted by the high winds from their precarious perches on Lambom’s rocky inclines. Travelling to gardens was dangerous due to falling coconuts (a serious threat on toilet trips to the beach as well) and branches, with many trees toppling across the narrow paths up to the island’s interior gardening areas. The rough seas made it difficult to travel by canoe with any sort of load, or to fish the waters beyond the reef; fishing the reef from the shore was likewise curtailed due to the ensuing turbidity of the waters ringing the island, and spear-fishing was impossible as well. Visits to town to resupply the trade stores were not possible, and the island’s stock of rice, and tinned meat and fish, were quickly consumed.

The one garden crop that weathered the harsh winds was cassava, and after an initial surfeit of bananas and pawpaw in the island-wide diet, gem and dried coconut became the monotonous staple of most meals. A lack of buai (betel nut) was especially bemoaned and was considered the crowning misery. Of immediate concern was the difficulty in obtaining fresh water from the mainland for drinking, as the usual five minute trip across the passage became a battle with winds and current, and canoes were unable to be loaded as fully as was usual. As the days of high winds stretched into weeks, and the weeks into a month, it was decided that something had to be done. The community quickly pooled resources to provide produce to the teachers, the Bible
translators, the nurse, and the anthropologist, none of whom had gardens of their own. But as time passed with no sign of diminishing winds, the entire community faced the real prospect of severe food shortages.

A roster of supplementary food sources was accessed to lessen the hunger on Lambom and the monotony of eating gem alone at each meal. First the small kuka (shore crabs) were gathered in large numbers, dozens being needed to provide a satisfying meal. Since almost everyone was gathering them along the passable parts of the shoreline, they soon became harder to find and less likely to provide a meal (though the solitary few that were found would be quickly tossed on the nearest fire). Next, the larger coconut crabs in the coconut groves of the island’s steep interior were targeted. This involved trips at night into the bush, a less than common practice on Lambom, and was dependent upon a foraging group’s access to electric torches, with kerosene lanterns providing a sorry substitute for the less fortunate. These crabs live in deep burrows that are hard to find, particularly at night, and the efforts to find them quickly diminished after the first few evenings.

During an early quest to find the large crabs a group of schoolboys happened upon a kuskus (possum) which they quickly captured and triumphantly displayed upon their return to the village. At first they tied it to a post in the centre of the village, but after several older boys commented on the kuskus’s skills at escaping such bindings, it was quickly bashed, then thrown whole onto the fire. Impatient as they waited for the small animal to cook properly, one bold young fellow grabbed the head off of the smouldering carcass and ran off to eat on his own. A melee ensued as the remaining boys ripped what was left of their hunting spoils and dispersed in opposing directions, with the less fortunate of the party in hot pursuit. This elicited howls of laughter from the gathered adults, as well as predictions that the boys would all be sick the next day from eating partially cooked meat.

The food shortages continued to get worse and it was decided that a trip for aid relief or supplies was imperative. With the seas being so rough the consensus was that travelling to Kokopo would be too dangerous. Exploratory dinghy trips to Point Waum had found the sea extremely difficult and the small boat’s crews decided that even a short trip to nearby Lamassa was too risky. Radio bulletins had reported significant damage to the
coastal areas of the Gazelle peninsula of East New Britain. A trip to the provincial capital of Kavieng was planned to seek assistance from the government as well as the logging company. This would involve a short but treacherous rounding of Cape St George, then travel by car to the regional government centre in Silur, next through the mountains by steep logging roads, then onward by coastal road through Namatanai and finally onto the Boluminski highway to Kavieng.

Rounding the Point

Four community leaders, myself, and the operator and boskru/first mate of a dinghy set out at dawn on our attempted relief trip. As we approached the Cape, the seas became exceptionally rough, and the typical high swells ran dangerously close as the winds whipped the sea into a frenzy. Giving the point a wide berth in order to avoid the most severe conditions, it still took our pilot Aisoli close to an hour to complete the trip around the East coast to Metlik that normally took twenty minutes. Aisoli drew upon all of his experience and skills, constantly tacking between the narrow wave peaks as he climbed each steep swell before slamming down on its backside. He stood with his legs shoulder-width apart, bent at the knees and hips in order to maintain his balance while operating the dinghy. With a soaked towel slung around his shoulders he would intermittently wipe the saltwater from his eyes with his spare hand, which he also waved like a surfer endeavouring to keep his balance. His ability to hold onto the throttle, and steer the dinghy, was tested again and again as the boat lurched violently from side to side as it pitched up and down the incline of the waves.

As we continued towards the Cape, Aisoli’s boskru was perched at the prow of the boat, pointing a path away from the highest peaks of the incoming waves, as well as the flotsam of coconuts and large branches that could damage the propeller. Three passengers bailed furiously with empty oil containers that had their lids cut off as we progressed gradually against the high seas. Aisoli’s control of the throttle was masterful; he constantly had to increase and decrease the dinghy’s speed in incremental measure in order to progress up a wave swell, then hover precariously at its peak waiting for the precise moment to accelerate down its backside while avoiding too precipitous a descent that would have led the ensuing wave front to crash over the bow and completely

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swamp the boat. In between moments of abject terror (when the song “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” came unbidden to the fore of my consciousness: “does anyone know, where the love of God goes, when the waves turn the minutes to hours?”), I could not help but marvel at Aisoli’s ability to simultaneously remain standing, maintain a feather light touch on the throttle, a firm grasp on the stia/tiller as he steered, plotted and followed a course through the churning seas, as wave after wave crashed against him and the boat.

The seas continued to worsen. Even as we rounded the Cape, my fellow passengers, all experienced sea travellers, found it difficult to manage smiles of mutual encouragement as they had when things first began getting rough. Aisoli was totally focused on the task at hand, and it was not until we had passed the southernmost tip of New Ireland, and had the seas running behind us that he was able to partially relax, shake his head in relief and give me a smile. From that point the going was still rough, but much easier to endure as the possibility of the dinghy being swamped was no longer a constant concern. The mood in the dinghy lightened, and conversation was possible for the first time since we began our rounding of the Cape. Wilson Boki, Lambom’s komiti (Local Government Councillor), beamed as he commented on the severity of the seas and praised Aisoli’s skills. He pointed out that a dinghy had been swamped only a few months earlier, in conditions much less extreme than they had been on this day. Laughter erupted when the boskru attempted to light a sodden Spia cigar, first when he pulled out a package of soaked matches, then when he repeatedly spun the wheel of his lighter against its wet flint. As we sped towards our landing at Metlik, conversation picked up, mainly about the difficulty of the trip so far, congratulating Aisoli’s status as the premier rough water captain, and the belief that the rest of the trip should be much easier from then on. Most of those present agreed with this final assessment, and though it was mostly so, the road to come was only marginally less difficult, and at times equally harrowing.

I will return to the events of this voyage later in this chapter in order to analyse the skills and performative aspects of Aisoli’s operation of Sikau. For now I will continue outlining this journey as a precursor to discussing the tenuousness of connections for Laskona life and identity.
Coming ashore at Metlik it was apparent that the logging camp was particularly dry. Winds were gusting across the bare swath that had been cleared from the old plantation as the site of the logging camp. The effects of the drought were evident here as well as on Lambom. The underbrush behind the worker’s quarters was sparse and dry. We took the opportunity to towel off and put on dry clothing in the bachelors’ quarters. Once suitably refreshed and recovered, the big men went to see the camp manager then to talk to the company staff. Someone from the mainland had walked over the mountain, down the steep wooded path and around the bay, to the camp the day before and arranged for the use of the company car that was luckily present at the time. There was time for biscuits and tea to warm up with while the jeep was to be fuelled and the driver fetched. Discussion turned to the condition of the road ahead. Along the East Coast the stationary cyclone had brought very different weather from that on Lambom and the West Coast. From Bakok village northward the steady winds had brought relief precipitation, and the eastern side of the mountains down to the coast had been drenched with steady rain. Conditions were exacerbated by the effects of the clear cutting for the road and the harvesting of trees along the mountain slope, which allowed less resistant pathways for rivulets running down the hill. Several small streams were swollen beyond their banks, and were difficult to navigate because of the increased speed of the current. North of Matkamlagir, the runoff became concentrated and moved down the hill through the village like a torrent. The jeep would take us past Siar village as far as Silur government station. There we were to meet one of the company trucks and continue on over the mountains, then along the coast to Namatanai. Approval was given for the requisitioning of the vehicles and our mood was upbeat as we prepared to set out.

The road from Metlik meandered along the edge of the peninsula up and down hills along to the cut-off to Bakok village. Past the junction we met our first swollen river. The small stream, that was the regular washing place of the nearby village, stretched from its narrow banks to over ten metres wide. There was a muddy brown wave-crested torrent careening across the road then pooling in the flat plain of the coast before emptying to the sea. We stopped and exited the jeep to survey our path. Several villagers were standing at the edge of the stream or gingerly working their way across in stops
and starts between the higher and less current buffeted eddy dividing high points. Greetings were exchanged amongst kin and old friends. Betel nut and its accoutrements as well as Spia cigars were shared as the water flowed past. Conferring amongst ourselves and with others by the stream’s edge, it was agreed that the stream was easily passable and a preferred pathway across the watercourse was quickly decided upon. As a group of villagers started across ahead of us tracing our intended route I skinned a betel nut with my teeth and tossed away its skin as I reached into my basket for kampang. Aisoli immediately bent over and picked up the discarded skin, slapped the back of my hand smartly, before putting the refuse into my basket. He admonished me for being so careless. He explained that we were no longer back on Lambom, and that several of the villages further along our road had reputations for sorcery. “Nogut ol i bagarapim yu!/it would be unfortunate if they mess you up!” he warned. I expressed ignorance as to who would want to do me harm. Aisoli cautioned that sometimes any victim would do, to allow a sorcerer to practice his spells and gauge the efficacy of his poiisin/injurious magic. Though the impending road was not considered unduly hazardous, there were other dangers to be kept in mind on our trip.

The crossing was made without any unforeseen drama. Though the water ran above axle height, the jeep had a “snorkel” (an air-intake extender that channelled air to the carburettor) above its cab. The power of the stream was evident as the current buffeted the jeep sideways and the driver had to constantly steer against the flow. A couple of those who had waded across waited on the other side, and climbed up into the box to hitch a ride up the road. This was a common practice along this stretch of the road, and most requests for rides were granted when space allowed. Both the local company officers and the Malaysian contractor staff had learnt that roadblocks would spring up if locals felt that the car service was not made freely available. People had taken to sitting in groups across the road, effectively blocking transit as they awaited a possible ride. Many gardens lined the road, following the pattern of gardening along the path that the people of this region were accustomed to.

We rode for the next half-hour winding our way along the coast. The road was wet and rutted and water pooled across the path in several places, as there were no consistent drainage ditches lining its edges. Suddenly we emerged from the bushland that had framed the road and were confronted by an expanse of water stretching across our route.
I was told this was the river Jiao. The river was at least fifty metres wide and moving at a furious pace. There was no bridge here, as the river was usually only a few metres wide. One of my companions pointed out that the river’s increased width was due not only to the recent rains and runoff, but also to the incompetence of the newer machine operators. When the logging operations shifted focus to the more northerly region of Lak, the previous operators had been replaced by workers from Siar village. The original machine operators had several years of experience in moving earth to redirect the increased flow of water that was the result of logging. Most of these men had been based at Metlik and had come from Bakok village and Lambom Island. With the establishment of the Weitin camp the men of Siar had decided it was their turn to fill the more lucrative and appealing jobs of operating the heavy machinery. One evening they had gathered all the current operators together, and after some argument that included a brief fight, they had convinced their southern relatives that it was time to give up their jobs to men from the immediate region. Although there was some lingering resentment on the part of my fellow travellers, there was an acceptance of this switch as being understandable and irrevocable. Nonetheless the current degradation of the crossing-points along the road was viewed as the inevitable consequences of the greediness of others.

Regardless, I could not see any way that we would be able to cross this barrier, as its width and speed were more severe than the previous small stream that had buffeted us so ominously. My companions were not as pessimistic and directed my attention to the far bank of the river. There was a large road-grader present on the opposite side of the water, and as we watched it entered the river and proceeded to slowly make its way across to our side. As the grader progressed across the river it was apparent that the water was deeper than the last stream we had forded. The grader’s large tires were more than half-submerged as it passed the river’s mid-point. My rough estimation was that the river at its deepest point was close to two metres deep. The machine made its way slowly across the river, the water pounding its upstream side caused it to sway but it was able to remain on course. While the water rose against that side, my attention was directed to its downstream side, where there was a lowering of the river’s height and slowing of its speed in the wake of the grader. My confidence was buoyed, as it was apparent that the grader would be able to re-cross the river and carrying us to the other
side. When I asked whether we could all find a place to ride on the grader and if there was a car for us to meet on the far bank my query was met with amused smiles. I was told that we would continue on in the car that had carried us this far, much to my puzzlement.

The plan to cross the river was explained to me. We would not be riding on the grader; rather we would be riding in its wake. The grader would cross upstream from us and our jeep would move parallel to it in the calmer waters of its slipstream. The water flow on the downstream side of the grader was visibly less rough than the current in general, but still was rougher than our last crossing earlier in the day. Though my fellow travellers expressed confidence in this manner of fording the river, there was a sense of apprehension as we climbed back in to the jeep to continue our journey. Our driver attempted to reassure us by stating that he had crossed the river in this manner before, but I made sure that I was sitting next to a door in case a quick escape was required. The crossing was completed without incident but with much trepidation expressed by Lambom contingent. The grader continuously swayed in an ominous fashion over the jeep, appearing to be on the verge of tipping on top of us. The jeep itself was buffeted by the current as it periodically slipped past the grader and pushed our vehicle in a frightening manner. The jeep almost lost purchase on the river bottom but eventually the driver got into a less powerful flow of current as we neared the shore and the river became shallower.

The next river we had to make our way across without the grader. Here it was being done by bulldozer. Talk of hooking the jeep up to the back of the dozer by rope was quickly squelched by the driver. The bulldozer operator agreed. The jeep would have to be left behind. The crossing was made with our party crowded into the cab of the machine. *Wantoks* on the other side of the river told us of a company car in a hamlet about a kilometre further up the road. As we walked along the road the consensus was that if we could get a ride the rest of our journey would be straightforward. Much to everyone's relief the car as well as its driver was present when we arrived at the village. Soon we were on our way to Silur.

Our journey reached its midpoint in Silur, but not in the manner anyone of us had expected. Driving into the small government station we made our way towards the
office of the Kiap. The plan was to inform the Kiap of the difficulties on Lambom, and try and arrange a ride from Silur on to Namatanai, and ultimately Kavieng. That was not to be. We were quickly informed that the road was impassable just north of the station cutting us off from the road, the Kiap’s car, and the airstrip as well. It was decided to return to Lambom by the road on which we had come. A feeling of anticlimax was inescapable. The situation was lamentable, and several members of our party expressed the unhappiness that our efforts to that point were for naught. “Yumi Laskona tasol!” was voiced. A resignation to the fact of our impending return journey was reinforced by the uncertainty of securing further transport and doubts about when the road would be navigable again.

**Picture 9: Keeping the new road passable was not always possible**

Our aim in travelling to town had been to draw upon regional travel routes to overcome the difficulties caused by the cyclone cutting off the usual supply route to Kokopo. The failure of our journey and its premature cessation pointed to the physical realities of being located in New Ireland’s Laskona. Here the focus was not upon mere distances in relating Lambom’s disconnection from the rest of the province, but also the tenuous nature of those connections. The condition of the road exacerbated the sense of being Laskona, not only because it was so obviously a temporary connection contingent upon
the logging company’s presence. The road’s impermanence highlighted the missed potential for making links to the wider world more dependable. This was taken as an indication that the provincial and national governments saw connections to the Laskona as being of little lasting importance. From Silur up to where the road was sealed south of Namatanai, bridges had been built and travel was easier and more frequent. This was in stark contrast with the road south, which beyond the logging company’s continuous maintenance and upgrading, was little more than a bush track. Among the people of Lak it was common to note that where they lived was not only the most remote part of the province, but that they were the last to see any government funds or works carried out to link them up with the rest of the island. In contrast, people pointed to the fact that the road’s southernmost sealed stretch began at Houris, Sir Julius Chan’s plantation home south of Namatanai. The stretch through that brief region was even lined with streetlights, the only such lighted sections of the road outside of the towns of Namatanai and Kavieng. As one man disparagingly put it “Namatanai, em i banis bilong pik/Namatanai is a fenced pig pen”. The implication here is that the town was figuratively enclosed to contain the wealth present there. Lak was physically outside this enclave and its connections to the rest of the province. The people of the Laskona were on the outside looking in. The implications for residents of Lambom with regards to their place in the world and identity formation were self-evident.

The situation on Lambom remained tenuous. Eventually the weather turned and dinghies were able to make the trip to Kokopo. Trade stores replenished their supplies and individuals were able to buy rice for the short term. Copra cutting and kampang cooking was taken up in numbers as the primary form of cash cropping and means to earn cash. Promises of relief from the provincial government were minimal, and in the end after a month Lambom received thirty bales of rice. This was nowhere near enough relief for a community of five hundred.

The general conditions for the short term with regards to gardening meant that people were still hungry. Current gardens were unable to provide more than a minimum of the required sustenance for the community. New gardens would not produce sufficient food for months. A decision was made by the Lambom community to spend the money Sir Julius provided for the construction of the seawall during the election campaign to buy rice. Lambom people were forced to choose between infrastructure and sustenance. The
choice was nearly unanimous. As one man put it “Mipela bin kaikai dispela siwal/We ate the seawall”. Nearly seven months later a ship arrived with famine relief --- part of the national government's provision of aid as a result of the wider drought crisis that had gripped most of the nation during 1997. By the time this relief arrived, things had normalized in Lambom's gardens and the island was gripped in a beche la mer selling frenzy. The rice was from Thailand and the lot for the Lambom folk had been sitting at the bottom of the ship's hold and much of it had been affected by bilge. People did not like this sort of rice; they were accustomed to Australian types of rice. When people got ill the rice was blamed as being sub-standard. The word came from the Doctor at the aid post at nearby Lamassa: throw away the rice.

However travel does not always lead to a perception of marginality for the people of Lak. The act of travelling, of purposeful movement resonates with cultural ideals relating to masculinity. Demonstrating the skills of operating a dinghy effectively is one means for young men to draw upon existing Lak notions of bodily performance and apply these to a newer mode of movement. In the following case I examine the way Lak people relate the skilful handling of dinghies to ideals of purposeful masculine movement.

**Sikau Das: Performing Masculinity**

My aim in this section is to discuss the ways in which masculinity is performed through travel in general, and by operating a dinghy in particular. Comparing traditional ways of expressing notions of gendered identity and hierarchy through the operation of the local men's cult, with newer means of performative masculinity involved with travel will show the continuities and changes between the two. In essence a new frame is available for notions of maleness and status to be played out upon.

The role of men's cult activities in revealing notions of masculinity and gender hierarchy is well developed across Melanesia. The general view can be summarised:

Men's cults aid in maintaining the established hierarchy in a community. Denying women and uninitiated men access to the secrets of what are held
to be essential rituals helps maintain the dominance of men over women and age over youth. (Smith 1994:80)

In the Lak case, there is sufficient evidence from across the region to support such a generalisation (Albert 1987). However, recent changes in the political economy of Lak have led to a wider range of contexts for the relative importance of seniority versus youth, with regards to status and masculinity, to be played out. This is played out within the field of particular institutions (e.g., lotu, bisnis, engagement with towns; discussed in other chapters) and allows for a transformation of, and dialogue with, customary ritual-based hierarchy as expressed through the men’s cult. Now there are many social dimensions along which to position oneself hierarchically, or alternately to opt out of particular means of hierarchical thinking/ordering: boys working on boats, men engaging with church/kastom/bisnis/gavman/cashcropping/gardening; all of these activities allow new status-complexes to form around lived trajectories.

The operation of the dinghy industry on Lambom generally supports the prevalent notion of male superiority over females, but gives rise to a different arena for the contestation of seniority versus youth with regards to status. Male ascendancy is supported by factors related to the preponderance of men as travellers, and their exclusivity as operators, but challenged on Lambom by the ownership of two dinghies by women. Purposeful, directed travel, in order to create relations beyond the local scene, is of value generally. The less directed travel or movement, glossed as bok bok isa (Lak: just drifting, floating), may be linked to an idealised young male identity, but such activity is not viewed as appropriate for females (see the range of pejorative terms, pasindia meri, meri bilong rot, denigrating women’s mobility37). Received status relations among men are not so clear cut. The traditional means of recognising and achieving status is both supplemented and challenged, and most certainly extended by the role of young men in the operation of dinghies. This can be seen by comparing it with the workings of the men’s cult. Within the context of dinghy operation and seafaring, continuities with notions of masculinity, male efficacy and status from the men’s cult are evident and extended.

37 I do not mean to essentialize the role of women amongst the Lak. However I do believe that such a characterization is a stereotype in the current PNG scene.
Performance through ritual dancing is the pre-eminent way for young men to participate in this cult. The skills that are displayed in customary dancing are also evidenced in handling a dinghy. A range of definitive operator’s skills, such as the loading, handling, and control of a dinghy draw upon the trope of “lightness” that is central to performing ritual dance. Lightness was the desired effect of the semi-fasting and avoidance taboos I witnessed amongst the island’s young men each time they prepared for a dance performance. Limiting food intake to *Ku* (Lak: a ritually prepared bush food, consisting primarily of certain barks, and coconut) transformed the body of the dancer, giving him a *skin tait*/visible musculature, the ultimate mark of which was the appearance of hollows in the clavicles; a dancer was considered well-prepared when spilled water could pool in those hollows.

![Picture 10: Aisoli at the tiller; calm seas at twilight](image-url)
Efficacy in customary dance on Lambom depends upon similar notions attested from elsewhere in New Ireland and PNG in general. For the people of the Lelet plateau the crucial factor in dance depends upon the dancer being “lightweight and buoyant, and ultimately powerful and invulnerable” (Eves 1998:58). Munn also notes the importance of “lightweight buoyancy” as a male value (1986:75). She reports that “…men are identified with vital mobility and external domains of space” (ibid: 101). One consequence of lightness as described by Eves for the Lelet is the “association of lightweight body, fast movement” (Eves 1998:216). Speed is crucial in operating a dinghy, and its potentiality and control are central to an operator’s skills.

Aisoli’s reputation as a dinghy operator is intrinsically linked with his handling of his family’s boat *Sikau*. His seafaring abilities, as described for the voyage to Metlik mentioned earlier, are considered exemplary. Through his operation of the dinghy he displays a range of masculine skills related to the trope of “lightness” which is central to performative dance. While actually travelling, his boat’s prow must be able to rise over the waves when required to avoid being swamped, yet remain solidly within the water to allow stability. The relationship between lightness and power is also salient. While his boat must be light enough to manoeuvre and ride over the waves it is also strong enough to deal with the resultant pounding when slamming back against the water. It is here that the lightness of a dancer’s body and its attendant properties are extended from the operator through to his dinghy. This is not seen as a given property of a dinghy, but rather as the result of the driver’s knowledge and skill through the action of his preparation and work. Like dancing, learning of the necessary skills is coupled with the carrying out of supplementary preparations similar to fasting that imbue the body/dinghy with the desired properties.

Washing the dinghy in fresh water after a trip strips it of damaging salt water. Running the engine in the stream at Lavonai is considered particularly important. The “no hevi tumas/lighter” fresh water cleans away the potentially debilitating effects of salt on the engine’s ability to run smoothly and powerfully. This is explicitly compared to the effects of “light” bush-based foods like *ku* in cleansing the body of heaviness of village food that weigh down and slow down a dancer’s movements and limit his endurance.
and power. Also important in this respect is the operator's skill in distributing the load of passengers and cargo within his dinghy. An operator must have at his disposal the ability to quickly move around and through waves, speeding up through troughs then quickly altering speed over wave crests.

These skills and properties also display continuities with the young male idealisations surrounding the trope of das/dust. Das imagery revolves around the potential for continuous, spontaneous movement. It is an expression which recognises the culturally expected wanderlust of young men. Travelling by dinghy is a practice that facilitates a similar mobility for Lambom's men. On the Lelet plateau, male dancers' ideal bodies display "transitoriness, being easily blown around and not heavy" (Eves 1998:146). Such properties are similarly linked to restlessness (Eves 1998:196). As a framework to view admired masculine traits, this imagery provides a standard for evaluating masculinity. The dinghy operator, in putting into operation an achieved lightness, combines his and his boat's ability to powerfully move and rise within the context of seafaring, with a similar upward movement of his status as a male. Through the display of efficacy in operating a dinghy, evidencing bravado in mastering travel by sea, a young man such as Aisoli makes his mark as a capable man worthy of status. This is evocative of the status imagery used by seafaring voyagers of Milne bay, where a "Gawan's fame 'climbs' like blowing pandanus" (Munn 1986:192).

There is a similar cultural cachet linked to the operation of other technology related to a modern cash economy. At the Metlik logging camp a worker's status is intrinsically linked to the use of tools38. A general worker uses manual tools and his body's strength to carry out his tasks, and is paid the minimum salary. A chainsaw operator earns more, and is considered of higher status. This gradient of status and remuneration continues up through larger machinery: bulldozers, trucks, graders, backhoes, and log-strippers. The capability of the machinery utilised, beyond the capacities of manual labour, to complete a task, follows an arc of power and efficacy. Likewise a man's status rises concomitantly with the power of the machinery he wields within this hierarchy of

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38 The value of superior technology is a trope that plays out in Lak mythology. In several episodes relating to the adventures of the brothers Swilik and Kapatarai (see Chapter One) the superiority of the elder one is demonstrated through opposition of their respective endeavours: the elder makes a ship and a tubuan, the younger a canoe and a talun. The efficacy of the superior technology of the elder brother is a mark of the brothers' relative status.
labour. The Lak place a significant value on the ability to control such machinery. To operate with tools that are external to the local repertoire, and of limited availability within it, confers an elevated status within the context of work in Lak. Through this, a man shows skills beyond the usual. Operating a dinghy draws on similar linkage of status with technological access. A dinghy is the most desired form of modern technology currently within the experience of Lambom islanders.

The importance of a complex that contrasts hidden/revealed distinctions is the focus of much ethnographic interest in PNG in general, and New Ireland in particular (Wagner 1986, Clay 1986). This complex is also evidenced in many aspects of Lak life, not merely temporal but spatial. The hidden can exist beyond the horizon, not only in the trium (men’s cult’s tabooed area); and its transformation through revelation can be achieved through the work of interested parties on the local scene.

Like ritual leaders in the men’s cult, dinghy operators control forces gained beyond the immediately visible, to display a superior status. They similarly draw upon a repertoire of skills and knowledge to enact their capabilities, and display their efficacy, within a structured context for status and hierarchy. There is a long tradition in Lak of travel by sea, with small canoes venturing well beyond the horizon to access trade goods, iron and other materials that enabled individuals to transform their status. Trips by Mon (the large ritually prepared canoes) were carried out at special times, with men heading off to ritual events to cement or extend their networks; and to enact and display their statuses, their efficacy in the wider world. The skills thus gained, both earned and demonstrated through participation in ritual kastom events, marked a man’s status. As well, esoteric knowledge related to weather sorcery was used on longer journeys in order to safeguard the mon against unexpected dangerous conditions. Likewise, dinghy operators would arrange for this type of sorcery prior to a trip when weather was expected to be unfavourable. And though I never witnessed it, I was told that one operator travelling with a group of senior men actually made a landing after setting out and encountering big seas in order to gather the materials needed to carry out siaro magic. Working within the dinghy and carrying the materials on board he was able to call up rain to calm the seas.
This forum for achieving status instilled aspects of rank that resonated through daily life, from greetings and seating, to decision making and the importance of one's voice within clan and community. Such status, though grounded in infrequent specialised events/kastom, was visible, realised, and reinforced in a myriad of practices throughout daily life. In contrast, the dinghy operator's status is enacted, tested, and proven much more frequently. Much as the act of travel compresses the terrain and landscape of the visible world space, the increased frequency of connection decompresses the timeframe of performing masculinity and male status. The chance to perform identity becomes more common in daily life, more widely accessible at various levels of engagement. Kastom sponsors and male dancers are tested by other men, their abilities challenged in order to be proven. Like kastom events themselves, these tests are infrequent, but are formidable and potentially lethal. Dinghy operators likewise are tested, and the challenges they face in performing their capabilities are real and similarly hazardous.

The Rugby Tournament

Another form of test that allows young men to assert their capabilities involves the sport of rugby. The manner in which Laskona identity was presented during participation in a rugby tournament is the focus of this section. The tournament involved a trip to the town of Namatanai. Within this context I describe an alternative representation of local identity which may be compared with that of the relief journey related earlier in this chapter. It involves a different motivation for travel as well as differing contexts which allowed Laskona identity to be seen in contrast.

Preparations for the tournament began immediately after news of the invitation was received. The manager of the Copra Marketing Board office in Namatanai offered to pay the entry fee for a team to take part in the town. A meeting was called for all interested that night at the men's house enclosure. The manager's brother, a school teacher and rugby coach in Madang, announced the invitation and outlined the nature of the tournament. The format was to be Touch Sevens, with a dozen or so teams entered from around the region and a prize being offered to the winners. With over fifty young men expressing interest the first order of business was to decide whether Lambom would
enter multiple teams. This was quickly discarded as an option. There was universal agreement in favour of a united front. Paskar was chosen as team trainer.

This enthusiasm and the amount of work and effort that were involved in the events which followed this meeting need to be put into context. Rugby football is an obsession for many young men in PNG. The most stylish piece of clothing aspired to be worn by most grasruts was a rugby team jersey representing an Australian Rugby League franchise. If you meet a young man in PNG there is a good chance he considered himself a rugby player now or at some point in the past.

There was no other event that occurred during my two-year stay that involved as much planning, or preparation time as this tournament. To understand this one must understand the wide spread mania for rugby in contemporary PNG. According to a PNG rugby league website the country is the only one in the world where rugby league is the official national sport. Australian rugby is the most popular sport on PNG television. There is a national competition with teams based in the highlands, Lae, Moresby, and Kokopo. Both of the national newspapers report Australian Rugby League results. The sports section in the Post Courier was bannered by ads for Winfield, a brand of cigarettes and the sponsor of the national competition. This mania peaked during State of Origin season in Australia. The State of Origin match is an in-season all-star match between Australia’s top players divided into teams representing the states of New South Wales and Queensland according to a player’s place of birth, or original team affiliation. This last rule allowed players such as Sydney’s Adrian Lam, originally from New Ireland, to represent New South Wales. The participation of a local boy in the big leagues was a fact that was noted by many young men on Lambom.

For the uninitiated, it is worth mentioning that State of Origin football transcends the sort of all-star sporting matches found in North America for instance. In Australia this event could overshadow the League Championship series, drawing its appeal from the rivalry between the two states, regional stereotypes pitting cockroaches against cane toads. The matches were essentially grudge matches, with a particularly rugged play drawing upon a passionate enthusiasm to play in such a highly regarded fixture.

39 However there are other regions in PNG, the Trobriand Islands for instance, where soccer is the sport of choice.
Lambom was quite often the site of regular informal matches. Players would gather at the school yard with latecomers joining in when the school teacher made the field available for play.

On the island ARL matches would be listened to on the radio. Videotapes of the matches would be viewed when available, with bootleg copies available at most shops in town. Local players would project themselves into such a setting with their affiliation for various teams or players. Adrian Lam was a visible reminder that guys from PNG could make the big leagues. An up and coming winger with Melbourne named Marcus Bai hailed from nearby Rabaul. Marcus had played in competition in town and was admired for his physical, bruising style of play.

There was much talk over the ensuing days as arrangements for the trip progressed and plans were made. The tournament was scheduled to take place as part of the wider celebrations marking the expansion of provincial school in Namatanai. In adding grades eleven and twelve the school’s status was being upgraded and it was now to be known as Namatanai National High School. Accompanying the announcement of the tournament was an invitation to perform during the festivities marking the opening of the High School. A group of older men decided to perform a type of choir that they said had not been seen in a long time. This group included several young men as well, and about twenty singers in all began to practice at the men’s house in the early evening following supper.

As discussions were held suggestions were mooted for a name for the team, and practice began. The would-be contestants practiced daily at three in the afternoon. Practices began with fitness training, running, and callisthenics. Teams would be chosen, and then play for the next couple of hours. Men and boys came to watch, and would sit on the porch of the Aid Post, chewing betel nut and talking. Older men told stories about tackle matches they had played in against a team from Lamassa years ago. Several boasted of their skills and in particular their tough tackling abilities. Stories were told about a local man who represented PNG on the PukPuks in the eighties. The brothers of a young man, who played in the national league for the Kokopo-based Islands Guria, boasted of his skills and their own comparable abilities. Comparisons were drawn between local men and ARL players, based on size and speed. The smaller players aspired to be like
Queensland’s star Alfie Langer; the bruisers displayed the toughness and physicality of Wally Lewis or Mal Meninga. In the late 1990s these men personified the quintessential skills of the quick, shifty small player, and the bull-like, run-you-over image of the powerful big man, respectively.

Initial scrimmages involved teams with over twenty players a side, with everyone who showed up being divided into equal sized squads. The school field echoed with the shouts of players calling for passes, or whooping it up when someone broke through the line and was chased towards the goal line. A dialogue between players would draw upon local imagery in exhorting instructions and strategy. “Dat al su!” (Lak: ‘We tighten the rope’), would be shouted directing the players to reform their formation in a straight defensive line, spread evenly across the field, moving together to close gaps that may have opened. To alert fellow defenders to the dummy or fake pass, a player would yell “emading i arowoi” (Lak: the man holds it still). And in a show of bravado a player would shout “ep ngorngor el dadat!” (Lak: ‘The point tide crashes.’) exhorting team members, with a reference to the pounding tide at the southern tip of Lambom, to relentlessly crash through an opening when they have the ball and have opened a gap.

Eventually a group of the better players were identified and were divided into four squads of seven players each. These fellows were the fastest players and the best ball handlers. Individual skills involved both aptitude at passing and catching the ball on offence and the ability to mark, pursue and touch one’s opponents on defence. The players chosen reflected the nature of the type of rugby to be played in the tournament.

Touch sevens is a fast paced game. After an initial kick-off the team returning the ball has a series of six touches to advance the ball the length of the field to score, or if not, as far as possible down the field before turning it over to their opponents. The team with the ball is playing offence; the team attempting to limit their progress by touching them is the defence. When a player is touched by an opponent, he places the ball on the ground between his feet and it is picked up by a team mate who then runs or passes until another touch is registered. Six such touches ensue, until the offensive side scores or the ball is turned over to the opposing team. Long runs are broken when a player shoots the gap between defenders avoiding his marker, or passes the ball to a player along the line. The aim is to get wide of the defending line or isolate one marker against two offensive
players, creating an overlap and forcing the defender to commit to one of his opponents. If the ball carrier is marked a quick pass can set a teammate into the open. If the potential receiver is favoured, a fake pass or dummy can force the defender to overcommit or freeze enabling the ball carrier to shoot the resultant gap.

Defence is organized on a man-to-man basis. Each player on defence lines up across the width of the field and marks an opponent. Players keep aware of the overall setup by calling out the name or a distinguishing feature of one of their opponents. After a few quick touches this individual marking can get the defensive line out of order, a condition which can be exploited by the offensive team to create two-on-one situations, gaps in the line, and overlaps. The defence trains to combat this situation by reforming the line in a zone defence that stretches once again with players evenly spaced across the width of the field. From this reformed set players once again mark out their individual coverage responsibilities amongst the other team’s players. As the game progresses, the ability to react and call out the required actions and then put them into effect is often the key to a cohesive team defence that consistently marks the opponent in a balanced and orderly fashion.

The phases of play became the focus of preparation in the practices leading up to the tournament. Strategies were practiced that involved sequences of quick runs after the touch, with players carrying the ball in a planned series until the defence showed an imbalance or weakness that could be exploited. Specific sequences of passes were rehearsed for situations after a long break when the defence would be broken and under pressure, or for when the team was near the opponents’ goal line. Paskar, who seemed to be on extended leave from his teaching job, or just tardy getting back to work after his leave, coached the team and taught them a range of plays to use. Some of these plays were based on set pieces observed during Australian Rugby League matches on television; others were standard to the repertoire of a trained coach. The players drilled unto they knew the team’s plays and the calls used on the field to put them into practice. Several of these calls involved phrases in Lak that would serve as a code to restrict their opponents’ ability to find out what the Lambom team was up to. The range and scope of this preparation, and its effectiveness in execution was impressive to me. Having coached American football for several years during my earlier career as a school teacher I was surprised at the extent of strategic sets of plays used in rugby. I had assumed it was a more free flowing
was taking a sophisticated and thorough approach to its preparations for competing. The level of training was methodical and comprehensive and the participation and dedication of the players was exhibited daily during practice that lasted for close to three months.

On the organizational side of preparations a number of activities advanced as the group’s plans were put into action. Every member of the team was charged with bringing twenty coconuts, enough to produce copra that was to be cut to earn money for the expected expenses of the trip. Money was needed for jerseys and transport, as well as the costs of accommodation and food.

A trip was made to Kokopo to purchase the maroon jerseys the team had agreed upon. A relative in town who worked for a wholesaler arranged for fifty jerseys to be purchased. Back in the village, the men from the Island’s southernmost rumai dalwan worked on a design to be screened onto the team’s uniform. The process used was based on what one young man had learnt observing silk screening in materials and facilities that were available on Lambom. This involved drawing designs onto a manila file folder. A pattern was then carved out, the cutting done with a razor artistically wielded by one young man. Different designs and patterns were drawn and cut. The ultimate choice involved a front design with the team’s name “Kantri Saii” and a relief of the lighthouse at the tip of Cape St George. On the back there was a picture of a coconut with the copra cut out in the familiar cookie cutter pattern surrounded by the motto: “Nuk tari Sa” in Lak, translated as “Save i stap” in Tok Pisin, literally “the know-how is here”. Thirty-five maroon jerseys were subsequently screened, with white paint being stencilled onto the fronts and backs of the shirts. The assertion expressed on the team’s jerseys, one of backwoods know-how based upon rural cash crop production, is worth noting. It plays upon the merging of backwoods strength and capability with productive capacity in the world of cash and modernity. This was the identity that the team projected. This combination represents a potency in things both inherent in Laskona life and those relating to being players in the wider society’s political economy. It was a theme that the Lambom entry in the Namatanai festivities was intent on expressing on a wider stage. This played out in the events that were to follow during the trip itself.

sport and that patterned plays were not utilized to the degree I saw here. Subsequent time spent in Canberra confirmed my eventual understanding of the game, and the sophistication the Lambom players demonstrated in their approach to it.
Fully fifty men, including rugby players, choir members, and other pasindia, set out for Namatanai after breakfast one morning. A boat was chartered to carry the travellers to the mainland from the island. Several trips were made, before a final group headed directly to Metlik around the point in the dinghy. The majority of the men climbed up over the thousand meter high coastal hills, before descending near Matataii on the opposite side of the island. From there a walk of a couple of kilometres around the shore led to the camp at Metlik. The team had arranged the use of company transport, and arrived at the logging camp and promptly began to wait for the truck that had not yet arrived. Men lazed and chatted until a large dump truck pulled into camp around four in the afternoon.

The trip to Namatanai took over eight hours. There were moments of tension when the truck with over forty men huddled in the back rumbled up and down the steep slopes of the logging road. The road was narrow and the bridges were bare logs covered with dirt. A few culverts appeared along the way from time to time, seemingly inserted at random rather than being placed functionally. I learned subsequently that the culverts were a recent infrastructure upgrade carried out by the contractor in order to satisfy government inspectors. The results were noted by many and did not impress anyone who mentioned them. This type of haphazard approach to road construction belied the company’s assertion that this was anything other than a temporary road that would disappear soon after the loggers left. The driver was only supposed to take the group about two thirds of the way to Namatanai as the truck’s registration had expired. When he stopped in his allowed northernmost village the group simply refused to leave the truck. The driver was informed that the group was going all the way and exhorted him to just carry on. Eventually the weight of opinion expressed by such a sizable group persuaded him to do just that. The road got better as we neared Namatanai and the appearance of street lights for the brief stretch past Sir Julius’s compound at Houris was again noted as the truck passed back into the darkness and pulled into a village just on the outskirts of Namatanai. We would learn later that he was stopped in town and the truck was impounded. As to this poor guy’s fate upon his return to Metlik no one seemed to be concerned. The team had arrived.

The team was billeted in a United Church in a hamlet just down the road from town. Backpacks were stored against the walls, and the benches were pulled along the cement
floor and used as beds by the men. The hosts were gracious and hospitable. The hamlet had a team entered as well and friendships were made with the members of the Lambom entourage. Their hosts commented upon the size of the Lambom retinue, and expressed admiration for the team’s uniforms. Several noted that they were impressed by the appearance of the screens and the fact that all of the jerseys were of the same type and the colour and designs matched. In contrast to their own efforts they asserted that it was quite notable that a team from such a remote local as Laskona should be able to organize and prepare more effectively than a team from town. This praise was repeated often in the following days and in summations back on Lambom after the tournament.

On the following day festivities commenced at the school grounds. The opening of school was marked with a range of performances and dances. The Lambom choir group were scheduled as one of the earlier performances that day. The men sang their song with enthusiasm, enjoying their choir performance. They sang with gusto, loudly with a pleasing harmony and a rhythmically counter-pointed style. The choir sang three short songs of about two minute’s duration apiece. They were quite happy with the small gathered audience’s applause. There were many smiles and a round of handshaking when their set was done. After their performance the team and choir and other travellers split up and roamed the grounds to socialize and observe the goings on.

Large groups gathered to see a number of traditional and not so traditional dance performances. These included a dance group from New Hanover who danced in line, decorated with stylized bird bills as head pieces, a performance widely recognized and identified with their island home. Two tubuan figures danced, their appearance provided by a community from nearby Susurunga. The differences between these tubuan and those native to Lambom was remarked upon. It was asserted that these tubuan originated in Lak and were adapted by the Susurunga people. The performance was evaluated with regards to the skill of the dancers and their accompanying drummers and singers.

However the performance that most impressed the men from Lambom was presented by a dance group from Lihir Island. The dance was of a standard form of line dancing recognized within New Ireland but the bilas or decoration of the men involved was unique. The Lihiran performers wore company work shirts and shorts, with the Lihir
Gold logo on a patch on the breast. Particularly admired were the troupe’s matching boots. These were black steel-capped work boots. Most of the young men noted the link between the cash benefits of having a gold mine on one’s island and the ability to purchase really stylish gear. These guys were ‘smart’ and their boots were ‘stail nogut tru, ya!/really cool, yeah!’

All this was a prelude to the actual rugby tournament the following afternoon. The Lambom team played two matches, winning the first handily but being defeated in the second. The first match, against a team from Namatanai town saw the Lambom team score five tries in the two twenty minute halves that made up the match. The team’s speed and execution of their quick attack patterns worked repeatedly and two players broke free for long runs culminating in a try. The second match, against the team from the hamlet that was hosting them in Namatanai was a much lower scoring affair. Their hosts scored an early try, and then the game settled into a tight defensive contest for most of the first half. The opponents scored a second try late in the first half. The Lambom squad scored in the initial phase of play in the second half and pressured their opponents’ goal line for long periods but could not add an equalizer. The players were surprised to hear the final whistle as the second half seemed much shorter than the first. After the match the referee was queried by Paskar about this apparent discrepancy and was told that the first half may have been a bit long, and the match was running late with other matches still to follow. That night the team made a formal complaint to the tournament organizers and it was decided the next day that there would be no final match or prize, and that all teams would have their entry fees returned. Although this turn of events seemed unfortunate to me, I was surprised by the team’s general satisfaction with this result. I was further surprised by the acceptance of this ruling by the other teams. A common desire to avoid a dispute was voiced as underpinning this decision, and this was seemingly approved of by all involved. It seemed a bit of an anti-climax to me.

Regardless of the results in the rugby tournament the team members and retinue were happy with their showing in the competition. They had executed patterns of play they had practiced and put into play the strategies they had devised. Several players scored and the team had played coordinated defence. All in all, in competition they had acted as a cohesive team and were able to perform at an impressive level of skill. It was felt that
the team's meticulous preparation had led to a successful performance on the
tournament field.

That night a gathering was planned to celebrate the birthday of the Copra Marketing
Board manager's son and the group from Lambom was invited. The party was held in
the fenced-in compound surrounding the manager's house. Food was prepared inside by
his wife and daughter while the guests gathered around tables underneath and alongside
the house. Music played from the ghetto blaster, the latest string band tunes mixed with
old sentimental favourites. The party was scheduled to commence at six in the afternoon
and guest arrived from this time and over the following hour. The players from the
Lambom team were particularly late. After waiting until seven thirty in the evening they
had still not arrived.

The host decided to begin the feast, and announced in English, "as is our custom, ladies
first". This invitation for the assembled women to start their way through the banquet
queue was met with immediate inaction on the part of the women. No one stepped
forward to go first. After a repeated call went unheeded as well, the host relayed the
message that the women preferred to follow the men in the chow line. The men
immediately moved towards the food-laden tables, and proceeded to fill their plates. Not
a lot was left for those who followed this initial onslaught on the buffet, but everyone
got a plate and the guests made merry. It was not until past eight thirty that the team
showed up as a group. Most of the food was gone, but some more rice was prepared in
the kitchen with tin meat, fish and some sweet potato. There was grumbling amongst the
team members, as they felt that the proceedings should have been delayed until their
arrival. The complaints set an unpleasant undercurrent to the rest of the evening, but
most in attendance endeavoured to have a pleasant evening.

Not only did the young men display individual prowess, by asserting masculine
fierceness and talent and ability, they were involved in the process of presenting their
group identity within a wider context. The results were mixed, but generally satisfactory
for those who set out to Namatanai. The team were out of their element at the party,
their excessive lateness not being in accord with town conventions. In this light they
expressed unhappiness with the way things worked out. Their proper place in the
scheme of things was shown to be secondary to that of the young birthday boy and the
invited town guests. The etiquette of hospitality in town did not fit with their notions of proper relations and their own perceived relative worth.

They were much more satisfied with the way they presented themselves and were viewed within the context of the tournament. They were talented and sophisticated players, combining village, back woods toughness and cunning, with well organized team preparations and sophisticated rugby skills and strategies. Their hosts repeatedly praised the Laskona entry for these accomplishments and abilities --- an amalgam of country-side natural abilities and world class savvy with rugby techniques. Their preparations for the match had involved ritual charms as well as sports drinks.

**Conclusion**

The travels described in this chapter placed Lak people in a series of different contexts that allowed them to posit their own individual and group identities. In some instances, the marginal situation of their community came to be foregrounded through their movements across the region. The actions of operating a dinghy presented the opportunity for identity to be expressed in the local scene. Travels across the region in search of government assistance were fruitless in obtaining the desired results or even relieving the sense of isolation and marginality of their situation. In other travels, people from Lambom were actively engaged in devising, and constructing aspects of their identity explicitly in order to contrast their origins from those on a wider stage. This is especially so in the case of the rugby tournament. This sort of trip is the pilgrimage that Lambom young men imagine themselves capable of taking, “a consciousness of connectedness” that runs counter to the disconnection they otherwise experience (Anderson 1983:57). The move to a wider stage, where their skills can be affirmed is one they long for, and choose to make. The events and talk involved with their preparations and the trip show this in the thoroughness and comprehensive nature of their planning and execution. In the next chapter I take up aspects of Lak experience of the town of Kokopo as a longer term and enduring expression of this desire to link up with the bigger world.
Chapter Seven

THE URBAN CONNECTION: PLUGGING INTO THE WORLD

The most common way that people from Lambom Island talk about their place within a wider world is through the term *Laskona* (TOK PISIN: last corner). This self-characterisation locates the Lak region as “the end of the line” both spatially and temporally within PNG. The more obvious geographic connotation of the term *laskona*, the Lak region’s location at the southern extremity of New Ireland, is self-evident. Lambom Island is the definitive backwater place: a small, remote island, positioned as far as possible from the capital of a remote province, in a likewise remote nation. Further exegesis however tends to highlight another gloss of *laskona*, one that stresses a temporal reading of the term. In this context, the focus is on the level of development of such an isolated locale as compared to other less remote areas within the New Guinea islands. Development is seen as a temporal process in which some places ‘go ahead’ (*go pas*) and others are left behind (*stap nating*). In essence I believe it is the relatively high frequency of this engagement with the wider world that allows the people of Lambom to regularly gauge their place within it.

In this chapter I will examine the site through which Lambom islanders connect with the world at large: the town of Kokopo in nearby East New Britain province is the main contact point to the rest of the nation. My aim here is to trace the relationship between the village and this town, as perceived by the people of Lambom, mainly through the effects of their participation in the cash economy of the nation. A wide range of social factors and cultural practices will be examined in order to unpack the relation between village and town, local thinking and global processes. Material culture, emergent social classes, the cash economy, contrasting gender roles and attitudes, youth culture, and
cultural difference all emerge as issues that rural and urban Lak people deal with in their daily lives as they take part in the urban experience of their nation.

Kokopo: *Das Taun* (‘Dust City’)

Due to the recent destruction of Rabaul with the eruption of several volcanoes on September 19, 1994, Kokopo, once a satellite of the urban centre of Rabaul, has emerged as the main connection between Lambom and the global political economy. I begin this section with a brief description of the history and current situation of Kokopo town. Then I will describe the manner in which Lambom islanders experience Kokopo, via a journey outward from the beach, up to the market, then into the urban centre of town. At the same time, and to explicate the scope of the relationship between village and town, I will outline the experiences of several different people and the manner in which they experience Kokopo. I will deal with the experiences of a variety of regular travellers to Kokopo from Lambom. People from Lambom who have settled in Kokopo have a range of situated perspectives that differ markedly from the way the short-term visitor encounters the town. These perspectives also differ from each other, partly on the basis of emerging social class (Gewertz and Errington 1999), and urban versus rural life style.

The island of New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago north of the mainland of New Guinea is home to the Tolai people. The Tolai occupy the easternmost tip of the large island, the area that has come to be known as the Gazelle Peninsula. This region quickly became the centre of the German colonial endeavour in New Guinea. The Germans estimated the Tolai population at around 40,000 when they established their colony in 1884 (Hempenstall 1978:119). They remained the largest known linguistic group in New Guinea until the Highlands were contacted from the late 1920s onward. The Tolai number over 100,000 today and continue to maintain a prominent place in the economy and national life of PNG. The town of Kokopo has one of the longest histories of sustained engagement with a world economy in New Guinea.

What makes the contact experience different here is the level of control gained by the local Tolai people within the new economy. One historian notes:
Up to 1914, four-fifths of the native copra produced in the Archipelago continued to come from the Tolai people, and they were responsible for perhaps one-third of all consumer imports into that area. By 1913 the value of clothes and textiles purchased by them amounted to 240,000 marks, and they seemed to have little difficulty in paying for the European cigarettes, tinned goods, clothes, even houses, which had become status symbols... Progress and prosperity were accompanied by a selective resistance to the European economy. The Tolai still refused to accept wage labour on a large scale unless it involved an elite position like domestic servant or policeman, where a sense of partnership existed (Hempenstall 1978:143).

Scarlett Epstein points to some effects of this situation and adds to this picture of Kokopo as a booming economic centre:

In 1909 there was hardly enough ground available around Kokopo, then the seat of the German administration in the Bismarck Archipelago, to put up even a few essential government buildings. New land purchases would have involved a big expense: 5,000 marks per hectare (L100 per acre) was then regarded as the ruling price for land in the area. (1968:40)

It is this unique situation of local engagement in the cash economy and success that the people from Lambom understand to be the result of urbanisation. Other towns around PNG today show significant levels of local entrepreneurship and local peoples have achieved varied levels of economic prominence and power. The Tolai situation differs markedly in that the Tolai as a people are identified with the economic leadership of their town. The Tolai continue to avoid what they consider more menial forms of wage labour. This negative attitude towards wage labour as compared to entrepreneurship and marketing of produce is one that remained as a feature of Rabaul up to the time of its destruction. Migrants from other parts of New Guinea, in particular large numbers from the Sepik region, took up the sort of work that the Tolai disdained. These migrants noted the Tolai attitude towards the work available to migrants, and experienced a derogatory attitude directed at such workers (cf. Cooper 1996). In effect, the Tolai are the lords of their own domain. They hold a privileged place within their region, and this has been the case since early contact times. The ascendancy of the Tolai is linked, in the minds of Lambom islanders, with the material conditions related to the presence of a major town within their cultural orbit.41

41 The town of Kavieng differs in that it is distant and seldom visited by people from Lambom. There also is no impression among Lambon people of Kavieng as being the place of a particular cultural group with economic pre-eminence there.
This level of economic activity continued on for the Tolai people through the turn of the twentieth century, but Kokopo itself gradually declined into a mission station and plantation setting with the construction of the town of Rabaul. The new town was constructed partly due to the difficulty in obtaining land around Kokopo, but mainly because of the benefits of the attractive deep-water port at Simpson Harbour 30 km to the west. Rabaul was built on the site of a drained mangrove swamp, thus the cost of the land and the difficulties of its appropriation from the Tolai were minimised. Since its founding, Rabaul’s ascendancy had been confirmed, with it becoming the capital of German New Guinea, and has continued apace, while Kokopo had remained a small town and backwater hinterland region. The difficulty with the Rabaul town site, however, was its location in the middle of three quite active volcanoes. Major eruptions in the 1880s and 1937 did not devastate the new town, but forcefully highlighted the disadvantages of its precarious setting to its residents. Rabaul suffered another eruption during World War Two, but it was Allied bombing of the Japanese Army’s main south Pacific base that left most buildings in the town levelled by the end of that conflict. Despite significant qualms on the part of the administration, the town was rebuilt and Rabaul grew into New Guinea’s third largest town and a major economic centre in the post-war period. All that came to an end in September of 1994, with the major eruption of two of the volcanoes and the devastating destruction of the town, which has yet to be rebuilt despite concerted efforts and lobbying. It was in the wake of this disaster that Kokopo saw a re-emergence and renaissance as an urban and economic centre. During the time of my fieldwork, 1996 through 1998, Kokopo was in the midst of a massive redevelopment and could best be described as a boomtown.

**Nambis**

When dinghies arrive in Kokopo from Lambom they come ashore along a sandy beach at the foot of an embankment that leads to the town. The useable strip of coast stretches for 200 metres from rocky cliffs in the east to the shoreline of the Ralum Golf Club in the west. There is a jetty further east in Vunapope, with a pier and docking facilities, but this area is used by the few yachts involved in the tourist industry and other pleasure and tourist craft. It is the beach at Kokopo, known simply as *nambis* (TOK PISIN: coast)
that serves as the disembarkation point for the dozens of Yamaha dinghies that come to town each day. The *nambis* has no infrastructure, beyond a very basic concrete latrine, nor any official administration. It is simply a stretch of shore where local and visiting people’s dinghies can be pulled up on to the beach. It is lined by a few ficus trees and many coconut palms that shade a narrow expanse of flat ground. This thin stretch of land gives way to a steep incline of about 15 metres up to the coastal road above, and the town.

![Relaxing at the nambis in Kokopo waiting to return to Lambom](image)

**Picture 11: Relaxing at the *nambis* in Kokopo waiting to return to Lambom**

The *nambis* is a busy place. Most days find at least 50 dinghies pulled ashore along the beach. The majority of these boats come a short distance from the nearby Duke of York (locally glossed by the acronym as DOY) islands visible off the shore about 10 kilometres away. On any given day up to ten dinghies arrive from across St George channel from New Ireland. The boats from New Ireland occupy the easternmost end of the *nambis*. The berthing areas of the *nambis* are spatially allocated according to point of origin of the arriving dinghies. DOY dinghies take up the longest stretch of shorefront, extending to the western tip of the *nambis*. The eastern end of the *nambis* has its own, more specific docking pattern, beginning at the eastern edge of the line of
DOY dinghies. This pattern maps onto the *nambis* the spatial relations of the West Coast of New Ireland. The boats from central New Ireland range from the west to east, and boats from further south across the channel, spread out further to the east. This pattern continues through to the last several spaces that are customarily occupied by dinghies from Lak. Lambom’s boats are pulled ashore at the eastern extremity of the *nambis*\(^{42}\). There are no apparent hierarchical forces at work in this arrangement. As one man told me: “Dispela pasin, em i kamap olsem long halivim husat i kam na painim ol dinghy. Nau, em isi tru long makim asples bilong olgeta dinghy i soa long nambis/ This practice, it arose to assist whoever comes to locate a dinghy. Now, it is quite easy to ascertain the origin point of all the dinghies that come to shore at this beach”. Lambom Island dinghies come to shore at the *laskona* of the *nambis*. This is noted by Lak and viewed as *streit*/appropriate. It should be noted that the dirt ramp that leads up to the coastal road and petrol station is located at the western end of the *nambis*.

Dinghies from Lambom usually round Cape Gazelle and arrive in Kokopo between 8 am and 11 am, depending upon the roughness of the passage and the time of departure. Upon arrival from Lambom at the *nambis*, the appropriate landing space is quickly marked, and the dinghy is promptly brought ashore. After passengers disembark, and whatever cash crops for market are unloaded, the dinghy is either tied offshore when the sea is calm or pulled ashore if there is a chop. Baskets are opened and betel nut and smokes are shared, as passengers dry themselves off and arrange their personal goods. Usually seagoing clothing is stripped off, with laplaps providing cover as dry clothes are replaced with the appropriate wear for town. For senior men, this is usually another laplap and a collared shirt; younger men favour jeans or shorts and stylish singlets or rugby league jerseys. The dinghy operator and his *boskru* (TOK PISIN: first mate) secure their dinghy and wrap it up with a tarp, removing the key and the fuel tanks. Forays up into Kokopo by the party are made with an eye to having someone remain with the boat at all times. Besides whatever personal plans they may have, the tasks of refuelling the dinghy’s fuel tanks and possible refilling of 55-gallon fuel drums have to be planned. With all the boats ashore, the nearby petrol station is usually quite busy, and these tasks are seldom left till shortly before departure time.

\(^{42}\)The same pattern is evident with respect to the PMV stops in Mt. Hagen (Alan Rumsey personal communication). For a discussion of this patterning in general, and Australian Aboriginal uses of town space in particular see Merlan (1998:1-2).
Those who are travelling on to the Copra Marketing Board (CMB) in Rabaul are quick to climb the escarpment in order to locate a truck to carry their copra there. Young men hoping to sell their *kampang* (TOK PISIN: ‘powdered lime’) to sellers in the Kokopo market also tend to move off fairly quickly in order to make contacts with a buyer and assure they sell their cargo. In times of *kampang* shortage at the market, Tolai women traders often wait at the top of the hill looking for dinghies from New Ireland in order to buy up scarce supplies. Otherwise, arrival in Kokopo proceeds at a leisurely pace; plans are hashed over about where to go in town and with whom, shopping lists provided by relatives back home are consulted, and Lak people currently visiting in town come down to sit on the beach, possibly arrange return transport and catch up with news from home as the travellers recover from their journey. Bottles of soda and takeaway food are purchased from the shops just across the road at the top of the hill, and people relax as they plan their stay in town. Individuals and small groups of travellers then head off to market or town to do their shopping. These trips begin casually, but once cargo begins to arrive back at the *nambis*, they become more organised, as some person or group is allocated the task of looking after the goods that are purchased for the return trip to Lambom. Although thefts along the *nambis* are quite rare (I heard of only one instance being reported for any dinghy along the *nambis* in the two year span of my fieldwork), due caution is exercised. An older man noted: “*Em taun ya, i no ples!* / *This is town, not the village!*” The day progresses in this laid-back manner; seldom does anyone appear rushed or stressed, with people heading up the hill for a bit and then returning to the constant, but constantly changing group sitting at the *nambis*.

Some sort of drinking occurs on most trips taken by Lak people to Kokopo. As the crew and passengers are predominantly male, and tend to be younger, this activity is one of the attractions associated with visits to town. When the return voyage is planned for the same day as arrival, the drinking invariably occurs at the *nambis*. Overnight stays also involve drinking on the beach, but funds are measured to provide drink for the evening’s accommodation as well, whether at various *wantoks’* homes or merely at the *nambis*. Things can get quite merry when a drinking party develops. Cartons of beer are bought at the nearby bottle shop at the top of the escarpment, cassette players blast the latest tape bought in town, and talk and activity increase. A steady stream of traffic continues throughout the day as younger men are sent up the hill to resupply the alcohol. It is
expected that one's level of inebriation be made visibly manifest, similar to drinking parties on the island, and such actions serve as the fodder for boasting and gossip once the drinkers return to Lambom.

And so the day passes. Conversations and parties usually remain within the group of travellers from any one village, but news and greetings are often shared with passengers of boats from other New Ireland villages. Depending on the sea conditions, and whether the prevailing labur or taubar (Lak: Northwest and Southeast winds, respectively) seasonal trade winds are blowing, departure times range between 2 PM and 4 PM, with some boats leaving as late as 5 PM if the seas are especially calm, and travel by night is considered advisable. The task of rolling empty fuel drums up the embankment to the petrol station, and the more onerous task of rolling the full drums back down, usually signals the time to start arranging cargo for the voyage home.

Visits to town invariably involve trips to the local shops and market. I turn now to an examination of Kokopo market and the Lak experience of it.

*Maket*

The market at Kokopo runs six days a week, with an especially busy day on Saturdays. It has become the regional successor to the Rabaul market that operated up to 1994. Some of the principles that operated at that market (as noted by Epstein 1968) could still be observed in the practices currently in place at Kokopo. Prices are fixed and there is no bartering or overt salesmanship at work. For Rabaul, Epstein noted:

> No vendor ever attempted to undercut her neighbour’s prices. It was this which made for the uniformity of prices all over the market on any one day... On walking through the market one got the impression of facing a body of monopolistic sellers rather than a large number of small individual vendors in competition with each other. (Epstein 1968:142-3)

Ascribing this behaviour to the numerous cross-cutting bonds of kinship amongst the market sellers, Epstein also points out that “according to custom it was regarded as bad form to display greed in getting rewards or payment” (1968:144). She goes on to cite Parkinson’s turn-of-the-century comment on the apparent indifference displayed at Tolai markets when it came time for payment to change hands. Danks, one of the early
missionaries to the Gazelle peninsula, described the system of markets in effect in the 1880s:

Market is held on the coast every third day in a large number of places. Those who live very far back inland have their inland markets where they sell to those nearer the beach who in turn sell what they buy to the coastal people. These markets are so arranged that two are seldom held near each other on the same day... the coast people meet the inland people at these markets with their fish and articles of European manufacture and either sell them for tambu or barter for food and other things available only in the country (1887:315).

In Epstein’s opinion, these chains of markets arose as an early contact adaptation of pre-contact trading relations, spurred by the cessation of raiding and warfare that followed upon missionization, colonization, and pacification.

Epstein notes that there was a gradual acceptance of the use of cash in native markets as opposed to the medium of tambu (TOK PISIN: shell money). “the people became adjusted to accepting at first trade goods and eventually cash for their produce and labour sold to Europeans, tambu remained for a long time the major medium of all intra-Tolai trade” (1968:147). However by the time of her study of the market in 1961 only 25 per cent of transactions still involved tambu rather than cash.

At the Kokopo market in 1996, trading in tambu was a marginal occurrence at best. A seller or two might accept shell money if they were specifically looking to accumulate some, but with the sale of the required raw materials (the unstrung but already drilled shells from West New Britain) available in the market itself, cash had become the near-universal currency of exchange. Yet in most ways the current market practices in Kokopo followed the older, established patterns described by Epstein and the others. First, the pricing within the market on any given day remains uniform for specific goods. When due to a shortage of betel nut an increase in price occurred overnight, each of the approximately one hundred sellers of betel nut in the market was selling it an identical price the next day. This practice holds true for taro, yams, melons, Singapore taro, kulau, bananas, eggs, peanuts, cabbages, and greens such as aibika, as for the rest of the produce and goods available regularly at the market. Bargaining is definitely not considered appropriate behaviour. Neither is any form of salesmanship at work beyond the arrangement of one’s goods on the long market tables. It appears that the price-
fixing mechanism at work at the market also applies to the ‘wholesale’ purchases by market sellers of bulk goods they subsequently sell in smaller quantities.

After cyclone Justin in early 1997, which limited visits to Kokopo by dinghies from New Ireland, there was a distinct shortage of kampang available in the market. One of the first boats from the Lak area to reach Kokopo was met by a Tolai market seller looking to purchase kampang. She asked that word be sent back down to the village that as much kampang as could be produced would be immediately purchased. Within a week of this, two boats from Lambom set off for Kokopo with over 50 ten-kilo flour sacks full of powdered lime. When we arrived on the beach, a Tolai woman was waiting for them, and sent a boy off to market to alert other purchasers there. However, a boat from Lamassa Island was already ashore with a load of kampang. The people of Lamassa are Lak speakers as well, and the two islands have dense kinship and clan connections. The owner of the lime produced in Lamassa had been there for two days, and was holding out for a better price for his goods. News of a proposed increase from 20 kina to 25 kina for a sack of kampang had been bandied about the west coast of New Ireland for the past couple of days. The logic behind the proposed price hike was based on the observation that the price for a teaspoonful of kampang in the market had risen from 5 toea to 10 toea, and likewise the cost of an empty film canister from 40 toea to 50 toea.

As we awaited the return of the Tolai women, everyone present agreed that a 5 kina increase in price for a sack of kampang was fair. The price of petrol was rising, the cost of travelling to town by dinghy had been on the increase, and there were plenty of teaspoons of lime in a ten-kilo sack. Solidarity was achieved. When the women arrived, the case was made for the increased price. The man from Lamassa spoke for all present, outlining the reasons for the increase above, and saying that they would only sell for the new price. The Tolai woman simply responded “Mi no inap/I can’t”. The man from Lamassa retorted “Olsem wanem yu no inap? Inap mani i stap long han blo yu/Why can’t you? You have enough money!” The woman responded this time “Mipela no inap. Prais i stap olsem yet. Mi yet, mi laik baim 15 sak/We are unable. The price is the same still. I myself wish to purchase 15 sacks”. After a minute’s discussion amongst the Lak, where one fellow from Lambom pointed out he was only there for the day and had nowhere to put his kampang, and needed the money right away to pay school fees, the
transactions began at 20 kina a sack. All of the sacks of kampang were purchased within a half an hour, and a truck soon arrived to carry it all to the market.

Later that day I asked one of the senior men present at this transaction about the sale. Although he was unhappy, he said that the Tolai women were too strong to overcome. “Ol i save sanap wantaim. Sapos ol i makim prais, ol i no inap senisim em. Em kain blo ol yet, dispela wantok sistem/They stand united. If they set a price, they will not change it. That is their way, this wantok system”. He also pointed out that soon other boats would come from the west coast of New Ireland, from other villages not related by language or clan to the Lak, and that if they didn’t sell now it would be hard on everyone from our area if they were unable to sell their kampang. His ascription of the seller’s unity to their ethnic solidarity, the wantok system, is a common PNG assertion to explain the propensity of people within a cultural group to transfer traditional solidarity to a form of economic nepotism. He concluded by stating that the Tolai had namba (TOK PISIN: numbers, power), it was their town and their market. That was the way it was. In the face of such unequal standings, the Lak had little recourse but to capitulate to the forces of the Tolai hegemony and the Kokopo market. In effect, his view can be seen to encapsulate the Lak interest in market forces, their appreciation of an inability to control these forces in a manner more satisfactory to their own desires, and ambivalence towards this lack of efficacy within an unequal system of power. This was in distinct contrast to the way things were back home on Lambom.

Though Lambom people do provide some goods to Kokopo market, they mainly experience it as shoppers and consumers. Visits to the market itself are an enjoyable pastime. With over 250 sellers present on any occasion, the quantity and variety of goods available is notable. It is not uncommon to hear a Lak person comment upon the Tolai people’s obvious and vast holdings of land suitable for gardening. Some crops, particularly taro, pineapple, and melons, are only grown seasonally on Lambom. And other garden produced on Lambom such as yams never seem to grow as large as those available in Kokopo. Though betel nut grows plentifully in Lak, there are seasonal shortages, but regardless, there is always a desire to purchase betel nut when in town to meet the seemingly limitless demand for it back home. Strolling through the rows of tables, laden with various produce, the relative quality of the tubers, fruits, greens, and other products is the main topic of conversation. Betel chewing is forbidden within the
market proper, so peanuts and small fruits are often purchased and sampled as people wind their way through the aisles while comfortably masticating. The sort of commentary the market engenders is in stark contrast to the practice of shopping in trade stores or supermarkets.

The market is also the source of a variety of entertainments. Preachers often find a space to stand and bellow out their testimony to passers-by. On occasions involving upcoming events in the town, promotions can involve string bands playing under the banner of new stores soon to open, or cigarette companies launching a new brand of menthol stick tobacco. More spontaneous entertainments include arguments between spouses, thieves being chased, police arrests, drunken people staggering around, and a wide range of inappropriate or unexpected behaviours. Many people simply promenade around the front of the market, or gather under the few large shade trees near where the PMVs disgorge their ceaseless flow of passengers. The sheer numbers of people present, and the variety of regional peoples represented, whether Sepiks, Highlanders, Bukas (as people from Bougainville are known vernacularly), or Papuans, starkly contrasts with the seeming uniformity and placidity of Lambom.

The market is the central gathering and dispersal point within Kokopo. The rest of the town is busy, but people are spread out and moving along the road or through the shops. But the market and the fascination it provides for Lak people points to the basis of the wider allure of town and its connection to Lak ways of thinking about the world. The gathering of such numbers of people, their constant flow, the fecundity of the land so visibly gathered in the produce available in the market, at one place and at one time, the underlying buzz of activity-- all of this resonates with Lak ideals relating to human value, efficacy, power, and the capacity of people to organize such resources into a grandiose display of the sum of social relations.

**Taun**

Kokopo is in the midst of an economic boom. The main road through town has seen a massive expansion of building since the Rabaul eruptions of 1994\textsuperscript{43}. Prior to the eruptions, Kokopo had served as an important regional centre within Rabaul’s

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\textsuperscript{43} For an examination of Tolai thoughts on the most recent destruction of Rabaul see Neumann’s *Rabaul yu swit moa yet: surviving the 1994 volcanic eruption* (1996).
hinterland. The town had a market area as well as a bank, an assortment of small trade stores, a supermarket, and two wholesale warehouses. Vunapope was the most developed section of Kokopo with the large Catholic mission centre and hospital, as well as a bank and a pharmacy. The area further east, through Takubar and on to Tokua was undeveloped, lined by old plantations and roads heading south to rural villages. All of this changed subsequent to the destruction of Rabaul and the relocation of the provincial government administration to Kokopo. The Gazelle Restoration Authority (GRA) armed with significant funds from the national government and international donor agencies was set up in Kokopo to oversee the redevelopment of the entire region. More importantly, the local retailers and business interests quickly settled upon Kokopo as the focus of their immediate rebuilding plans. Rabaul was still largely buried under dust with parts of the town, and the old airport in particular, resembling a surreal moonscape studded with half visible buildings poking through the ash.

Within two years of the eruptions Kokopo had grown rapidly. The major wholesalers on the Gazelle peninsula had built new warehouses in the town, with Tropicana, RabTrad, Spirit of Kokopo, and Spirit of Rabaul all constructing large storage sheds, offices, retail annexes, and employee housing along the main road through town. Anderson’s supermarket was joined by Supasave, and Papindo, all with significant grocery outlets as well as department stores. The dozen or so small trade stores in Kokopo prior to 1994, run predominantly by Chinese storekeepers, saw their numbers doubled by 1996, and by 1998 more than fifty stores were trading, with many of the newer ones owned and operated by Tolai. A bevy of new, temporary banks joined the existing PNGBC and ANZ branches within months of the eruption, and most of these had built permanent buildings. The market was expanded fourfold, and saw its infrastructure of railings, tables, awnings and plumbing completely renovated. The scope and scale of development is considered amazing by regular visitors to Kokopo over the past few years.

This economic boom put great strains on the capacity of Kokopo town to provide services to its growing corporate and civilian population. An ever-increasing level of demand has been put on the electric grid, as well as the telephone relay and the roadways around the town. In particular, the main road has quickly degraded into a barely serviceable track with more potholes than bitumen. The steady stream of trucking
traffic and the numerous PMVs weave their way across both lanes, in a sinuous, low velocity, ceaseless flow from sunrise to sunset. This weaving traffic pattern more often than not extends onto the road’s shoulder, making the equally clogged pedestrian pathways a hazardous proposition requiring constant vigilance. During the dry season, or anytime the winds carry volcanic dust from the east, this already unpleasant situation is exacerbated by a constant miasma of dust being kicked up and hovering over the entire proceedings.

The unpleasantness associated with Kokopo’s growing pains is a source for constant complaints to recent arrivals from Lambom, as well as the subject of much carping about Gavman (TOK PISIN: government) shortcomings compared to the alacrity of the local business sector by town residents. The lokal turist (TOK PISIN, lit. ‘local tourist’; connotes short-term travels by PNG villagers to town) component of Lambom visitors may bemoan the das/dust, but are much impressed, and more interested, by its causes: the sheer level and range of activities going on in the town. Kokopo is a happening place. People from Lambom find the wide range of activities and material culture exciting.

For the young men who make up the majority of travellers from Lambom, town also has an added appeal. As one young man put it, in explaining his eagerness to serve as often as possible boskru on dinghies heading to town:


I enjoy just hanging around. Kopex (stylish diminutive form of the name Kokopo) is all right. I am bored of the village. Town is full of all sorts of things. I like to get drunk and look for women. Give it a go, that’s all. It isn’t like the village. Lots of Tolai women spread around like burnt rice.

The term paia rais (TOK PISIN: burnt rice) is a euphemism for sexually willing young women. Like the burnt rice on the bottom of the saucepan, they are prone to be offered freely to anyone. The term has an obvious derogatory connotation, and most young men note the negative aspects of its usage. However it is not uncommon for the consumption aspect of the euphemism to likewise be evoked: \[ taim mi stap hangre, mi kaikai tasol/ \text{when I’m hungry, I just eat. Paia rais is limited to describing promiscuity among} \]

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women. Young men, who are considered promiscuous, are not subject to a derogatory moniker. But men who often have relations with girls who are promiscuous are likely to be labelled as *rabisman* (TOK PISIN: garbagemen), men who like eating/having sex, with leftovers that no one would choose if they did have a choice. This view as reflective of Lak masculinity depends upon a contrast of town life from the village scene.

Though a similar level of bravado and sexual intentions are present on Lambom, the linkage of town with sexual freedom and opportunity is a well established premise in the minds of visitors from the village. Several young men comment upon the numbers of young women travelling around without male relatives accompanying them. This is considered slightly scandalous, definitely provocative, but something inherent to life in towns. For the young men, it is one of the most exciting aspects of town. Unlike the village, the gaze in town did not have to be averted amongst possible *prens* (TOK PISIN: lit, ‘friend’; usage in reference to the opposite sex implies a sexual relationship). Every action, glance, or utterance was not under the gaze of clan mates or senior relatives who would be monitoring such actions with an eye to their short term as well as long range consequences. To be amongst crowds of strangers, to be part of the throngs of young women and men, passing each other by, elicited a sense of liberation and elation for the guys from Lambom. The potential for the unexpected activities beyond the framework of village demands was so alien to the everyday realities of life in the village. Despite the exultation this situation evoked, a residue of village-inspired imperatives limited the outgoingness of village boys as opposed to their town-based relatives. Many young men pointed to the value of drinking beer and other spirits in order to overcome the *sem* (TOK PISIN: shyness, reticence) they felt. In this light, the appeal of town has much to do with the ability to step outside the constant, and overarching, web of obligations and kinship that permeate every aspect of life in the village.

Though the visitors from Lambom to Kokopo experience a wide range of aspects of a modern cash-based political economy, they are not always impelled to place themselves within the frameworks of such a system during their visits --- especially given the emerging imperatives of social class within PNG society. Visitors from Lambom come

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44 See Webb 1993 for a similar urban/rural gender contrast within the Tok Pisin popular music scene.
into contact with class, but do not employ such identifications self-referentially; they are able to plug themselves into differing class situations at various levels. Overall though, class identification can be elided by visitors in most cases. This is not the case for those who have made the move to town. To explore the emergence of class in urban PNG, the lifestyles of some Lambom people resident in town will now be examined. I will focus on two examples of different lifestyles associated with differences in occupational status: the middle class existence of the family of a salaried bank management level employee, and the working class position of a clerk in a shop.

Salari

Agnes and Stephen Tosmith\(^{45}\) live in the bottom half of a two-storey house provided by the bank she works for in Kokopo. Agnes is a Supervisor at the bank, and Stephen retired recently from a similar position. They have four sons, the eldest and the youngest living with them in town, the two middle boys away at school: the elder in tertiary studies in Madang, the younger in primary school on Lambom. Agnes earns a professional's salary for her work, an amount of money of a different order than the majority of wage-earners in PNG. They supplement their income with the proceeds earned by Stephen through operating their own dinghy between Lambom and Kokopo. Their house has electricity and running water. They have a refrigerator, stove, stereo, television, video cassette recorder, and other small electric appliances. The food they eat is purchased: takeaway pies and buns from shops, greens and produce from the market, rice and various tinned meats and fish, bought at trade stores or at Anderson’s supermarket. The family is completely enmeshed in the cash economy. The Tosmiths live a respectable life, centred on work, family, and church. They would be regarded as a model of appropriate town family life, linked with the responsibility of maintaining the modern housing they inhabit. They belong to the urban elite, typically referred to as a middle-class that has emerged in PNG in the last few decades (cf. Gewertz and Errington 1999:8). They are firmly entrenched as town dwellers.

\(^{45}\) I use an alias here to protect the family’s privacy in relation to people they know in town.
Yet, the Tosmiths maintain close relations with the village on Lambom Island. Their second youngest son lives almost exclusively at Lambom, occupying a house with Agnes’s mother on the mainland. Stephen, although originally from Kavieng, visits Lambom regularly. He travels to the island about once a week when the weather is agreeable, ferrying people and their cargo between village and town. His boskru is the son of one Agnes’s sisters, and when Stephen must remain in town this man and another clan member operate the dinghy. Besides providing their aquatic shuttle service, Stephen also travels to Lambom to look after the family’s house there, take care of their resident son Leo, as well as to garden and to fish. The Tossmiths, like most town-dwellers I met, profess to miss the food they grew up eating in their villages of origin; they enjoy the opportunity to eat home-grown garden produce, especially gem Cassava bread, and fresh fish. Agnes and Stephen originally met while working at a bank in Chimbu Province in the highlands, and then were transferred closer to home in Kavieng. After Stephen took early retirement the family moved to Kokopo to be closer to Lambom. Although established as town dwellers, the Tossmiths have demonstrated through their moves that they wish to maintain a strong link with the village. In many respects they are living an ideal existence, enjoying the benefits of a middle-class salary, while drawing upon the advantages of their rural connections.

But all is not paradise for the Tosmiths. They have worked hard and long for promotion within the bank and the chance to transfer closer to home. Yet there have been unintended consequences in this achievement of their goals that has led them to feeling an ambivalence towards their situation. Members of Agnes’s clan often stay at the family house when visiting Kokopo. Lak notions of hospitality require guests to be fed, and provided with tobacco and betel nut. Though the family does not find the provision of accommodation and hospitality particularly onerous in most instances, there are cases where difficulties do arise. Young men, as noted above are likely to drink, and if they get a bit rowdy, the noise is of concern since the bank branch manager is the Tossmiths’ upstairs neighbour and there are restrictions on who can actually live in company housing. The stress of dealing with such potential workplace complications leads to an ambivalence on the part of the Tossmiths when certain visitors arrive. This ambivalence often turns to an overt hostility once such guests have left; proper decorum and gender practices make it very difficult for Agnes to address her kinsmen directly. After such
visits Agnes has been vocal in asserting that she will no longer put up with *ol pasindia* (TOK PISIN: ‘passengers’, but with an implication of freeloaders). She complains and wonders why those visitors can afford to buy lots of beer but never offer to buy food or contribute cash to pay for the meal she inevitably ends up cooking for all present. Her frustration in being unable to confront certain relatives who take advantage of the family’s hospitality leads to a less than flattering stereotyping of certain village visitors’ behaviour in her subsequent complaints. Besides the more relevant protestations decrying the *pasindia pasin* (freeloading habits), insult and ridicule emerge with village dwellers being termed *bus kanaka* (TOK PISIN: lit. ‘bush natives’; can be glossed as ‘bumpkin’ or ‘hick’) because they don’t know how to use a toilet or shower, or appear particularly ragged in their dress. This mirrors what Gewertz and Errington identify as a trend for middle-class Papua New Guineans to disparage their rural countrymen, “being caught up in the social and cultural work of creating new forms of distinction” (1999:8).

Another source of ambivalence for the Tosmiths beyond the demands of visitors to town, were the demands of relatives back in the village. As a visible and nearby steady earner of cash, Agnes is often the first source addressed by village people when quick cash is needed. Besides demands from her relatives for assistance with school fees, Agnes has been hit up for a donation towards the K12,000 for the United Church’s Ministry group band to buy instruments and amplifiers in their quest to go fully electric. These sorts of requests are dealt with constantly, and the Tosmiths help when they can, dealing with the more compelling requests and finding others quite humorous.

Of more immediate concern are customary obligations related to mortuary practices. When a clan member dies, clan resources are pooled and marshalled by the clan’s bigman. Often times the Tosmiths’ dinghy is considered a clan resource, even though, strictly speaking, and in other contexts, it is understood to be the private property of the family. Arranging the first stages of mortuary custom can be demanding, and in marshalling a clan’s resources a fair amount of transport within the Lak region, as well as trips to town are required. And though sometimes fuel costs are met from clan cash resources, this is, as often as not, not the case. Furthermore, the Tosmiths’ dinghy is removed from its usual cash-earning capacity for periods of at least a week, and often
extending to several weeks. The demands on the services of their dinghy are just the
beginning of the expectations placed upon Agnes as a salaried professional.

Several stages of the Lak funerary cycle as now practiced on Lambom (see chapter on
\textit{kastom}) require the provision of rice, tea, and other store-bought commodities. Koroe
clan recently spent over K400 just for the meal provided to the youth group that sang
hymns the night before the burial of their deceased. Within the following week food
would be required for the following groups and people: those planning the \textit{kastom}
within the moiety of the deceased; the gravediggers and pallbearers; those involved in
the building of portable pig pens; the young men who would go capture the pigs and
bring them to the island to be penned; and visitors from other villages or town. And
these are just the preliminary requirements involved in the first stage of mortuary
customary obligations. With the recent shortage of pigs due to the Foursquare schism
(see chapter on churches) pigs would need to be purchased, and big ones were going for
upwards of K500 at the time. The Tossmiths have little recourse but to provide for such
demands, and put up the cash almost immediately upon its being requested. Customary
obligations of this sort are not often negotiable.

The difficulties involved with an existence perched between town and the village have
not led to the Tossmiths’ disengagement from one for the other. Villagers see them
predominantly as town dwellers, with access to all that entails. The Tossmiths do not see
things as so clear cut. They continue to see their future as involving both the rural and
urban contexts of their existence. This does not mean that they do not display
ambivalence about their situation. As noted earlier, one of the family’s sons is living
primarily on Lambom; the others are living in town. Different life skills are being
learned by the younger Tossmiths; different life trajectories and modes and levels of
engagement with a cash based economy are being played out. From the family’s
perspective, village life demands one set of capabilities, town life another. Though there
may be a certain amount of overlap between the talents required by these differing
spheres of living, grounding in the one or the other is seen as necessary for subsequent
success. The connections are being maintained, and the future for the Tossmiths involves
negotiating between the exigencies of town life and the imperatives of the village.
On visits to town I would often visit Pasingan Sion at the shop where he worked just above the *nambis*. I also visited him in his housing compound along the main Kokopo road. One afternoon we were sitting around a rough-hewn wooden table on benches outside the small house where Pasi resided. Pasi’s room was at the end of a block of similar rooms in the tin-roofed building that his company provided for its workers. The compound contained five other identical barracks ranged around the fenced-in block of land that served as the site of workers’ quarters for one of Kokopo’s main wholesalers, as well as employees of other nearby shops. A fine patina of volcanic dust covered the compound, and any slight breeze or anyone moving too exuberantly would kick it up, leading to repeated expletives of “blari das” (TOK PISIN: bloody dust) and similar refrains. It was Saturday afternoon, and while Pasi entertained a group of his brothers just arrived from Lambom, his wife minded their baby while preparing a large saucepan of rice to go with the fish the dinghy had caught while trolling on its way from the island to town. All the assembled young men were drinking SP beer while waiting for dinner and planning what to do for the evening. Similar groups of young men sat at similar tables arranged throughout the compound. Music from several portable stereos competed to fill the background to the loud and boisterous talk of young men partying.

This lifestyle contrasts markedly with the Tosmiths. Pasi occupies a more tenuous place in the world of wage labour. His fortnightly pay packet is not much more than the nationally mandated minimum wage. The housing he occupies is more communal in nature than the Tosmiths. The families resident in the compound are more indicative of the typical life attached to wage labour in PNG. Most of the families in the compound are young. None of these families overly concerns themselves with the aura of middle-class respectability that pervades the salaried elite of the nation. As workmates, the young men of the compound share an identity and lifestyle related to their position within society as clerks, labourers, and shop workers. They share an interest in leisure activities such as drinking, following rugby, going to clubs, playing cards, and hanging out around town; and ultimately in maintaining a certain style that advertises their cash earnings, but denies affluence, in projecting an image of hip, urban grassroots youth.
The accommodations these urban dwellers have to make to the logic of a cash economy are not particularly onerous. Most have received primary education and some have some high school but educational credentials are not necessary for the jobs they do. These workers have internalised the discipline of a regimented workday. They must consistently show up on time for work and be able to do their jobs. But the work itself is not the thing; they like the lifestyle that it enables. They represent a type of in-between class, sharing communal aspects of shared village type space, but having discrete households based on a wage earner. Their attitude was one of fundamental cool. They spend their free time pursuing the opportunities town life affords. Pasi and his friends like to hang out, and stroll through town, to *raun nating* in Tok Pisin. He is not especially future oriented in his work life and does not seem to exhibit too much ambition for a career per se. He just likes the aura of the scene through which he and his friends move. To his village brothers and cousins, he is admirable. He is able to make a go of town life and in the process live a cool *stail* existence.

The talk that afternoon turned to possible activities for Pasi’s brothers and friends who were visiting him at the time. The decision was made to go check out the new supermarket down the road in Vunapope. There was a trade store near the compound where one of Pasi’s neighbours worked. It stocked a range of cold drinks and snacks as well as a limited range of grocery staples such as rice and tin meat. The store also sold bush knives, batteries, cookware, clothing, and other regular consumables. It was not unlike the dozens of other stores scattered along the road from town. In many ways these trade stores are direct descendants of the earlier general goods type of trading posts as first established in the islands back in the 1880s. There was a steady flow of shoppers through the shop, with most people browsing or getting a cold drink. However on this day the party wanted to see something grander.

The trip to the opening of the new Papindo supermarket introduced the visitors to a range of new things. Other large supermarkets had an extensive variety of goods on offer but Papindo was the largest of these and a new brand name in the national scene. Owned by Indonesian interests, the store brought entire new product lines into the Kokopo market. Many of these were unfamiliar brands of Indonesian tin goods, and other Asian brands. The shoppers recognised various Indonesian versions of popular products such as tinned mackerel and corned beef. But there were other brands with
pictures of unfamiliar vegetables on their labels, and many that were unrecognizable as to what might be contained in their tins. Interest was expressed in what these things might taste like. The relatively low prices were commented upon. The number of staff was also noted. There were ten checkout aisles, all staffed, and most departments had counter staff. There were also numerous security guards all uniformed and with batons hanging from their belts.

People promenaded down the numerous aisles in the store’s various departments. In general, our group found the size of the store and its inventory quite impressive. Differences in behaviour in our shopping party became apparent when we entered the crowded electronics section of the store. Whereas the guys from the village stood back as they looked at the tape players and other electronics goods, Pasi engaged the counter staff and asked for a closer look at a particular tape. He asked for other goods to be brought from behind the counter for his brothers to look at. Surgical tubing was bought for the construction of sling shots for use back on Lambom. Several recent tapes of popular Tok Pisin string bands were examined and a few were purchased. On this day Pasi exhibited an attitude that overcame his brothers’ sem, their shyness in dealing with staff of the store. In practice he enacted a more appropriate cool approach, one internalized by many other young men who shared this as part of their outlook to town life.

Pasi and the residents of his compound had a purchase on the rocky shore of the world of town, commodities, and modernity. He still had a form of village grasruts credibility, and was not required to ponder or make such drastic disengagements as the Tosmiths. This was due in part to the way his Lambom relatives perceived him. He showed fewer tangible signs of success and status than the Tosmiths (though it must be added he is still in his twenties). He was seldom hit up for cash to supplement kastom events on Lambom. His lifestyle and accommodations seemed closer to village ways. His guests stayed a bit rougher with him. Some would joke that the Tosmiths’ house was the Laskona Hotel in Kokopo, with its flush toilet and modern kitchen and bedding. Pasi’s visitors were accepted more informally, and offered less extravagant lodging. Staying with him was more like a staying at a hostel, if the hotel analogy used earlier is
extended. Whereas the Tosmiths decried the plague of *pasindia*, staying in the compound provided more reliable if less extravagant hospitality.

In addition to his lifestyle in Kokopo Pasi was also much admired by the young men of Lambom villager due to his success as a rugby player. He had made it to the elite level of competition in rugby league in PNG. Another trip later that year was made by several of his brothers to watch Pasi play rugby for the local team in the national competition, the Islands Guria. Pasi had tried out for the Guria the previous year but a knee injury during training had caused him to miss the season and this year was to mark his debut as a player in the national competition. This was the cause of great excitement amongst the rugby mad youth of Lambom. Their participation at the touch tournament in Namatanai gave them much satisfaction but they also realized that full contact, eleven a side league play was the format of real rugby in the eyes of most Papua New Guineans (as opposed to Rugby Union, a code with more players and different rules). Marcus Bai had played for a previous incarnation of the Guria in Rabaul before making the leap to the NRL’s newest team the Melbourne Storm. He was gaining a reputation in Australia as a dangerous try-scoring winger, and Bai was equally lauded for his punishing tackling. Marcus Bai was the inspiration to many young men with dreams of rugby success in PNG that year.

There was some disappointment when we arrived to discover that Pasi was a reserve for this year’s team. The Guria had hired two star players from the Highlands of New Guinea that season, and places in the starting line up were limited for new players trying to make the starting eleven. As well, Pasi’s attitude became cavalier due to his limited role. He began to add more drinking bouts and this affected his training regimen, as his expatriate coach explained to me during a conversation prior to the weekend’s match. “That boy likes the piss” he told me, and added that coming to practice with a hangover had not allowed Pasi to display the fitness he expected from players on his team.

Nevertheless, the Lambom Island contingent of supporters made their way to the Kokopo rugby field to watch the match that Saturday afternoon. The Guria’s opponents that week were a team from the Highlands that was leading the competition at that point.

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46 Marcus Bai would play a big part in Melbourne’s improbable last minute Grand Final championship later that year. As a new franchise in the re-named Australian professional league, the Storm’s victory, let alone their participation, in the Grand Final was considered an upset of significant note.
during the season. Pasi ran out with the Guria squad for the pre-match stretching and callisthenics and his brother Rodal drew attention to his "stail nogut" (TOK PISIN: very stylish, hip) rugby uniform. The first half saw the Highlands squad score two tries, and though the Guria spent their share of time in attack they could not break through the Highlands defence with an answering score. The Highlands team had some big players, but so did the Guria. The difference, and several spectators noted this, was the fierceness of the visiting team's attacks and tackling. Pasi's brothers watched the game intently but quietly, and the crowd response in general was similarly restrained with the home side trailing on the scoreboard.

![Picture 12: Pasi (left) shows his gameface at halftime](image)

At the half time siren the teams retired to respective end zones of the field and I wandered over to listen to the coach's instructions for the second half. He stressed his team's need to continue to pressure the Highlanders when the Guria had the ball and maintain their defence when their opponents were attacking. The second half began with a quick line break by the Highland's team that allowed them to take the ball deep into Guria territory. However, they could not finish their attack with a goal and the ball was turned over to the Guria. The Highlanders played determined defence and kept the Guria pinned down near their own goal line. After a short kick to end the Guria set of downs,
the Highlands squad resumed their attack on the home side’s goal line and after a couple of tackles the visitors were able to crash over for a score.

At this point with the home team down by three tries and only about twenty minutes remaining in the match Pasi’s brothers became anxious and started complaining that it was time for the Guria to play their reserves as the current side on the field was not going to turn the tide. To their gratification that is exactly what transpired; three players came off the bench for the Guria to enter the match as replacements and Pasi was amongst them. In Rugby the scoring team gets to receive the kick after a re-start and the Lambom contingent whooped it up when Pasi raced down the field and made an excellent solo tackle on the player returning the kick off. In the ensuing defensive series for the Guria Pasi showed the freshness of his legs and got in on two of the next five tackles before the Highlanders were forced to punt the ball back to the home team. Pasi’s brothers where jumping up and down, barely able to control their enthusiasm as the shouted for Pasi to take a run with the ball on offence. On the third play from scrimmage Pasi got his chance and made an aggressive run directly into the heart of the Highland teams defence. Unfortunately for him, Pasi was tackled by a particularly large man on the opposing team and he went down as if he had run into a brick wall. However, he immediately jumped right back up and put the ball into play, and after another tackle, then a kick and run play, another Guria player was able to chase the ball down and score the home side’s only goal for the day. The game ended after a period of back and forth, with the Highlanders maintaining control and with their lead never in doubt. Pasi’s brothers raced to the sideline to slap him on the back as the team made its way back to the locker room after the match. Pasi had a big smile on his face as he left us there and told us to meet him back at the house. I saw his coach and asked him what he thought of the game and Pasi’s play. He told me that the Highlands side was the best team in that year’s competition and he felt his side had put up a good effort but were overmatched. He then told me that he did not know Pasi was so tough. “I didn’t think he was going to get up after that tackle” and he said Pasi would probably get more time off the bench in the future.

None of that mattered that evening as a spirited drinking party broke out at Pasi’s compound. His brothers roughhoused and mock-tackled him and each other, and boasted of their own prowess and their plans to move to town and join him on the Guria.
The party continued well into the evening and when I came by to visit the next morning the brothers had just gone into the house to sleep.

On the trip back to Lambom a few days later the mood was still happy but much quieter. Pasi’s brothers were proud of his play but realistic in assessing his chances to make it really big in rugby. The story of the match was told repeatedly on Lambom when we returned and many young men voiced the opinion that they could play just as well as Pasi did if they could get the opportunity.

When I returned to Kokopo the next time the season was over. Pasi had been suspended from the team for showing up drunk to a practice session and the Guria had missed the finals playoff. Pasi was realistic about his future as a rugby player and told me he was tired of being a reserve but that the team might be better with a new coach the following season. Pasi never got the chance to play for another coach. Due to the inability of several teams in the national competition to pay their membership fees the competition was shut down and only regional competitions played at a representative level. His rugby dreams never were completely fulfilled, but like his status as a wage labourer, they were enough for him to find satisfaction in his town-based existence.

Conclusion

As visitors to Kokopo Lambom people are struck by the vibrancy and happening nature of town. As marketers of cash crops they are forced to confront the marginality of laskona identity. Families such as the Tosmiths have made the necessary accommodations to the requirements of salaried work while being forced to re-evaluate their connections to visitors from the island. Workers like Pasi have internalized similar demands related to wage labour, yet remain less committed to the more formal aspects of middle class life in town. Pasi’s lifestyle is one that is more comprehensible to people from his home village. He is able to maintain the informal aspects of hospitality without being subject to the requirements of a more respectable position in modern town society.

Comparing the Lak experience of Kokopo with another case of urban rural relations in PNG, certain contrasts become apparent. Gewertz and Errington’s examination of the Chambri in Kokopo shows a people with a more settled and formal presence in their
local metropole of Wewak. The Chambri established a settlement in Wewak, an actual part of town that came to be called Chambri Camp, with an adjacent market area called Chambri market. This settlement reflected aspects of the home villages up the Sepik river on Chambri Lake. Thus:

...the Camp came to look like and function like a Chambri village... In fact the residential pattern at the camp replicated that at Chambri with migrants from Kilimbit, Indingai, and Wombun living in their own respective sections of the camp. These had the same spatial relationship to the coastal range and ocean as they had the three Chambri villages to Chambri Mountain and Lake. (1991:101-2)

In contrast, the Lak experience in Kokopo never involved the establishment of such a base within the town. Lambom people never settled as a community in Kokopo there was no focal point linked to Lak. Like the Chambri, they did engage in a spatial ordering of their presence in Kokopo, and one that was accepted by the locals with its informal Laskona stretch of the shoreline. But this was limited to the beach and was based on their place in an islands’ regional orientation, with their place in New Ireland as laskona mapped onto the shore, rather than reflecting any Lambom-based geography.

In keeping with Lambon people’s diffuse experience of Kokopo, its effects upon their sense of identity and engagement with modernity have been diverse and dependent upon particular circumstances. For short term visitors town serves as a contrast with Lambom, with Kokopo viewed as an exciting place that allows an escape from the overarching kin based morality inherent to village life. It is possible to see oneself as part of a national category of youth or athlete or villager come to town. Also apparent is the gulf between village life and urban life with regards to not only social relations, the lack of kin based restraints on behaviour in town, but a world of things and commodities more numerous and varied than those on Lambom. It is also possible to envision an identity beyond the national, in terms of Robbins notion of negative nationalism that transcends PNG and makes possible a projection onto an international or global scene. Rugby dreams are not uncommon in PNG and the glory attained by players in Australia and England provide a possible future for young men to fantasize that places them on a global stage of international sport.
In the next chapter I take up the imposition of some aspects of commodity relations implicit in town life as they are transposed into Lak through the presence of a large-scale timber concern in the region.
Chapter Eight

LOGGING IN LAK

The most intensive experience the Lak have had with capitalist structures and practices arose out of the development of logging in the region. Logging led to the introduction of novel institutions to Lak, and engendered relations between local individuals and communities, and these institutions. How the Lak related to each of these institutions --- the Malaysian Logging Contractor, the UN funded Conservation project, and the locally controlled Landowners Company --- depended upon Lak understandings of each institution’s intrinsic nature. In this chapter I will examine the relationships between the Lak and each of these institutions to unpack Lak notions of their place in a wider world and their capabilities and efficacy in dealing with it.

The logging industry has drawn the attention of a range of interested parties since rumours began about its impending arrival in Lak in the late 1980s. A listing of these parties illustrates the global range of forces at work throughout the region, and presents the international and ecumenical nature of the cast of characters implicated here. These include: the national government and its forestry department; Niugini Lumber, a subsidiary of the Malaysian timber giant Rimbunan Hijau; ICAD, a United Nations sponsored conservation project; Metlak Development Co., the local landowners company; various clan leaders and big men listed as shareholders and landowners of the Lak timber resource; and the labour force at the Metlik and Weitin Valley logging camps. Changing the regional landscape through logging and the building of logging camps, and providing the raw material for Lak thinking about their place in a modern world system, these agents play out their roles in a variety of sites, contingent upon shifting and contested notions of appropriate behaviour. By looking at the issues and events that arise across these situated perspectives it is possible to flesh out the continually emerging understandings the Lak have regarding their place in the world as they perceive it today.
The interaction of the interested agents at work in the timber industry occurs across a range of sites within and beyond the Lak region. It also has a history that has been observed from various positions across these sites. I will focus on three of these sites: the logging camp at Metlik, the landowner company offices in the provincial capital Kavieng, and Lambom Island itself. These settings, with their particular and contingent events and understandings, reflect the relations between the forces at work in logging in Lak.

When discussing logging Lambom Islanders make frequent recourse to the concepts of development and corruption. In examining logging one of my aims here is to get to the import of the meaning of this opposition. This will lead to a more general account of how Lambom Islanders use their culturally specific understandings of events and characters/agents they experience, to ground a construction--their world system.

The coming of logging to Lak

In 1990 Colin Filer visited the Lak constituency as part of a government committee proposing alternative development strategies to logging for the region. This trip arose mainly in response to reports of widespread corruption in the logging industry as documented in the Barnett inquiry, which focused on activities in Lak. Filer summarised the complexity of the situation he found in Lak:

> If it is true that the vast majority of New Irelanders believe that logging equals development, and is therefore a good thing in itself, there is surely little chance of preventing, or even controlling, this activity. Indeed, it could be argued that ‘corruption’ is the natural outcome of a battle between bureaucratic regulation and popular impatience...But the strange thing about New Ireland, in comparison with many other parts of the country, is that it is very hard to tell what anyone really thinks about anything. To put it crudely, New Ireland is a place where everyone claims to be acting on behalf of someone else, where no-one really trusts anyone else to act on their behalf, but no-one is prepared to say so publicly, for fear of being disrespectful. (Filer 1991:71)

Regardless, the views expressed by people he spoke to were consistent. He states:

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47 The Barnett Inquiry Report, 1990 was focused on logging in New Ireland. Judge Barnett was attacked by men with bush knives outside the gates to his home in Port Moresby after its publication.
It would probably be difficult to find another place in PNG where local landowners were more insistent on the need to have their trees cut down as soon as possible!...To understand why this is so, one must appreciate that the people of Lak believe they are living in the least developed area of their province, if not the country. (Filer 1991:72)

Filer goes on to outline the difficulties involved in trying to convince the Lak that there was another path to development besides logging. Money was promised to help set up a ‘habitat’ preserve, and Filer had funding commitments from several NGOs as well as the United Nations to offer. This proved to be a bit nebulous, and in order to be more concrete in offering alternatives to logging, one member of the visiting party caught a butterfly and carried it around, asserting that it could be sold for close to 50 Kina. Filer describes the Lak response to the team’s proposals:

The rest was talk, and could mean nothing, as the local people constantly reminded us. After all, ‘the government’, with which we were identified, has made so many promises before, but how many of these have been kept? We could of course reply that Mr Yong, the Malaysian businessman who proposes to ‘develop’ the area...had more reason to deceive the people than we did, because he stood to make a profit out of his promises, whereas we did not. But Mr Yong has already provided benefits which are more tangible than the sight of a butterfly and a lot of talk about ‘another road’ - and we had not. (Filer 1991:73)

Filer ends his piece with a plea to the residents of southern New Ireland, arguing that they reject the opportunity to be the last place in PNG to experience the type of development associated with logging, and be the first to follow another path. During my stay the UN sponsored conservation project withdrew and Lak constituency remained the site of extensive, ongoing, barely regulated, clear-cut logging.

In turning to the Lak interpretation of their experience with logging and its effects I will focus on a range of practices that the Lak people put into play in relation to the industry. To begin I will discuss the process of distributing timber royalties among a landowner clan. This will give a glimpse into the actions and authority of clan leadership within this context. The next section will deal with the repercussions of a logging camp being sited within Lak at Metlik plantation. I will examine the practices and relations associated with wage labour. Following this I will describe my visit to the landowner’s company offices in Kavieng to meet the Chairman of the company. I will conclude this chapter with an analysis of the Lak interaction with a UN backed conservation project that attempted and failed to replace the logging industry in Lak.
Katim Mani on Lambom

According to the signed agreement between the landowners’ company, the multinational logging contractor, and the state, the local company is responsible for “distributing royalty moneys according to native custom” (Lak TRP agreement). Part of this is done for the landowner company by the forestry ministry, which takes the contractor’s reported timber yield and calculates the royalty to be paid, then bundles a cash payment for each particular block-holding clan. Clans, as the basic landholding unit in Lak, decide which big man is to receive a particular royalty payment. It is left to the big man to decide what to do with the money.

When a clan leader decides to distribute a royalty payment, the current practice is to meet with other men of his clan to formally divide the money. The Lak use the term katim mani (Tok Pisin: ‘divide the cash’) to describe these meetings; this is an aspect of logging and development not widely described in the literature. All policy fiddling is moot without an understanding of the nature of distributing royalties according to native custom, and its relation to local desires and concepts of development. Receiving royalty moneys is what people say they want most when discussing logging benefits and development in general. In what follows I will present a case of royalty distribution focusing on the events revolving around the particular clan I observed. The events surrounding this case of katim mani occurred between January 1997 and June 1998, and provide a good picture of the workings of one sort of cash input from logging. Contrasts will emerge with other forms of distribution operating in Lak, showing exposed cultural blind spots- places for innovation, adaptation and transformation, and a space for development and corruption as locally developed interpretations of these changes.

The topic of royalty payments came up quite often in my earliest discussions with Lambom Islanders dealing with logging. My nearest neighbour Tony Penias was quite adamant in stressing the corruption of clan leaders in distributing substantial royalty payments. As a “scaler” (Tok Pisin skela, ‘counter’) Tony’s job at the Metlik logging camp involved counting the types of raw logs and calculating the total volume of timber sent out on each shipment. I was surprised to find him back at Lambom at a time when a shipment of logs was being readied for loading on an incoming transport ship. Tony had mentioned before that the contractor often-times miscounted or incorrectly typed what sort of timber was being shipped, consistently undervaluing outgoing shipments. I asked him if he was worried that such a miscount would occur in his absence at this crucial
time, and whether he felt the royalties his wife’s clan was receiving would be diminished if this was the case. His answer was forceful and direct:

*Mi noken wori, mipela kisim hap pipia toea tasol. Ol papagraun bilong dispela klan, ol i korap. Mipela kisim ten Kina o Twenti Kina nating, tasol mipela save dispela lain ol i kisim hamas hanret na tausan kina. Maski ol i wokim wanem, mi no inap hisi long ol.*

I don’t care, we only get a little bit of rubbish money. The bigman of this clan is corrupt. We get ten or twenty kina, and we know my in-laws get hundreds and thousands of kina. Never mind them, I can’t worry about it.

When asked what happened to the balance of a royalty payment if clan members only received such a small proportion of the overall cash, Tony replied, “*Em i kaikaim olgeta mani, dispela bos bilong ol, em i wanpela korap man tasol.*” He ate all the cash, this leader of theirs, he is a corrupt man”. I heard similar statements about other clans’ experiences with royalty divisions, but the case of Buibui clan and its leadership took centre stage in my investigation. This was due to the manner in which I became involved firsthand in the *katim mani* process of Buibui clan.

*Katim mani* tends to be a furtive process. This type of meeting is meant to be carried out in private, but its occurrence tends to be public knowledge. Royalty distributions end up straddling the locally meaningful divide between the hidden and the revealed. It is dependent on a very public grapevine to arrange, but due to the uncertainty of road transport into Lak from Kavieng, expected payments are often announced and then delayed. Thus the entire process in Lak involves many false starts and stealthy journeys, and causes fluctuating levels of anticipation. People quietly talk of their expectations as to the size of the payment, as they arrange meeting times and places. An imminent *katim mani* meeting engenders hidden planning, with decisions spreading out through a clan’s membership. It also is of interest to other clans; people compare and contrast what they know of the actions of others to add to their nascent understandings of how the process works. Various factors are at play whenever a particular *katim mani* takes place. Critical among these is the fortuitous circumstance of which Big Men are there taking leadership roles, as the process is being worked out of who is able to control the distribution of large sums of cash. All this is in flux according to events and perceptions, as well as characters and competencies. This is all contested, as the following case illustrates.

In early January of 1997, I participated in the process of *katim mani* on Lambom with a group of men from the Buibui (Lak, lit. ‘deep bush/jungle’) clan. At that point Buibui
clan was the largest and most visible recipient of royalty payments, having received over K100,000 in the previous two years (by local accounts, as well as the royalty schedule document of the provincial forestry ministry). We gathered in the hut of an elderly clan mother, reclining against the walls of the largest room. The house was neutral ground, not belonging to either of the big men who were in charge of this katim mani. A large packet, a manila envelope, was placed in the middle of the room, labelled ‘Buibui clan royalty, K49,000’, printed in dark marker. Sitting inside the house were six men: Gaius Toaligur 30, accountant in the prime minister’s office; Toamasik, 60, senior big man of the Buibui clan for Lambom and Bakok village; Paskar Toaligur 26, high school teacher in Lae; Pulagis Toarasai, 20, clan storekeeper and boat operator; Elson Senior, 44, bachelor and younger brother of Toamasik, gardener and lokal turist; Elson, 20, bachelor, and dinghy bosku (Tok Pisin, first mate); Aisoli Toaligur, 26, boat operator, young married man; and myself, the neophyte ethnographer, 35. All these men were the sons of Toamasik and Elson Sr., sisters. Absent but central to the ensuing events was John Peni, 35, manager of the Copra Marketing Board station in Namatanai.

My friendly relations with members of Buibui clan were the impetus for my invitation. Aisoli and I had made the trip to Kokopo several times, and had encountered exceptionally rough seas even as Lambom Islanders reckon them. He liked to make fun of my attempted stolid behaviour in rough conditions; I liked to compliment him on my deeply held hope and belief, that it was his skill that ensured our safe crossings. I was known by the other men and spent time with them to varying degrees, and called them accordingly tasik (Lak: brother), and bah (Lak: mother’s brother/sister’s son), and was taught the appropriate behaviour for those relationships through interaction with these men. Gaius I had met only a few days before.

Arriving in the last days of the Christmas vacation visiting period, his presence on the island was in response to complaints by his brothers about previous katim mani. Gaius did not have traditional big man status, which is earned by holding mortuary feasts. However, his Big Man status was considered imminent, not the least due to his position in the government as conduit for the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) network of patronage.

Gaius had announced his presence loudly and publicly, arriving at dusk with a boatload of drunken young men. I was quickly shushed away to a further end of the village by a senior man, told “nogut yu lukim ol, ol i spak tumas. Nogut ol i bagarapim yu. / You
shouldn’t see them, they are really drunk. Don’t want them to mess you up.” Sitting under this man’s house, we heard the sudden blare of a stereo, and observed the tumultuous unloading of passengers and cargo, all to the delighted greetings, and angry remonstrations of friends and family. People came to see the commotion, some standing nearby waiting to greet, others positioning themselves surreptitiously to best take in the goings on. Young women came and departed, taking parcels and groceries to other households in the village. Young men came, some carried off packages as well, others staying in hopes of sampling the betel nut always carried from town on such trips, others anticipating a party or drinking. Previous visits by Gaius had proven the likelihood of such merriment occurring again. The provision of drink was part of Gaius’ patronage of his local political, and clan supporters. It was yet another instance of the continuing PPP web of patronage, established through Sir Julius Chan’s twenty-seven years of political power. The Prime Minister at that time, Sir Julius had always received overwhelming voter support from Lambom. It also reflects a national trend among urban-based political types in relating to their village bases, demonstrating Gaius’ wage and remittance power, and his personal charisma. Regardless, a party did indeed commence, the half dozen or so young men already drunk from their trip joined by at least as many again clan brothers and friends. Besides the general raucous merriment, Gaius was heard to bellow, curse words directed in the general direction of his uncle Toamasik across the passage on the mainland. At this point, I was graciously invited by my host to walk with him and my torch to the hamlet where I slept at the other end of the island.

Toamasik was the pre-eminent bigman of his clan. His status was based on his leadership role in conducting the series of mortuary rites for members of his clan. He was not a prominent bigman, his clan was small and he had not gone beyond his strictest responsibilities to enlarge his reputation. But as the bigman of Bfuibui clan he was entitled to decide the allocation of clan lands within his clan, and was the accepted leader when the issue of royalties arose with the logging industry. According to several of his nephews, who kept a list of their clan’s royalty payments, over the previous year or so, Toamasik had received over K100, 000 in cash but had held no formal katim mani meeting. Instead he had twice given payments of twenty or fifty kina to each of his siblings as well as their grown children. His nephews estimated he had distributed no more than one thousand Kina. With what was expected to be the clan’s last large royalty

48 But this support eventually broke down, as evident from my account in Chapter Five of the subsequent elections in 1997.
payment, paid for the timber of their last land block to be cut, the nephews meant to change the status quo. Gaius was the only person who had the status to challenge his uncle, so his presence and organization of a *katim mani* was crucial to any challenge to Toamasik’s authority.

The morning after his arrival Gaius and several of his brothers set out in their dinghy to Metlik to collect their royalty payment. They did not stop at the mainland to pick up Toamasik. Instead, a young man was sent to inform Toamasik that a *katim mani* would take place later that afternoon. Even before the men returned that afternoon from Metlik, the bush telegraph had carried news that the *Buibui* royalty totalled K49,000. Workers at the camp saw the envelopes as they found their way to the camp offices, and passed the news on around the cape the previous day and evening and across the passage that morning. In the early afternoon, after a visit to the mainland to bathe away the salt water from their trip, Gaius and his party returned. After a quick meal of rice and tea, a select group of *Buibui* men was invited to meet inside the house. Gaius began by stating that his uncle had organized the prior two royalty payments and that he himself would organize this one. No rationalization was given, and everyone nodded in agreement. *Spia* cigars and betel nut were shared out amongst all present, then the envelope containing the cash was placed, printed side up, in the middle of the floor. Gaius announced ‘This is our money and now I will divide it’. I was assigned the task of counting the thick bundles of fifty and hundred kina notes to confirm that the printed total was indeed present. Once this was done, Gaius asked me what ten-percent of 49,000 was and I told him. He said that total would be topped up to 5,000 and would go to the two *Buibui* families at Bakok village. Next, he cut 4,000 kina and said this was for Toamasik as bigman of the clan. Toamasik appeared pleased, saying it was very good and straight. Gaius said this royalty should benefit the entire clan, so he asked his brother Paskar what was needed to purchase a chainsaw with a plank-cutting frame. Several *Buibui* families were planning to build new houses, and this suggestion was greeted by the voiced approval of everyone present. Paskar asked for and received 3,000 kina to buy the chainsaw and attachment in Lae, and have it shipped to Kokopo. Next, the clan’s trade store was given funds for resupplying the cargo. Gaius suggested that the staple cargo of rice and tin meat be supplemented with a wider range of goods. Again everyone approved. Toamasik was moved by the mood of giving and provided the storekeeper nine hundred kina to “top up” his funds for buying supplies. Money was cut for families and individuals of the clan, the totals decided upon after Gaius
suggested that they be sufficient to buy more than rice and tin fish. The remaining total was counted and Gaius said that 30,000 kina would be directed to John Peni in Namatanai to open a bank account for future clan business and needs. He said this money was not to be touched, but would earn interest for at least a year before its use would be decided upon. He said that the clan must think of its future because royalty payments were unlikely to continue after this. The remaining cash would be his to pay for the meeting expenses and his travel costs. A man was designated to deliver the family and individual payments and each was placed in a small envelope, recounted and labelled. This took some time, and as I counted, we shared betel nut and chatted amicably about fishing and what supplies should augment the trade store’s staple goods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASH AMOUNT</th>
<th>UTILIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K49,000</td>
<td>Total royalty payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K5,000</td>
<td>Allotted for Buibui at Bakok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K4,000</td>
<td>Share of Toamasik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K3,000</td>
<td>For chain saw and plank cutting attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K2,000</td>
<td>to clan store for cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K2,800</td>
<td>K200 per married woman, K50 per youth, K20 per child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K30,000</td>
<td>to John Peni to be banked/invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K2,000</td>
<td>“Leftovers” misc to be used by Gaius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7: Katim Mani. Buibui clan. Lambom Island January, 1997**

The remainder of Gaius’ stay on Lambom passed without incident, and several of his sisters and aunts expressed their approval of their larger-than-expected payments. It was several weeks after Gaius left before Toamasik approached me and complained about Gaius’ actions. He felt that the 30,000 kina was too much money to be left with Gaius, and he was unsure of whether John Peni would receive the money to open an account. He stated that Gaius liked to drink too much, and that he would use the money for himself. Toamasik said that Gaius wanted to be a bigman, but he had better save some money to carry out mortuary rituals if he wanted to be a bigman on Lambom, and not just a bigman in town.

A year later, during the Christmas holidays of 1998, the Buibui clan again held a meeting. This meeting involved the women of the clan. John Peni had called the meeting in order to report on the funds that the clan had and to ask his clan sisters what should be done with the money. Gaius was not present during this meeting, but was expected to visit the island within a month or so. John began by presenting the bankbooks for two accounts, one was a yearlong term deposit for 10,000 kina and the other was a treasury bill with a maturity date of six months for 20,000 kina. His sisters
and aunties were very pleased. John pointed out that the accounts had earned over fifteen hundred kina in interest and suggested this be used to help pay for all Buibui children’s school fees for the coming year. He then asked what people felt should be done with the money in the near future. Toamasik said that he did not feel that paying school fees was straight, because some people had many children others few, and likewise some went to school and high school while others did not. He suggested that a *katim mani* be planned for the time when Gaius was expected. His suggestion was greeted by immediate disapproval of the women present. One of his nieces had the temerity to say to him that he had already received lots of money and she had seen only a little, so he should not worry about what was left. John Peni argued that school fees were important and that the future should be taken care of. He said the bank paid interest, and this was good, but that larger sums could be withdrawn for specific business projects of clan members. When his suggestion met with the approval of those assembled, only Toamasik disagreed. He said that he had provided a lot to the clan. He had built the store and had given a thousand kina to top up supplies the year before. If the bank money was not to be distributed, he wanted the store to repay his loan and give him two thousand kina immediately. Again, his suggestion was met with disagreement. One of his nieces who worked in the store said the store would fail if it had to pay him. She said it would have no money to restock its supplies. When it became apparent that he would not receive cash immediately, but would have to wait, Toamasik left the meeting saying that that was all right, he would wait but they better not forget. The meeting concluded with expressions of gratitude to John and continuing discussion of Toamasik’s demands. His most vocal niece told me that he did not understand banks, was greedy and was a *man bipo* old fashioned man. She felt that in his time it was alright for big men to act like kings but now there was a new kind of knowledge and that he had proved that he did not know how to deal with money.

When I left in October of 1998, school fees had not been paid and only the 20,000 kina account remained. It was rumoured that Gaius had withdrawn the money and closed the other account. The trade store was still operating, but despite price increases, it was incurring a loss after each smaller re-supply trip.
Metlik Logging Camp: *Wok Hangre*

The logging camp at Metlik is a unique place in Lak. It is the largest block of land in the area that is not held by traditional landowners. Built by the contractor, Niugini Lumber, the camp was the base for the stockpiling of round logs, and the loading of these onto ships. It housed the dozen or so Malaysian contingent of Niugini Lumber, as well as larger numbers of Lak men who worked for the company. Controlled by the Malaysians, the camp was run employing a model for camp operations informed by Rimbunan Hijau’s experience in several countries of the region. This framework for organizing work did not fit well with certain Lak conceptions of managing labour.

Metlik logging camp was the site of intersecting forces of cultural meaning and practice. The events that occurred at Metlik can be viewed as another example of a globalizing capitalism encountering a political economy based on quite different relations of production. Yet there is more at work here than differing ideas of labour, status, and the contrasting hierarchies of clan and company. In analysing cases of what he terms structures of conjuncture, Sahlins cautions against the conventional approach of seeing culture contact in terms of binary oppositions such as resistance and accommodation. He argues:

\[(T)o\ \text{conceive of a simple opposition between the West and the Rest is in many ways an oversimplification...A number of anthropologists... have taught us to reconfigure the usual binary opposition as a triadic historical field, including a complicated intercultural zone where the cultural differences are worked through in political and economic practice...where “native” and “stranger” play out their working misunderstandings in creolized languages. (Sahlins 1993:13)\]

The logging camp at Metlik is an example of just such an intercultural zone. Further complicating matters, in this case a West versus the Rest oppositional framework becomes even more questionable as the forces of Western Capital are represented by a Malaysian timber concern. Rimbunan Hijau is capitalist institution, but to portray it as Western would deny the various cultural, political, and economic contexts from which it emerged and developed. Positing a global/local frame for viewing Metlik would likewise miss the nature of the contestation here, the shifting contextual forces at work at this specific place, and its particular historical trajectory. The trope of resistance and accommodation implies a certainty that belies the incomplete and ambiguous understandings of what occurs here.
The logging camp at Metlik plantation is set on a peninsula located just east of the rough waters of Cape St George, at the extreme southern tip of New Ireland. The camp buildings sit on a plain nestled in a clearing cut from amidst the rows of coconut trees of an old, disused copra plantation. Outsiders have held the land at Metlik since the turn of the century. Owned by an expatriate Chinese man named August Chan, the plantation had not been in operation since independence. On the surface it looks like any other of the hundreds of such places active in Pacific countries constructed from rough-hewn timber and flimsy tin roof sheeting. The effect is bleak and unquestionably bare in contrast to the vastness of the surrounding mountainous jungle. But to many Lak, it is a unique place, not in the least due to its very existence as the manifestation of "development" directly in their lands. Here we can see the variety of interested perspectives and social roles that are part of Lak social order; and in contrast, the interests and roles that are part of kampani practices. It is the way these worlds are related, as well as the various ways in which they are understood and acted upon that serve as the entrée into a discussion of the Lak and their world into a world-system political economy. What most markedly makes it such a unique place is its role as the site of contrasting notions of sociality and structures being played out. Though there is much that people find beneficial and positive about its presence, an undercurrent of ambivalence is apparent in the way people see Metlik in their lives.

The logging camp is set on a flat expanse of land with loading areas on either side; the plantation's coconut trees have been cleared away. Open to the weather, with logs piled, dusty and bleak when hot, it is a wind tunnel when weather is rough. The camp is a ten-minute walk to the nearest village, Bakok. Bakok only has a population of around eighty residents, so numerically Lambom people at the camp have a large presence. Fifty young men reside in a single barracks, a long structure made of rough timber with covered porch, and lighting when the generator is running. The generator is located behind the Malaysian quarters, where the contractor's employees take advantage of a kitchen, showers, toilets, a lounge, satellite television and videos, all in air-conditioned comfort. The married men's quarters consists of about 15 houses, ranged in rows, and is approximately a hundred meters away from the bachelor quarters. Beyond the main camp, on edge of hill, lies the house of the camp manager. An officer in the landowner's

49 On Lambom, the tin roof sheeting used by the Malaysians was called in Tok Pisin "niuspepa kapa/newsprint tin sheets. It was of a noticeably thinner gauge of tin, and its quick rusting characteristics were disparaged.
company, he resides in a kit house provided with electricity, a refrigerator and a large cook house.

Supervisory positions and those for skilled labourers, such as machine operators, are predominantly held by Malaysians at Metlik. Most of the manual labour done at the camp is by young bachelors from Lak. Some younger married men work as well, but tend to do so for short spells. Some older skilled married men work, but they are a distinct minority. Men with experience at other similar wage labour elsewhere are well represented.

At Metlik several workers complained about the treatment they received from the Malaysians. Many workers were unhappy with their rations. As far as food distribution, young men received a single packet of biscuits for lunch, and were expected to buy any other food with their wages from the company canteen, or get it from their families. As a result many young men ran up a debt at the company store and had their pay docked. Another practice that annoyed locals was that the Malaysians did not eat with the local labourers. They had their own cooks and got their meals served to them in a mess hall in their offices/dormitory. Married men who laboured at Metlik were often dependent on their wives' gardening endeavours, carried out on the steep ground on the edge of the camp to provide food for their families. All of these actions contrast markedly with village notions of sociability and particularly the imperatives of sharing food.

As well there is an uncomfortable fit between camp practices regarding the nature of status and the manner of ‘bossing’ of workers. Local models of patronage involve respect and casual supervision accompanying work done for others. Overt direction is seldom given in a demanding fashion, and signs of anger directed to a worker are rarely seen. Such behaviour towards workers has resulted in numerous assaults on Malaysian staff at Metlik. Cooke (1997) reports Lak had the most frequent cases of assaults on Rimbunan Hijau field staff anywhere in their worldwide operations. One young man who had hit a Chinese supervisor explained that when his stomach is empty and a Malaysian yells at him to work, he gets angry. He did not immediately act upon this anger but followed the most common manner towards physical violence in Lak. Some time later, when he had the opportunity to drink he recalled his anger and then he confronted the boss who had scolded him. Then he hit the Malaysian. This young man said there was no other way to have his complaints addressed. The camp manager was a
local man but workers complained that he acted like the Malaysians. Workers would bring their complaints to him, and he would assure them of his support but nothing would get done. Workers say he eats their shit. His interstitial position made him a convenient target that deflected some of the anger at the Malaysians.

One act of resistance involved vandalism of the satellite dish that was accessible only to the Malaysian dormitory. When it was being installed, the PNG man who set it up pointed out the piece in the centre of the dish that could be removed in order to render the whole thing inoperable. A few days later, when it became clear that the local workers would be unable to watch the television, several young men took it upon themselves to remove this piece and hide it in the bush. However the most common form of resistance was work avoidance and other forms of AWOL adventures.

Yet, despite all these complaints and acts of defiance the Metlik camp was considered an exciting place. It was happening. This reflects a feeling held by older men reflecting a wider sense of ambivalence about the benefits of logging. Wage labour at the camp had a pull on younger men. They were diverted from village-based projects and their wages seldom made it back in any form of remittance to family members. This was mainly due to the low wages, averaging only forty kina per fortnight, and the costs involved with living at the camp. Also decried was the drinking and rowdiness that went on at Metlik. It was not uncommon for drunken young men to return from a drinking bout at the camp to air grievances in their village. This sort of behaviour, though not outside village strictures, had been rare before the easy access to drink the camp provided. Despite the problems people noted due to the camp it still had a pull on the young men of the region. Many young men aspired to the stylish practice of wearing construction helmets, work boots and company uniforms. Though the young men often complained about the shortage of food, their lodging at Metlik was structured much like a bachelor house with the added benefit of town type freedoms: outside the ambit of strict kin based relations; a source of cash and the attendant fun it allowed; and a break from the monotony of village life that most bachelors express as a practiced ennui.

The Metlak Development Corporation

The offices of the local landowners company, Metlak Development Corporation (MDC) were located in the town of Kavieng, the capital of New Ireland province. Kavieng is
located at the extreme northern end of the island of New Ireland and was rarely visited
by people from Lambom. The offices of MDC were set within a fenced-in compound in
the basement of a two storey house with the Chairman of the Management board
residing in the living quarters on the second floor. I visited Kavieng for a few days in
June of 1997 in order to see the company operations there.

At the time of my visit Ezekiel Waisale was once again the Chairman of MDC after an
unsuccessful run for the National parliament in 1997. He had visited Lambom during
the campaign and invited me to drop in on him in Kavieng. Waisale had been the
Provincial government member for Lak in the late 1980s and was instrumental in
organizing the landowners company that had signed an agreement with Niugini Lumber
to operate in Lak. Soon after the commencement of logging in 1991 Waisale attended
the United Nations’ Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June of 1992 as a member of
government. After being immersed in the heady atmosphere of this watershed moment
in the development of international conservation, Waisale wrote a letter to a UN NGO,
the International Tropical Timber Organization in August of 1992 requesting assistance
in monitoring the logging industry in Lak and help in setting up a conservation
foundation. He had obviously picked up the conservationists’ rhetoric as his request
eventually led to the founding of the first Integrated Conservation and Development
project in PNG (discussed below). He was a man who knew how to play both sides
against the middle and come out alright.

Waisale met me in the offices of MDC early one afternoon to discuss the role the
company was playing in developing the Lak region. I waited for Waisale outside his
office in a narrow foyer crowded with file cabinets and a weight lifting machine whose
cables hung askew and whose iron weight plates lay piled on the floor, its bench covered
with dusty stacks of paper, cutlery and dishes I was ushered into his office and was
seated across from his desk after a warm greeting in Lak and a handshake. Waisale told
me he was happy that Apelis had defeated Sir Julius during the election even though he
himself had been soundly defeated. I asked him how the company was doing and what
sorts of development projects it was planning for Lak. Waisale responded by telling me
that logging was going to end soon so the company had to diversify. I told him I had
read that the company was losing money and that it was in serious financial difficulty
but he responded that MDC owned its offices and had a line of credit with the bank. His
plan, which he was soon to announce, was to purchase the Kavieng Hotel. This
eventually took place but not quite in the way Waisale initially explained it to me. The Post-Courier reported that the arrangement Metlak had entered into was a lease-to-buy agreement.

Kavieng MP Ian Ling-Stuckey congratulated the people of Lak for the initiative and assured them that he would work together with provincial authorities including Governor Paul Tohian to promote business development which directly involved the people...Under the lease arrangement, the owner and manager of the hotel will continue to manage it and report from time to time to a three-member hotel management committee comprising members of the Metlak board on how the business is going...Metlak Development Corporation as lessee of the hotel has invited other local groups to become partners in the running of the hotel (Post-Courier September 29 1997:14)

Despite the praise that Member of Parliament Ling-Stuckey heaped on Metlak and the people of Lak for their aspirations towards development, in the end this endeavour came to naught. The lease arrangement with the Kavieng Hotel ended up lasting just over three months. A local expatriate in the know told me that it was an attempt by the previous owner to get access to the MDC line of credit and the bank sensibly would have nothing to do with this. When I last spoke to Waisale he was completing an application to attend a course on developing management skills sponsored by AUSAID (an Australian government aid agency involved in many development projects in PNG). He was pretty sure he would be accepted and looked forward to an extended stay in Australia.

The ICAD experience

The interaction between Lak communities and a UN sponsored Integrated Conservation and Development (ICAD) project offers an insight into the range and nature of forces in play due to logging in Lak. Different cultural definitions as well as conflicting models of political economy are evident from the mutual misunderstandings the Lak and ICAD came to have of each other. Analysis of the competing conceptions of equity, exchange and money played out in this relationship allow the underlying logic inherent to each to come into sharper definition.

The failed attempt to establish an Integrated Conservation and Development (ICAD) project in the Lak region of southern New Ireland province has given conservationists
much to think about. Being the first of its kind attempted in Papua New Guinea, the history of the Lak ICAD has been well charted in the literature (McCallum and Sekhran 1997; Filer 1997). After the project was shut down the United Nations Development Programme’s Resident Representative for Papua New Guinea wrote that “The principal positive outcome of the Lak project is that invaluable lessons have been learned” (McCallum and Sekhran 1997:iii). This retrospective view of the project is documented in the glossy publication *Race for the Rainforest* published by the DEC and the UNDP-GEF. In this publication, subtitled "Evaluating Lessons from an Integrated Conservation and Development "Experiment" in New Ireland, Papua New Guinea", the authors take the admirable course of outlining the errors they made in the hopes of honing the ICAD approach for more efficacious results in subsequent projects. Several of these "lessons learned" are quite valid; accurately depicting the difficulties faced and mistakes made in trying to convince Lak landowners to terminate industrial logging in exchange for an ICAD project. The problem with this hopeful rehabilitation of an abandoned ICAD project is that there are fundamental misconceptions regarding the nature of Lak society, history and culture evident in the analysis presented by the ICAD team. This calls into question the value of the lessons learned and, in the end, says perhaps more about what was not learned.

In the following section I will explore the way ICAD misconstrued the Lak, the ways in which the Lak misconceived ICAD, and how both these sets of perceptions added to the already tenuous likelihood of the establishment of a viable ICAD project in the south of New Ireland. My aim is twofold: first, to offer a corrective to the misrepresentation of Lak society and culture presented in *Race for the Rainforest*; and second, to show how this misconception hampered the establishment of an ICAD in Lak.

**Understanding ICAD’s view of the Lak**

On 30 August 1996 the ICAD project terminated field operations. This ended a roughly three-year-long operational phase of the project on the ground in Lak. I commenced my fieldwork in October of 1996, so my understanding of ICAD understandings of Lak society comes from the project summary published as *Race for the Rainforest*. The background information to Lak is quite minimal as portrayed in their summary. We get some quotes from Powdermaker on matri-moities almost 70 years and over 200
kilometres away in Lesu. We get a discussion of *arsaikiap*, citing Albert’s thesis, on jealousy aimed at those who rise above others in egalitarian society, and a mention of rigid hierarchy. Despite a general warning to conservationists that they should place primacy on social factors involved in any proposed project area, and a more specific caveat regarding the expression of an overwhelming desire for logging to commence in Lak (Filer 1991), this advice was not heeded.

To begin, I will address the general view of Lak culture that emerges from a reading of *Race for the Rainforest*. The basis of this view can be derived from a reading of the actions and words of Lak people mentioned in this document. Analysis of the ICAD presentation of Lak culture will follow, allowing for a characterization of the cultural lens through which ICAD came to their understanding of the Lak. Outlining the cultural scheme ICAD operated from when interpreting Lak actions and statements will then be used to examine the specific misreading of Lak social systems and the implications of these for the wider range of cultural misunderstandings. I will address the ramifications of these misreadings later, but to get the gist of the general view of Lak society ICAD came to hold, an examination of some cases presented in *Race for the Rainforest* will serve as a starting point.

The lack of understanding of Lak society, and its range of historical and cultural responses to external forces, is evident in the project summation where several anecdotes are presented to show the difficulties of dealing with various segments of Lak society. One is left with a sense of the “just so” nature of Lak responses to reasonable ICAD actions. The portrait that emerges is not very flattering: a divided, corrupt, self-serving and self-defeating attitude to development that is reduced to a simple desire for cargo, and evidence of a dependency reflecting a handout mentality. Various Lak are quoted saying that basically they want things, and aren’t necessarily willing to work for them.

The ICAD project’s views about the behaviour of Lak communities are evidenced by the following anecdotes, presented in boxed off sections, adjacent to the text of their report. The first deals with local labour and demands for wages:

Project staff devised a system of water reticulation for the villages worst affected by poor water quality. A donor was found to provide assistance. The installation of water tanks in each village, with water piped in underground from a safe source, promised clean water and significant time savings as women would no longer need to fetch water from distant creeks.
However, when this system was presented to the communities, with project staff offering the equipment, and technical advice and the village expected to provide labour, inevitably the first question was, “How much will ICAD pay us to dig the ground for the pipe?” (Alois Topot pers. com.). Although the communities saw value in the communal water system, their recent experiences with the cash economy and interaction with the logging company would not allow them, as individuals to work for the community good. “We won’t work for free, we are not fools. Only fools would work for free like slaves” (Topot pers. com.).

A similar experience was recorded during the ICAD project’s attempt to establish a *Marasin Meri* (Medicine Woman) scheme, under which community-appointed women were to be selected for training in basic health care and provided with a stock of basic medical supplies. Receiving periodic supporting visits from the district’s Health Department officers, the women were to make early diagnoses, distribute medicines and record statistics. The scheme has been very successful in the Sepik area, particularly in the early treatment of malaria, and assistance with childbirth. The ICAD project, as part of the Early Rewards scheme, offered to fund the training of *Marasin Meris* and provide the medical supplies required. Again, almost unanimously, the communities’ response was, "Who will pay them? They cannot work for free--you must pay them a salary". (McCallum and Sekhran 1997:34)

The use of the adjectives ‘inevitably’ and ‘unanimously’ in this anecdote point to the frustration the team felt towards what they saw as unreasonable and inequitable: the inability of Lak people to perceive the fairness of pulling their share of the load in something that was being done for their benefit. This is presented to substantiate the view that Lak are unwilling to work for the communal as opposed to individual benefit. It is also meant to show how the logging company had biased the Lak towards equating labour with wages. In essence we are presented with evidence of the Lak practice of making unreasonable demands to be paid for labour while ignoring the fact that the expertise and materials were being provided gratis for their own benefit.

Further evidence about attitudes towards money emerges in the following anecdote. Here we see the ICAD project’s willingness to pay wages but difficulties with demands for compensation for Lak materials.

In their efforts to landscape the base, project staff negotiated the purchase of gravel from an unused area of the beach at Siar village. The leaders of the village declined payment for the gravel, stating that the gravel was worthless
to them. As a gesture of good faith, project staff only hired Siar residents to help shift the 250 loads of gravel.

Six months later, an elderly man who had been absent from Siar during the construction of the base, returned home. He promptly delivered a letter to project staff claiming that he was the real owner of the gravel and that a payment of K1500 would be needed "as compensation". The threat was made that if the money was not paid a tambu sign would be placed at the entrance of the base, effectively prohibiting all activity there. After consultation with the community, it appeared that while the community saw the compensation claim as an attempt by a small minority to extract more income from the ICADP, they unanimously supported the idea of a tambu sign, stating that tambu signs must be respected, even if the dispute is not seen as valid. (McCallum and Sekhran 1997:39)

In this case we find ICAD faced with the inverse of the situation they faced with the water reticulation system and the Marasin Meris: with the water and the health issue, ICAD offered material and expertise but expected labour to be provided; in the case of the gravel, ICAD was willing "as a gesture of good faith" to pay for the labour needed to move the gravel, and the gravel itself was unpaid for. Such a transaction was satisfactory to ICAD; the problem arose later when a compensation demand was made for the gravel itself. This demand is considered an attempt to "extract more income" after a deal had been completed. Such an interpretation seems suspect when we note that ICAD had found payment reasonable initially and "negotiated the purchase of gravel" when they first began their landscaping project. What had occurred to turn a purchase into a compensation demand, a payment for material into an attempt to extract income? Along with a representation of Lak intransigence a model of valid exchange processes is beginning to emerge, and a further example should help in discerning both more clearly.

We are told the story of a subsequent visit to the Baining area to see a small-scale timber project in operation. A Lak man’s reaction is summed up by the comment:

These are very good ideas...I would like them very much at our home. I think making our own timber is better than getting the Asians to do it. But it will be hard for us to convince our people because working a sawmill is hard work—these guys are really sweating. Royalties are much easier, the company just delivers them—it’s like free money. (McCallum and Sekhran 1997:28)

Once again we are presented with what appears to be a less than flattering example of Lak attitudes. From the point of view of the authors it is meant to show the dilemma ICAD had in trying to compete with the deleterious effects of logging royalties. This
case is not commented upon by authors, but we are left to take the statement at face value and draw our own conclusions: the Lak would rather sit back and receive payments instead of actively participating in a forestry industry of their own efforts. I think what is being missed here, besides the self-evident logic of "free money", is the contextual differences of the two opposed ways of getting money. What is being ignored in this case is the fundamental contextualization that differing forms of remuneration are nested within: the contrast between labour and wages, and landowner entitlements and royalties. These are basic differences that the Lak are quite aware of, and not the sort of dichotomy that representatives of donor economies, like ICAD, would be unfamiliar with. The problem occurs when the Lak attitude is seen as not genuine, the result of the cultural degradation caused by engagement with capitalism.

Analysing these examples it is possible to outline a model of appropriate exchange values from ICAD’s perspective. Taking the evidence piece by piece, the following propositions emerge: It is equitable to pay wages to Lak people, when Lak people provide raw materials for no charge; it is unreasonable for wages to be expected by Lak people when raw materials and expertise are provided by ICAD for the express benefit of Lak people themselves; expected payment for raw materials is considered a purchase at the time such a payment is negotiated, but Lak requests for payment when made subsequent to the acquisition of the materials amount to a demand for compensation --- an effort to extract project funds.

At first glance, a rough symmetry is observable in the position held by ICAD. Unpaid labour by the Lak is to be exchanged for material goods and expertise courtesy of ICAD; and Lak raw material in the form of gravel is to be exchanged for wages for labour. However, this reciprocal exchange model is subverted in each instance: The Lak demand money for the labour of pipe diggers and Marasin Meris. After villagers received wages for carting gravel, another man later demands compensation for the gravel donated previously by the Lak. Nowhere in the project document do we find out about the resolution of these incidents that ICAD viewed as failed reciprocity. We are left with the impression that Lak concerns were simply ignored as the bad faith attempts of putative extortion. ICAD simply moved on. Further negotiations would have been interesting in disentangling the views both sets of interested parties brought to encounter. In the end however, from an ICAD perspective, the Lak repeatedly failed to
make equitable bargains. And the sticking point was money, and attitudes towards acquiring it.

What can be said about the models of appropriate exchange that various Lak brought to the cases mentioned? It is obvious in the cases dealing with wage demands that as far as the Lak were concerned labour was not viewed as being exchanged for material benefits such as health care and water provision, but for wages for those who laboured. The wider community benefits received from a water system and network of medicine women were not part of the basic equation for the Lak, as they consistently demonstrated. This is not to say that such benefits were not valued, nor that an appreciation of shared community advancement was lacking (as ICAD implies), but that such benefits were being exchanged for something else. The Lak saw the provision of such projects as being exchanged for their forgoing of royalties from the loggers.

The Lak were explicitly marking a distinction between communal and individual spheres of recompense. The bargain that was to be made in exchange for community benefits and rewards was perceived to operate on another level, and involved a different form of reciprocity. What ICAD missed here is the fundamental contrast between labour, wages and private property on the one hand, and clan owned land rights and royalties on the other. These are basic differences that are central to Lak ideas of reciprocity, and not the sort of dichotomy that representatives of donor economies, like ICAD, would be unfamiliar with. The Lak model of exchange was wages for labour, and infrastructure projects for royalties. ICAD failed to realize this. Instead they saw the Lak attitude as culturally inauthentic, the result of cultural degradation due to large-scale logging.

What is at the root of ICAD misunderstandings of the Lak, and in particular their desire for money? While Race for the Rainforest is presented as lessons learnt arising from the particulars of the Lak ICAD project, the superficiality of their analysis belies this. What they present as Lak sociality, or lack thereof, is in reality a clichéd preconception about how natives should or shouldn’t behave. Others have identified this skewed notion of primitive propriety as arising from:

... a politics which, while purporting to be (distinctively) radical in its rejection of conventional, materialistic Western values was -- at least in the context of Papua New Guinea -- relatively conservative. The principal value of Papua New Guineans ... was that they be ‘untouched’... [C]orrespondingly, the principal lament...was that the people had become
spoiled. The social relationships between travelers and native people had become, like those in the West, essentially commercialized... Those held most responsible for spoiling Papua New Guineans... representing the worst commercialism and superficialism of Western society, had through their insensitive use of money fostered the commercialization of social relation. (Errington and Gewertz 1989:42)

Note the resonance with the following characterization in the ICAD document detailing: “the communities’ fascination with cash, as result of their experience with logging” (McCallum and Sekhran 1997:59). When this is coupled with the earlier comment that such payments had disinclined Lak to be able to work for the communal good, it becomes clear that the ICAD project held a worldview that classed all such demands in a negative frame, the result of a damaged culture. The natives have been spoiled by the effects of world capitalism -- be it in the form of rich tourists or transnational loggers -- and their respective habits of turning all relations into cash relations. This perspective had the effect of making ICAD reluctant to add to the cultural damage that cash and logging had already accomplished, and more importantly, unlikely and unwilling to resolve such disputes where cash demands were involved.

This is not meant to imply that ICAD never found it appropriate to pay for services required by the needs of the project. For instance we have the biodiversity appraisal (BIORAP):

As the Lak BIORAP involved eminent expatriate scientists working on tight time schedules, and as the area was inaccessible, the study team made wide use of helicopters for transport. Food was brought in from outside the area. Local people were hired as porters and guides and were exposed to the "affluent" lifestyles of the scientific workers... The presence of expatriates, the use of helicopters, and other factors, reinforced the notion that the ICAD project was wealthy; villagers saw little reason why this wealth should not be shared with them. Thus, inadvertently, the ICAD project reinforced local dependency rather than challenging it. (McCallum and Sekhran 1997:56)

No mention here of fostering the dependency of eminent scientists and other expatriates, although perhaps we can begin to understand why villagers would be confused by the ICAD project’s unwillingness to pay wages to them (the Lak appreciated the irony here). Other consultancies included the hiring of a British business expert to review the “business performance of the Metlak Development Corporation” (ibid: 43), the landowners’ company; “a report on the agricultural potential of the Lak area” by Paconsult, “a reputable New Britain-based firm of agricultural development specialists” (ibid: 39); and ANUTECH, “the commercial arm of the Australian National University”,

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to develop a sustainable forest management plan (ibid: 31). And in each of these instances there is no mention of the money demands of the consultants, or how the project staff dealt with carrying out negotiations in determining the purchase of these services.

So, in retrospect, what can be said about the issue of labour, wages, and money when trying to understand the attitudes of the Lak and ICAD in dealing with one another? To begin with, there is an anthropological perspective within which to frame all this. In the introduction to their important collection *Money and the Morality of Exchange* Parry and Bloch argue that: “What money means is not only situationally defined but also constantly re-negotiated” (1989:23). The point is that that notions regarding money are culturally specific, and historically informed. What the Lak think of money and its appropriate uses is informed by the specific cultural and historical factors of their experiences. They expect certain sorts of institutions to pay wages for labour, and see this as a straightforward, uncomplicated exchange. The views that the ICAD report chronicles for the Lak are consistent. Lak confusion over the unwillingness of an obviously wealthy institution to pay such wages also emerges. And this cuts both ways; the way ICAD spends money and its understandings of when and who can validly expect payment are culturally and historically determined. ICAD had no problem paying consultants sums of money, and likely paid related expenses where required. ICAD valued what these consultants had to offer implicitly, as these were related to the sorts of things they themselves did, part of the world of NGOs and such. None of these actions were seen as attempts to extract money from the project, or as being unreasonable, but as integral to the project and accepted without a second thought. The problems arose when ICAD’s preconceived view of the Lak, which was based on a different set of perceptions, did not jibe with what they experienced. In this case ICAD suffered a sort of cognitive dissonance when the worldview they had was tilted, where the Lak did not fit into the classificatory schema that they were meant to fill, as donor recipients. The issue of cash payments became the point of tension between ICAD’s understanding of the Lak, and the actual behaviour of the Lak.

The true failure is the ICAD’s inability to understand that the Lak were negotiating in good faith for what they thought was equitable, just as the ICAD project felt it was doing. The frustration evident in the ICAD presentation of these cases is just as evident in the Lak people’s consistent response to them.
Lak view of ICAD

The understandings Lak people have of what ICAD was, why it came to Lak, and why it abandoned its activities are based upon a wider set of impressions linked to logging in general. In particular, it is the relational positioning of ICAD within that set of interested agents and institutions that is central to thinking about what ICAD was, what it wanted to achieve, and what it offered to the Lak. It was ICAD’s perceived placement in a pantheon of competing entities that grounds the Lak understanding and response to its activities. I argue that a narrow view of Melanesian society in general, expressed in ICAD evaluations of the Lak experience, limited the way ICAD personnel could carry out relationships with segments of the Lak population. This in turn led to an evaluation of ICAD by differing segments of local society based upon the nature of human relationships involved, and once again, within the context of the other forces at work in the region.

ICAD’s action led to a local perception of ICAD itself that further limited the project’s ability to convince landowners of its ability to deliver the goods, and indeed left people wondering about what the goods were, or why ICAD would be delivering them, and raised a series of other questions, most revolving around the general theme “what is an ICAD?” In particular, the ICAD fear of fostering a dependency relationship, combined with reluctance to pay compensation or other wages, made ICAD unable to manoeuvre successfully in the Lak setting. From the perspective of the Lak, this contrasted sharply with ICAD’s willingness to pay various consultants and spend extravagantly on such things as transporting scientists into the region to do biomapping. ICAD’s refusal to pay wages appears manifestly inequitable to locals. It also frustrated locals, mystifying them as they try to understand how to get ICAD to pay. ICAD misunderstood the Lak, and their subsequent actions limited local understandings of what they were up to. This is like gavman in that benefits go to projects and politicians not to the people.

The emergent Lak understanding of ICAD becomes evident in the way they treated project promises. As the ICAD staff report:

Landowners, on the other hand, intimated that they were unwilling to provide a commitment to conservation without first receiving tangible benefits: “We can be very materialistic people, we want to feel, taste and smell development. There’s no use just promising on paper, we want to see it” (Toanusi to Cooke, 1996). The local community gave little credit to the expenditure made by the project as part of project operations and
infrastructural development as these costs did not produce individual direct benefits. (Ibid 39)

Whereas ICAD took this as the materialistic bent of recently spoiled natives, the Lak were expressing their own understanding of the situation: Like gavman, ICAD promised things and thus the Lak responded in waiting to see the results before committing their support. They had been disappointed before, and in the final analysis ICAD did leave and did not deliver on their promises.

For ICAD, much like Lak experiences with gavman, development was posited as entailing a specific set of benefits with communities as the targeted recipients. Thus ICAD professes:

Project proponents defined development support as technical assistance for community-driven sustainable development initiatives. Resource owners, on the other hand, typically defined development support as the delivery of kago (cash, consumer goods, and services), levels of which were expected to equal or exceed that provided by the logging company. (McCallum and Sekhran 1997:27)

The practice of National politics is a prime example of expectations of this sort. Once every five years while he was in parliament until his ouster in 1997, Sir Julius made his pilgrimage to villages and dispensed largesse as part of his slush/development fund, in large cheques. In 1997, this involved a solar power system for the school which he purported to cost 12,000 kina and a 10,000 kina cheque to pay for the construction of a sea wall. In the past, Sir Julius has given the construction materials for a communal copra oven (never built), a copra boat (over 20,000 kina), and several dinghies with outboard engines (valued at upwards of 7,000 kina each). These went to the community. This kind of giving is what Lak people expect the government to provide, because this is precisely what the government has provided in the past. Services may be spotty, poorly managed and intermittently funded, but every five years this is what government provides to gain support. The nature of this compact with the member was evidenced when Sir Julius lost in 1997 and the local PPP membership considered withholding the cheque from the people.

ICAD built a base, but this was theirs; they set the rules there. Other than one rent-receiving clan (within which the matter was disputed) and one beneficiary Elvit Remas, nothing related to the base benefited local stakeholders. As Elvit was seen as linked to
Waisale and his political project and party, to the Lak ICAD again revealed its nature through this association.

ICAD often held meetings, like government related actors, and with government officials present. The Lak responded in turn. In general, only supporters would go to these meetings. This led ICAD to overestimate its support while at the same time confirming to the Lak that ICAD was a sort of gavman project. When ICAD ceased operations and left the Lak region Lak people where not surprised; it was what they had come to expect from all things related to gavman.

Conclusion

Logging in Lak as a phenomenon of global capitalist forces was perceived locally in a variety of ways, depending upon the contexts in which people encountered it. On Lambom the payment of royalty moneys was domesticated within the control of clan big men. Though there was no real precedent for disbursing such large sums of cash, big men, as local practice dictated, took the lead in acting in their clan’s interests. Unlike the distributions resulting from the activities of mortuary feasting, there was no public division of the resources gathered by the clan; money is portable in a way that large numbers of pigs and shell valuables are not. Though many big men found the ability to take a large share of the royalties satisfactory, as we have seen, most members of their clans did not. Dissatisfaction led to a new form of royalty division: one clan overcame the standard approach of their bigman to inject the knowledge of modern accounting methods into their katim mani distribution. This innovation led to further changes as women were brought into the process of their clan’s business as valid agents in the interests of their children’s futures. Whether such an innovation will be continued after royalty payments cease, or if it will be extended to other forms of clan hisnis remains to be seen.

At the Metlik logging camp the workers’ housing arrangements mirrored Lak practices of segregating bachelors and many workers found this comprehensible. The attitude taken by Malaysian contractors towards their workforce did not sit well with workers, and the Lak responded in a manner consistent with their usual means of showing grievances, through avoidance and drunken confrontation. As well a rough reciprocity was asserted through acts of vandalism such as the sabotage of the satellite dish at...
Metlik. Yet despite their unhappiness with their wages and the treatment they received, workers were still attracted to life at the camp. It was a happening place, a hybrid town in the bush, where urban attractions could be sampled closer to home. To some extent it fulfilled their yearning for development and the modern in that as it included physical structures like the barracks and offices seen in Kokopo albeit on a smaller scale. But in the end the camp at Metlik disappointed the desire for an actual bit of the modern world imported onto the local scene. The relations hoped for, ones more in tune with local concepts of reciprocity, did not emerge. Though the young men had a brief respite from the marginality they feel in the village, and gained an increased sense of worth and capability from the opportunity it gave them to use power tools and operate heavy machinery; this respite was tempered by the failure of the camp to provide relations with outsiders that fit with their own notions of self-worth and an affirmation of their usefulness in a modern world. Even taking part in modern work and using modern skills and machinery did not lead to the type of respect they gain at home when they similarly master the work of daily life. And much as in the earlier example of incursions from the wider world, the camp was only a temporary presence in the Lak world. The connection to the modern world was fleeting and its passing served to reinforce the notion of being at the last place that laskona identity implies.

Soon after it became apparent that the logging camp was going to be abandoned in mid 1998 the Lak began to dismantle it for salvage. The first dinghy to arrive from Metlik on Lambom brought a group of young men who came ashore at a rumai dalwan and unloaded a large amount of rice and tinned meat and numerous jars of sauces. News spread and several dinghies soon were on their way to round the cape and reach the camp as soon as possible. Later that afternoon the dinghies began to return and discharge their cargo. One prized acquisition was a set of wooden steps that had once led to the company offices and would now serve to replace the ladder for the house of a particular happy man. I must admit surprise when another man arrived on a subsequent dinghy and unloaded a porcelain toilet fixture (sans seat) and then raced up the hill to his home to quickly stow it in the house. That evening at the mmai dalwan the young men had quite a feast. Several large saucepans of rice were on the boil and when they were done the contents of every can and jar and bottle were emptied into them to create a stew the likes

50 What happened here is interestingly similar to a case reported by Errington and Gewertz (1995:157-169). In that case the destruction took place prior to operation of the project for which the building was being constructed. They conclude that Karavans were: "refusing to accept their inequality as ontological—as other than the product of immediate and alterable social circumstances" (166).
of which were unique in the experience of those gathered for the feast. One particularly enthusiastic young chef was emptying a large bottle of soy sauce into one saucepan as his friend urged him on: "Karamapim olgeta. Mi no laik lukim wait, dispela rais i mas blak tasol/ Cover it up totally. I don’t want to see any white, this rice should be black."

There may be a comment here regarding concepts of race, but when questioned later the young man laughed and said that was not his intention; he just wanted to eat something and was excited to be able to not have to restrain his appetite. As Sykes noted regarding gluttony and rascalism among the Lelet of New Ireland, there is a "feeling of empowerment that comes in periods of excess". (1999: 171). In the Lelet case that excess related to violence, as well as consumption, and was part of youth raskol behaviour that was the focus of Sykes’ paper. On Lambom not one person I spoke to considered the dismantling of Metlik to be an instance of raskol behaviour; even the camp manager felt it was the natural way for the camp to end its existence.

Sykes argues that the exuberance and empowerment that such excess and gluttony brings soon dissipates: “Afterwards, youths come to understand their conditions differently: as poverty, as loneliness and as alienation.” (1999:171). I would argue that for the young men of Lambom this alienation did not involve loneliness as these fellows weren’t marginalized raskol but mainstream Lak youth. Their poverty and alienation were relational states⁵¹, brought into focus by their engagement with modernity and capitalist informed wage relations. Far from being lonely or alienated, they were united in sharing an understanding of their marginality as ol Laskona mangi/last corner young men ---just like their fathers, and their fathers before them.

In retrospect all the actions involved in the dismantling of Metlik camp were carried out with joy and enthusiasm, not ill will, resentment nor ‘bloody mindedness.’ In the end the camp was further flotsam for the people of Lambom to gather and make use of as best they could.

The actions of the Landowner Company were beyond the view of the people on Lambom, and besides the provision of the copra boat MV Metlak, the local community saw very little in the way of development. The MDC management was captured by

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⁵¹ As Sahlins notes “Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people” (1972:37).
educated Lak who were sophisticated in the operations of \textit{gavman} and divorced from the actual communities which their enterprise was supposed to represent. MDC had little effect upon the situation in Lak beyond enriching for a time the various men who served on its board. Relations with the Landowner Company allowed the nature of \textit{laskona} identity to emerge in stark relief. Lambom was literally at the last corner of New Ireland while Kavieng remained a distant place at the opposite extreme end of the island province. MDC in Kavieng was inaccessible to the vast majority of Lak people, outside the realm of their daily lives or even the routes that travel might take them during a lifetime. Likewise the actions of the company were beyond local control, and this was a bitter truth that came to be acknowledged on Lambom. What should have been their company, their collective place in a world of \textit{bisnis}, only heightened the local sense of an inability to engage in this wider sense in a meaningful and satisfactory manner. New types of leaders emerged, but these leaders proved to be immune to local expectations, relations of exchange, and forms of patronage.

The ICAD episode left people mystified as to its true purposes and nature, and because of its perceived similarity to \textit{gavman} Lak people classified it as a part of that domain of modernity. ICAD acted upon a view of the Lak as natives that failed to allow for any meaningful understanding of their behaviour. The failure of either side to understand the best intentions of the other left the field to the loggers, a result that did not have to happen. Consistent failure to understand the motivations of the other led to Lak being abandoned by ICAD and the leaving the Lak to ponder the inscrutable ways of the modern world.

Logging and its intense presence in Lak ended up being like other Lak encounters with forces from beyond the horizon. Similar to the De Rays colony, the Japanese occupation, and Australian colonialism, logging was there for a while, its presence seemingly beyond the control of local people, and then it was gone. Lak people were not overly surprised by this turn of events, they attempted to take advantage of what they properly perceived as being a temporary presence, and get the best result they could. In the end the \textit{Laskona} remains as it is, and will be, a place on the periphery of the more substantial flows of globalization, yet ever ready to engage these forces on Lak terms to the best of their understandings and abilities.

It is to the wider issues of marginality and modernity, and the identity that such engagements foster, that I turn to in the next, concluding chapter.
Chapter Nine

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I will place the ethnography presented in this thesis within wider contexts of anthropological discourse. I begin by using the set of experiential domains, bisnis, kastom, gayman, and lotu as an entry point to compare the Lambom experience of modernity in broader regional, national, and global contexts. I then move to a discussion of a variety of ways that modernity has been characterized in anthropology and how this applies to the Lak construction of Laskona identity.

First, having organized my Lambom based ethnography according to the local domains of experience; I now offer an analysis of each of these spheres by placing them within wider contexts of setting, and current discussions in anthropology. My ethnography makes apparent the overlapping relationships among the domains of bisnis, kastom, gayman and lotu as ways of perceiving and acting within a modern world. By placing the Lambom case within a variety of comparative settings, it is likewise apparent that all of these vernacular domains demonstrate flexibility as categorical frames for action depending upon the specifics of ethnographic context.

Bisnis

In many ways the impetus to partake in business affords another context to achieve goals and successes in the local scene. Early attempts at such endeavours on Lambom, through trade store ventures, were linked to clan leaders and attempted through clan based enterprise. Recent trade stores have afforded opportunities for those outside traditional clan based leadership positions. As well, the influx of capital from logging royalties has allowed clans to again attempt cooperative business ventures. Here the
problem that emerged on Lambom, as described in Chapter Two, involved the questions of appropriate skills and time commitments from clan members.

The impetus for earning cash is firmly rooted in the daily requirements of village life in a modern world. Both trade store ventures and cash cropping are necessary in order to provide for school fees and uniforms, trips to the aid post and the cost of medicines, as well as church tithes; all these costs are a part of everyday life on Lambom.

My discussion of problems faced by trade store owners on Lambom (Chapter Two) highlights the difficulties of success while remaining within a social world of accepted kin relations and customary ideas of food sharing. This constraint on profitability and success is further exacerbated by the difficulties presented in a church ordered regime where tithing is both public and mandatory. Having to operate while dealing with kin and in-law credit as well as a ten percent gross tithe of income makes it difficult for even those with exemplary business acumen to keep a trade store operating as a going concern for an extended period of time. In some ways it is almost as if the obligations of sociability and church act as a brake on the establishment of a continuous trade store entrepreneurial elite. The stuakipa is in the end levelled through the influence of church and kin, and thus cannot emerge as a permanent merchant class. For a while such enterprises work in a manner that allows kin access to goods they may not be able to otherwise access; in effect, the wealth of the enterprising gets eaten by social relations within the wider community. But in the end, a reciprocal levelling occurs, and the inevitable pundau failure of another store ensues.

The imperatives of education, healthcare, and church obligations are not the only factors behind the desire for cash. Another is the role of consumption in identity formation. Goods are desired for the construction of an identity as engaged in the modern world through them. People have gained a taste for eating rice, tinned meat and fish, and other goods that are produced outside the local scene of Lambom. As well, clothing and style become markers of ability to access things and forces beyond the horizon. The importance of this for the identity of young men is a continuation of earlier practices of status acquisition where men traditionally travelled in clan leadership roles and as part of the men’s cult to gain position and bring goods to Lambom for local mortuary ritual enactments.
What is new on Lambom is the way that status is linked to consumption of goods that have been produced as part of a world based capitalist system. Foster has described how consumption creates a national identity within the PNG context as a result of advertisements: “commodity consumption…attaches specific characteristics to generic individuals” (2004:127). While his interest is with the production of generic consumers as citizens, the general point regarding identity attached to consumption is useful in the case of Lambom encounters with the world of goods available in Kokopo.

My account of the Lak experience of shopping in my chapter on town is an attempt to ground what is a common practice across PNG ethnographically in the lives of people who originate outside the urban scene. Here desire is enacted through the process of engaging with objects as commodities regardless of whether a purchase is imminent or even probable; the variety of commodities and at times their novelty serve as a mode to shape and project potential lifestyles and identities. The stylish young men of Kokopo existing in a space between the entrenched stable elite and temporary visitors to town represent a class of urbanites placed between village and town life. In this fashion workers gain a marginal entrée into the world of cash afforded a particular class, a working class within town that falls between an established elite and an excluded rural population. I hope that my discussion of their experiences will have gone some way towards providing “…an ethnographically grounded study of modernity in Papua New Guinea [which] would…involve the presentation and analysis of…efforts at self- and social construction” (Gewertz and Errington 2004:278). Adding to recent studies of elites in PNG, it offers a complementary portrait of non-elite that were more numerous among the urban dwellers of Kokopo during the late 1990s.

Life in town provides for villagers a tangible and primary conduit to the world of modern flows of ideas and things. Village life sees one range of possible engagement with one set of commodities that flow into rural settings; town provides a much wider range of experience of such flows and at a pace that is exponentially swifter. The expansion of Kokopo that occurred during the late 1990s presented a model of what development might be capable of in transforming a ples/village into a happening, engaged place more firmly seated in the modern world system. The most likely
engagement with this world is as a member of the working class described in this thesis in Chapter Seven. For those who make this lifestyle choice the rewards are different from those related to elite status. Their existence is much more tenuous in its links, but here the goal of workers may not be the respectability of establishment or advancement of the elite, but rather simply the opportunity to stay engaged within a happening town outside strictures of village norms of behaviour. The payoff for such workers is the ability to take part in the consumption of various markers of *stail* and live modern town lives. In essence these workers is able to appear as the “successful embodiments of a coveted, consumer-focused lifestyle” (Gewertz and Errington 2004:282). Not quite the elite world of salaries, Land Rovers, Rotary Clubs, and modern houses, but an urban, hip, on-the-edge existence, as definitive of one particular way of being modern in the emerging class stratified world of PNG towns and cities.

**Kastom**

‘Kastom’ in the early literature was often seen as opposed to real tradition as spurious ideological representation to authentic cultural form. Though *kastom* is often seen as being opposed to the modern, there are several problems related with this simplification. One is the fact that when approached from a broader context of locally imagined domains of experience, these other domains discussed in this thesis, *bisnis*, *gavman*, and *lotu* all have aspects of the traditional as part of their logic; they are traditional in the sense that they are grounded in beliefs and practices with local pedigrees. By using this fourfold taxonomy of domains I have attempted to get beyond the dichotomy of tradition versus modern, in order to ethnographically map out the Lak way of apprehending their place in a modern world. Here I will briefly discuss how a focus on *kastom*, as a domain that mediates between forces local, regional, and global, helps us to compare issues apparent in Lak and other parts of PNG.

52 Though wage labour is not subsumed under the concept of *bisnis* (Otto 1992; Foster 1995:25) generally, I believe it is useful to discuss workers here as they do operate under relations of production that emerge from a world system of capitalist relations.

53 For a powerful refutation of this approach in the literature see Jolly (1992).
It was within the domain of kastom that the people of Lambom were able to address and mediate a potential disparity between local and external forces with regards to shell valuables (as described in Chapter Three). Here the local issue of the cash value of pigs as related to shell money was informed through a process reaching outward towards regional and global forces. The speeches customarily given at mortuary feasts provided a forum for this matter to be contested. At issue was not only the relative value but questions of absolute value for traditional shell valuables. The point being argued was that shell money must in some way be linked in value to both the regional and global context. If this did not occur Lambom islanders would be in the position of having things on the island devalued to the point of relative unimportance. The debate that ensued allowed the villagers to assert the worth and exchange value of predominantly local modes of exchange. Similar forms of shell money within the region were discussed, such as Tolai Tabu, and at the national and international levels, the price of commodities such as spia tobacco, and twenty kilogram bales of rice. As well as serving as the venue for this debate, the speeches at the mortuary ritual allowed a consensus to eventually be reached. In the end local bundles of shell money were pegged for the time being to the cost of similar bundles in East New Britain, the price of bales of rice, and the cost of tobacco.

Changes in the practice of sorcery and divination also reveal the connections between local, regional, and global forces. Exposure to different forms of divination, the result of a Lambom youth’s attendance off island in a national high school, was the first step in the process of innovation outlined in Chapter Three. The crucial fact about Ouija for that process was that it was not linked to now questionable divination practices involving the bones of the dead. Furthermore, the origin of Ouija is certainly beyond the Papua New Guinea context, even if the student who imported it into Lambom was certain it was a regional variation of sorcery divination. It was local disputes that made this innovation attractive to the people of Lambom. Those and the tensions between local competing churches created a milieu which led to one traditional practice of divination being considered unpalatable to emerging Christian sensibilities. In particular, members of the Foursquare church criticized those of the United Church for failing to condemn aspects of kastom that were not consistent with Christian belief and this was the spur to this change in divination practice. This led UC leaders to become
more vocal in stating their opinions on various *kastom* practices; since leadership within the UC and men’s cult overlapped, this new UC attitude towards divination gained ascendency. In this case the use of a Ouija-like divination replaced an established but problematic form of *kastom*. In other words, the demand for new a form of divination and *kastom* arose from a local dispute that reflected global forces involved with Pentecostal and evangelical forms of Christianity. I will return to Christianity within the domain of *lotu* shortly, but for now I just wish to highlight the manner in which *kastom* as a domain is able to serve as the arena for contestations originating in other spheres of action.

Within the regional scene, and in New Ireland, *kastom* has served as the means for change in mediating local and external forces. Foster’s work on Tanga Island demonstrates a case where the emerging domain of *bisnis* was able to allow the innovation of patrilineal inheritance of coconut palms within a land tenure system fundamentally matrilineal in nature (1995). In this case mortuary feasting became considered part of the newly conceived domain of *kastom*, while the practice of copra production came under the rubric of *bisnis*. This allowed certain Tangans to rationalize and justify their transfer of their own *bisnis* endeavours outside the matri-clan to their children. This sort of binary opposition of *kastom* to anything considered non-traditional is apparent in a range of works across Island Melanesia. In addition to the *kastom*/bisnis opposition presented by Foster (1995), we also see a *kastom* versus *gavman* contrast in Vanuatu (Philibert 1986).

Eves’ work shows how the adoption of new forms of ritual dancing, performed in various networks that have developed since PNG independence, allow for the projection of local agency onto a wider scene (2004). High school based festivals, national day celebrations, and the like create the opportunity for *kastom* to serve as a marker of Lelet efficacy and power beyond the local scene of their home in the province’s central plateau. Here a local desire to engage on a regional level was answered by the flexibility of *kastom* practices. As Eves notes, this was not without its inherent risks, as the sorcery involved with these new dances intensified the risk to participants as compared to local forms. Yet the risks were weighed and the practice has become part of Lelet aspirations.
to engage on a wider scale, and in a more potent fashion in their opinions, than existing forms of dance allowed.

To return to the Lak case presented in Chapter Three, the crucial response to the exigencies of modernity has been the use of innovations, various shortcuts, in order to take over the functions that had been served by various rituals within the modern context of pressures on time and resources. *Kastom* events are still critical in determining clan leadership, and the ritual complexes surrounding the men’s cult and male initiation. I will return to place of shortcuts later in this chapter. Here I will conclude by stressing that the idea of change within *kastom* is not oxymoronic. The Lak of Lambom have been adapting and ‘editing’ their ritual activities, in particular their mortuary feasting complex, for some time. Other rituals, formerly part of the wider scheme of inter-moiety exchanges, have simply ceased to be practiced: the exchanges described in Albert’s ethnography related to marriage have not been carried out on Lambom since well before my fieldwork began in 1996. *Kastom* thus can be considered particularly well suited as a means of innovation, not to be considered as spurious Invented Traditions, but as the locus for Lak people to act as authors of their own culture; invention here evoking the sense Wagner implied in his work on culture as creativity (1975).

**Lotu**

Christianity has become the focus of much recent work in the anthropology of Papua New Guinea. In the years since the publication of the edited volume *Christianity in Oceania* (Barker 1990), anthropologists have increasingly turned their attention to the place of churches in various ethnographic settings. In order to place the Lambom experience in this context I will discuss two cases of sectarian rivalry in the recent anthropological literature and compare it with those. I will conclude by moving the discussion from the national scene to the wider global context, dealing with the spread of forms of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity across the globe.

Dundon’s work on the sectarian schism in Gogodala provides a good entry point to put the Lambom experience within the national scene of PNG (2002). In this case the rift dividing the community she studied involved the more established ‘traditional’ church
the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG) and the newer church, the Congregation of the Evangelical Fellowship or CEF.

From its introduction "... (t)he local form of Christianity was predicated on certain prescriptions about activities associated with past heathen practices and beliefs" (217). Local people quipped that they had twelve commandments instead of the standard ten to abide by. Smoking tobacco, drinking kava, and chewing betelnut, were traditional practices that were outlawed; and introduced vices such as the drinking of alcohol were also discouraged. Traditional dance was likewise frowned upon. These dances were part of the traditional male initiatory cycle.

The introduction of the CEF church into the region was brought about through the efforts of an elite and educated group of locals. One of the founders of the new church was the first person from Gogodala to receive a Bachelor of Divinity degree; “Similarly, his supporters in the CEF are the educated and professional elite, who’ve grown up in the EC as the children of EC pastors” (220). Their main complaint about the older church concerned the lack of development in the region, and the church’s failure to create a more satisfying engagement with the wider world.

Thus local people from the beginning had expectations that Europeans would help improve their material circumstances. This seemed to be borne out by the mission establishment of schools and medical posts in the villages. But in the long run locals came to believe that the missionaries had failed. This is supported in the local mind by the Church’s teaching regarding money as the root of all evil. Dundon says that in the local view,

This has resulted ... in a dearth of local business acumen, and my attention was often drawn to the lack of viable Gogodala businesses in the area. Gogodala, people say, do not understand money and cannot seem to manipulate it like others in PNG can and do (221).

Thus, development is related to things such as infrastructure, cash, educational services and aid posts. Development is seen as crucial to their future as a community. “It is envisaged as the means by which these communities will transform their places and practices through the inclusion of European technologies and foods within the tenets of a local lifestyle.” (222)
The older church and missions provided the bases for these forms of development, and the critique that is current is not a rejection of Christianity but rather an avenue to question whether the churches are capable of delivering the goods. By reinstituting dance, and in particular dance that in its vigorous nature evokes older tabooed forms, the CEF challenges a tenet of ECPNG practice and belief. Dundon argues:

...that a recent interest in dance and Christian forms of worship, instigated by various new churches in the region, forms part of an ongoing discussion about the confluence between custom and Christianity... In the process, a redefinition of appropriate forms of bodily movement and comportment meant that many Gogodala became involved in 'traditional' dancing, associated primarily with pre-Christian past. (225)

By instituting dancing to new forms of Christianity, the new church is:

...critiquing past decisions that continue to adversely affect the future of Gogodala communities. The current predicaments... are taken as indicators of the failure of the mission to fulfil certain basic promises.... in the hope that this will initiate development. (226).

Thus in this case, a desire for development and modernity is being instituted through newer Christian critiques of older Christian practices, by turning to aspects of custom to resurrect dance and redeem it as part of newer Christian practices of worship.

Another case of sectarian strife and schism is the focus of one of the first book length ethnographies of Christianity in Papua New Guinea, Jeben’s Pathways to Heaven. Subtitled Contesting Mainline and Fundamentalist Christianity in Papua New Guinea, the book is an examination of competing churches in a Kewa village in the Southern Highlands Province of PNG. In Pairundu village the two churches involved are the Seventh-day Adventists and the Catholic Church. Similar in ways to the case in Gogodala, both churches share a view that is critical and condemnatory towards the traditional customary religion of the villagers. In Kewa both of the adversarial churches display millenarian beliefs centred on the coming end times. Prohibition and prescription are central to each of these churches’ beliefs regarding the manner of constraining improper behaviour in order to lead a proper Christian life.

The differences emerge in various practices. The Seventh-day Adventist church is actively evangelical. And while members of the Catholic Church disavow customary

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54 Jebens’ book is a translation from the German volume first published in 1995.
beliefs and rituals, in actuality, members still engage in many of these practices. Here the Seventh-day Adventists are more consistent in that they both condemn and reject traditional beliefs and practices. Instead of searching for local structural divides to account for the success of the new church in Pairundu, Jebens argues that the SDA appeal is based on its doctrinal relation to Catholic beliefs; in essence he believes that the SDA presents an intensification of Catholic dogma. But like the case in Gogodala there is an aspect of the failure of the older form of Christianity in failing to deliver the goods: “the dissatisfaction with Catholicism in general...is based above all on the fact that the adoption of the Catholic Christianity has not led to the acquisition of the power that was hoped for” (2005:186).

The SDA also professes the need to be pure and its members believe in separating themselves from the more mundane aspects of the world to focus on a spiritual life. This has a great effect on a wide range of both daily and ritual exchanges crucial to village sociability. Further exacerbating this negative effect on sociality is the Seventh-day Adventist prohibition on eating pork. Here as in many places in Papua New Guinea pigs are a crucial object of exchange in traditional ritual life. The tensions caused by these behaviours create a schism that engenders great antagonism within the community and between the churches. The rift is also exacerbated by its zero sum nature “…since the growth of the SDA community is frequently based on switching denominational affiliation, it takes place at the expense of the Catholic community” (Jebens 2005:145).

Within this context of PNG denominational contestation, the Lambom case offers some interesting points of continuity and contrast. The Foursquare church like the newer churches described above is characterized by a bevy of prohibitions, of betel, tobacco, and such, and likewise firmly rejects most forms of kastom and ritual. It appears that young educated people were involved in the introduction and early acceptance of the newer church on Lambom. The differences regarding the reasons for local acceptance are different from those in the above cases. Unlike Kewa, the Lak case was not based on doctrinal prerequisites in the older church that paved the way for an intensification of existing belief. The Foursquare church was much more prescriptive in belief and action than the United Church had been on Lambom. The results of the encroachment of newer
churches are similar though, especially the nature of the divisions based on withdrawal from traditional and ritually based forms of exchange.

Unlike in the Gogodala case the Lak new church did not draw upon kastom or reflect an appeal for older forms of dance. Though spirit movements were part of the Foursquare worship it was in the UC youth group that the more vigorous expression of Holy Spirit dancing appeared. I believe that this was primarily because of local structural impediments against younger energetic leaders taking on leadership roles in the established church. The UC leadership overlapped significantly with clan and men’s cult leadership on Lambom. The opportunity for a wide range of leadership roles was part of the appeal of Foursquare, part of its practice that was inherent to its form of Christianity. As Robbins has noted in a review of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity as a global phenomena:

> The lack of prerequisite credentials for leadership gives nascent P/c churches a large pool of potential local talent from which to draw. And most converts are given an opportunity to serve in some capacity, since P/c churches sport numerous lay preachers, deacons, and leaders of various men’s, women’s, and youth groups. (2004b:130).

In this light I argue that rather than doctrine or belief, it was primarily aspects of practice and organizational structure that led to the acceptance of the new church in the Lambom scene. Originating in a global form of Christianity, the structure of the Foursquare church leadership practice differed from the local Lambom structure of their traditional form of Christianity. A paucity of opportunity in the UC made it vulnerable to the poaching of enterprising young men who felt locked out of roles that would allow them to be fully engaged with the older church. It must be noted that this lack of opportunity was not the only factor involved. As well, the UC accommodation with a range of kastom practices of the men’s cult involving ancestral spirits was vulnerable to a critique that would label such actions as non-Christian at the very least, and demonic and satanic in terms of the Foursquare interpretation of scripture. Situating the adoption of the newer church within Lambom thus involves a subtle interplay between the local and the global. As Robbins concludes for Pentecostalism’s general appeal, “it would be a mistake to reduce it to a mere reflex of the modern…” and “to see it as a simple force for indigenizing cultural localization is equally wide of the mark” (Robbins 2004b:137).
One way of understanding Lak people’s experience of modernity is through a consideration of their engagement with the state. In Chapter Five I have discussed the way elections involve Lak in the practice of government, and the way in which the school and aid post as physical structures figure in Lak people’s ideological interpretations of their relationship to gavman. Here I will offer an analysis of their views on the content of proper government provisioning as part of its imputed role in the reciprocity that locals project onto this relationship. Development emerges here as a concept that encapsulates local desires for a changed daily existence, one engaged with placing the modern firmly into the local quotidian.

Development is seen locally as the provision of basic expertise and things, of health and education services, as well as the access to cash to allow the ability to bring modern technology to the village. Added to this would be the skills and opportunities to foster enterprise that involves rewards related to a cash economy. For Lak people engagement within proscribed social relations is the means of entering into reciprocal obligations. Thus the path to development means producing or having established relations with those who can provide development. Similar to other peoples in PNG the Lak “understanding of development was movement and progress towards a future in which they had the necessary social relationship to help them access the goods and services they want and need” (West 2006:217). The trope of movement here is important as is the imagined future that is desired. What the Lak imagine in this respect is rather different from what Sahlins does under his neologism ‘developman’, when he says that:

The first commercial impulse of the local people is not to become just like us, but more like themselves... For a long time, or so long as their own relations and ideas of the good life are intact, they use Western goods to furnish these exotic ideas, or even to advance and ‘develop’ them. (Sahlins 2005:23)

Development in the Lak view as I understand it implies more than an intensification of locally valued practices and things. Rather it entails a transformation to a newer existence: a place in the modern world, of daily life not too dissimilar in its appearance to that of other places, increasingly visible through global images and connections.
Though the buildings the government has provided on Lambom are not quite crumbling edifices, it is apparent that they represent an incompleteness and ineffectiveness in providing services to the village. Tangible and embedded in the physical scene, the school and aid post provide a daily reminder of the failure of government to provide services in anything but a haphazard fashion. Furthermore the low numbers of students who qualify for further education, and the fact that the aid post was ultimately not staffed during my field stay, point out this failure in action as well as material results. The Lak people vote, they pay their school fees and attempt to maintain and accommodate the provision of education and health services on Lambom. Yet in their view the things their behaviour should obligate are not reciprocated in an acceptable and effective manner. Gavman is failing its entailed obligations. This perception of the state is not unique to Lambom. Goddard points to other places in PNG where the state is perceived in terms of a ‘big man’ relationship to the community with the requisite obligations of reciprocal exchange (1995:70).

This view links development with the provision of a specific set of services as well as opportunity to access cash and the material goods of modern technology. It is a view that is evident in ethnography from other regions of PNG as well. I outline some of these below with an eye to arguing that the range of these other opportunities for the usurpation or projection of development provision says much about the state of the state in modern PNG.

Thus we see people in other places in PNG looking to mines or resource projects to provide the services one would expect to be the purview of government (Rumsey and Weiner 2004). The desire for development, unfulfilled by gavman, leads to a projection onto other agents of the expectations to provide the hoped for infrastructure and services as West’s work so readily demonstrates. This kind of projection was also apparent on Lambom. The work done by the logging contractor on Lak was seen locally as demonstrating the loggers as being able to deliver the goods, and in quick order. The houses for teachers, the extension of the field, and the bulldozing of the path between hamlet and village centre were the sorts of things villagers consider appropriate and worthwhile services and things.
Likewise the conservationists failed because even though they offered development opportunities they ended up acting like gavman, with offers being more freely given than tangible things or actions. The recent work of Paige West, pointedly titled “Conservation is our Government now”, makes explicit the perception that provision of services is the expectation of government, and the failure to do this is the experience of government.

West has written an ethnography that outlines a case of mutual misunderstanding between Papua New Guineans and conservationists. As in the Lak relationship with ICAD, The Gimi people of Crater Mountain and the conservationists they dealt with, each side had quite different understandings and expectations of the other:

...while villagers thought they were entering into an exchange relationship, conservation planners thought they were entering into a relationship in which villagers would work as a corporate unit...in order to make money that would then be redistributed fairly to individuals and be used to buy commodities and services. (2006:xiii).

This failure of understanding left the local people with the impression of having their expectations unfulfilled. In the end, “the fundamental experience of conservation-as-development for Gimi, is one of nonreciprocation” (West 2006:217). Again the relational aspects are crucial in a perception of government. Conservationists fail as gavman because they end up failing to deliver the goods, development, and instead act in ways that locally resonate as failed sociability and unsatisfactory reciprocal exchanges. Here access to the modern is the desired end that both NGOs and nation states fail to deliver.

The state in PNG seen as the purveyor of gavman fails to hold up its end of the bargain in the Lak case as well the others described here. The need to project the desire for development onto a range of other actors and agents is not just an instance of negative nationalism (Robbins 2004:170), a questing beyond the national; it is an indictment of a national government and nation state that has allowed its connections to the many out-of-the-way places that comprise PNG to wither away due to incompetence, corruption and neglect. This process has been steady and consistent since the decade or so after independence. And though it is clear that brute geography plays a part in the perception of remoteness felt in many villages in PNG, it is also apparent that the state is complicit
Domains of meaning are one organizing principle for discussing modernity on Lambom Island. They are part and parcel of the way Lak people come to understand their place in a modern world. Thinking through and between these categories is part of the way the people of Lambom create an identity for themselves in various domains of action and meaning. It is to an examination of the implications of the shared identity implied by the term *laskona* that I now turn.

**Modernity: humiliation, frustration, and laskona identity**

The notion of humiliation has recently served as a spur to discussion in Melanesian anthropology for understanding experiences of modernity and cultural change. In my introduction I addressed some of the ways responses to modernity had been discussed in terms of marginality, disconnection, and abjection (Tsing 1993, Ferguson 1999). Now I turn to an examination surrounding humiliation and modernity in order to contextualise the Lak experience described in this thesis.

Sahlins suggested that a sense of humiliation played a role in triggering a move from what he termed *developman* to development. In this sense humiliation served as a stage, a motivating precondition, as a trigger of rejection towards traditional ways of being. Although Sahlins never elaborated upon humiliation beyond stating its role, Robbins found a use for the term as a bridge to his theory in elaboration of Sahlins’ model of structural social change.

For Robbins humiliation served as the starting point for the extension of Sahlins’ models of assimilation and structural transformation that he thought was necessary in order to account for the process of Christianization amongst the Urapmin. In Robbins’ view the wholesale importation of Christianity that he observed in Urapmin marked a radical form of social change, a mode he terms adoption.

The first stage of conversion gives way to the second when Christian meanings have come to shape people’s world to such an extent that those
meanings themselves, rather than ones drawn from traditional culture, begin to provide the motive for conversion. With this change, the situation begins to resemble that depicted in the model of adoption; the one in which people have taken on a new cultural system to some extent on its own terms (2004a:115).

Rejecting the practices and content of their traditional religion led to the wholesale adoption of Christianity on its own terms. Robbins’ focus on rejection also fits the other cases of religious transformation that I have discussed above involving the Kewa and the Foursquare church in Lambom. Regarding the former, Jebens states that “rejection has to some extent been resumed and intensified during their ‘second socialization’ within the SDA community” (2005:246).

Not all instances of social change within a specific culture need necessarily operate in the same fashion. For Lambom, the United Church as instanced in its accommodations reflecting the Foursquare church’s critique of the UC displays a different form of social change: the sort Robbins elaborates as assimilation, and transformation (2004a:10). This fits with the Kewa case as well. The older churches in these places were to some extent able to get along with aspects of *kastom* and ritual within their respective communities. Processes of change in this light move from an initial one of assimilation in the early days of these churches, then subsequently to one of transformation (as a result of incompatibility and contestation between *kastom* and the newer churches). The older churches are in effect adapting their relationship with aspects of *kastom* in light of critiques (of the received and imputed cosy coexistence between *kastom* and *lotu*) from the more adamant, condemnatory, and fundamentalist new churches. In such cases we see processes that are more in line with Sahlins’ classic paradigm of structural transformation. Categories expand and adapt as situations change, and the relation between these categories is often transformed, with the changing conditions being part of cultural reproduction.

The concept of humiliation has been applied regionally in Melanesia in an edited collection of papers dealing with modernity and cultural change (Robbins and Wardlow 2005). Surveying the cases presented there, it is apparent that not all humiliation-related reactions to modernity are easily subsumed under a single organizing rubric. Once one starts talking of emotional reactions to a changing world the ubiquity of any one framework becomes fuzzy. Humiliation only goes so far, as perhaps Sahlins appreciated.
As Foster notes in his concluding review of the collection, the Melanesian responses to modernity in the cases presented say: “...as much about frustration as they do about humiliation, as much about seething resentment as abject self-contempt” (2005:213). And once we turn to frustration the logical next step would be an examination of differing responses to this condition.

It is not from an inclination towards a sunny optimism that I would want to broaden the discourse here to a focus on different sorts of responses to modernity, and argue that the focus on despondency may be overly pessimistic. Foster points out that humiliation was not a central tenet to Sahlins’ theories of social change, just a “momentary lapse into ‘despondency theory’”; and that Sahlins himself rejected along with dependency theories (Foster 2005:208; Sahlins 1993). An examination of the Lak case, focusing upon the nature of their attempts to deal with the frustrating aspects of modernity, can serve as a counterpoint and allow for appreciation of the variety and tenor of active responses to modern alienation.

In my discussion in my introduction of laskona identity as expressed on Lambom I tried to show that what could seem to be a lament was in actuality a critical commentary on the way things were for the Lak in the 1990s. In proclaiming their laskona identity the Lak focus is not upon disconnection, but on the quality of connection as they perceive it. Their response, as evidenced by the actions of a variety of Lak agents, has been not merely to decry the inadequacies of their faulty links to a wider world, but a range of active attempts to fix this connection; to improve the reception, to fix as it were, their connection to wider systems. Fixing is an apt metaphor here in the sense that the Lak are endeavouring to improve those connections, and create new ones that are more, continuous, and enduring. At least in retrospect they see themselves as having had some such connections in the past: their landscape reflects the storied history of engagements with extra local agents and forces, some more enduring than others, some more locally satisfactory; but in the end all were transitory.

In my introduction I presented the Lak practice of treating the novel, that beyond the horizon, as a form of riddle, as something to be solved, through thinking and contemplation. They are inclined to do just this in their engagements with the wider world, to contemplate the range of options presented to them in their daily world of
experience. Various leaders through their history, and in the recent context of modernity, have attempted in various ways to make more successful connections to the world beyond their horizons, as opportunities presented themselves. Whether these attempted connections sputtered out, as in the case of the almost-established aborted colonies, logging camps that seemed fixed but turned out to be temporary, or short-term sea cucumber selling bonanzas, Lak people have experienced these phenomena as opportunities. They set out to make the most of these chances to engage the extra-local, even while (rightly) suspecting that the opportunities were likely to be only temporary.

It is the indeterminate and punctuated, episodic nature of these engagements with external forces that has been the main source of frustration for the Lak --- their inability to fix these connections, to place them under more efficacious local influence and control. They wish to act as effective agents --- as they have at times in the past --- in the contemporary world of globalized flows. Here it is relevant to note the following observations by Foster:

"Globalization describes the exaggerated tendency toward time-space compression that Marx and Engels identified in the Communist Manifesto as characteristic of the capitalist mode of production...That is, globalization implies a radical acceleration of the flow of images, people, money, technologies—subjects and objects, in short—across the face of the globe...These flows move increasingly quickly along routes of increasing distance. But the network of flows is not fixed; nor is it symmetrical: not everything flows everywhere in all directions...Not only are the flows particular to particular times and places...particular times and places are themselves the contingent outcomes of these flows. (Foster 1995b:4)"

In essence, it is possible to argue that what the Lak people are attempting to achieve in their engagement with global forces is to compress the time between events that can intensify their connection to these forces; to lessen the distance that separates them and their local world from a wider world of possibility.

It is in this light that the shortcuts Lak people are instituting can be seen as attempts to solve the riddle of engagement, to fix the connections with wider systems, to close the circuit. So far, circumstance has made these various instances of historical connection ephemeral, and not dependable. This impulse, this common human quest for efficacy and agency reflects the desire for transformation within Lak culture, a culture for the people of Lambom which is now, and has always been nested within a range of wider
contexts. I don’t believe it is controversial to say that there never was a static, content native world, a closed exotic way of living oriented only and ever inwards. The Lak history described in this thesis shows a series of engagements over a significant span of time.

Thus, I argue that the compression and editing of ritual that takes place on Lambom, through various forms of what are locally termed shortcuts, is integral to a way of life that is now and has always been engaged with various cultural others. These shortcuts need not imply a way of life that has been shorn of the poetic, or is less meaningful than it was in some putatively holistic, traditional past. Rather, an examination of the prosaic, the mundane, the quotidian, the everyday struggles of just getting on and along in a world is the most appropriate way to understand how they engage in their sort of modernity. It is this sort of experience that is more reflective of the realities of modern laskona life. It would be a short-sighted anthropology indeed that would ignore the wonder and variety and genius of a people going about the business of dealing with what life presents to them, ever casting their net wide in order to make a life more locally meaningful.
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