SOCIAL THOUGHT & COMMENTARY SPECIAL SECTION:
Anthropology and the Opacity of Other Minds

Confession, Anger and Cross-Cultural Articulation in Papua New Guinea

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As will be evident from our introductory essay, the impetus for this Social Thought and Commentary section has come in part from our puzzlement at the co-occurrence within Melanesianist ethnography of two apparently contradictory motifs. One is the widely reported idea that one can never know what is in the minds of others, partly because what they say cannot be taken as a reliable indicator of what they are thinking. The other motif is the rising prominence of various more-or-less institutionalized practices of confession, as exemplified with respect to indigenized Christianity by the Urapmin example discussed by Robbins. These practices of confession would seem to stand in a problematical relationship to claims about the impossibility of knowing what is in the mind of another, since that is precisely what they would seem to be designed to reveal.

The essays by Robbins and Schieffelin address this problem by taking the "opacity" motif as their starting point and then considering new practices of confession and how they impact upon speech communities whose preexisting language ideologies would seem to deny the reliability or appropriateness of such disclosure. Here I approach the problem from the other way around, by looking first at practices of confession and then ask-

ing how they do or do not relate to linguistic ideologies. One point of this will be to show that, in at least some Melanesian locales, practices of confession did not begin only with the arrival of Christianity—that there were earlier forms of it which continue to be practiced alongside, and sometimes in tension with, the church-related ones.

The question of the relationship between those older practices and the Christian ones is of especial interest in the context of comparative studies of confession that have been stimulated by Michel Foucault's well-known (1978, 1988) account of late medieval Christian practices of confession as the genealogical precursor and matrix of more recent, secular regimes that have produced the purportedly self-disciplined, modern subject. So far, these comparative studies have been carried out mainly by sociologists and historians, with little direct input from anthropologists. This is unfortunate, for two reasons. The first is that, sophisticated as some of this work has been when dealing with European historical sources, when drawing on anthropological ones it is often far less so. The other reason is that, as we hope these essays will demonstrate, such practices offer a fertile field for comparative study in connection with issues of interest to anthropologists (cf. Strathern and Stewart 1998:62).

The fullest comparative studies of confession to date, by Hepworth and Turner (1982), and Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1986:35–72 et passim), while taking issue with Foucault in some respects, have agreed in their finding that "the confessional tradition in Europe laid the foundation for the modern personality as self-reflective consciousness" (Abercrombie et al. 1986:47). These writers are well aware from their reading of ethnography that there are other "confessional traditions" outside of Europe which are of longstanding, but, adopting a Durkheimian position—which incidentally, obviates the issue of mental opacity altogether—they have argued that:

> confession outside the Western tradition normally assumes a collective, group nature, that is, the confession is a reflection not of the state of mind of the individual, but a reflection of the character of the social structure. We would suggest that such confessionals are in fact very Durkheimian: they are statements about collective properties and forms of public thought, reaffirmations of public values and communal practices, rather than reflections of an interior mentality (1986:46).

Let us now consider this position in relation to some cases from Papua New Guinea. Turning first to confessional practices of the more traditional sort, in the Ku Waru area of the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea where Francesca Merlan and I have worked, there are well-established practices this kind which are referred to by two kinds of related expressions. One of them is: *ung kis pára si-* where *si-* is a verb root that takes suffixes indicating (among other things) the grammatical person and number of the subject, e.g. *ung kis pára sid* 'I confessed,' *ung kis pára sing* 'They confessed,' etc. The direct object in this expression, *ung kis*, literally means 'bad talk.' The compound verb *pára si-* means something like 'neutralize' or 'disarm.' For example, when used in reference to a trap that has been set to catch marsupials (*lopa mili*), it means to unset or disable the trap (*lopa mili pára si-*). When used in reference to *ung eke*, 'figurative or allusive talk,' literally 'bent speech',[1] it means to demystify the *ung eke* by providing a more easily intelligible 'straight talk' (*ung kuni*) version of it.

Three things are worth noting about the expression in which this phrase *pára si-* is combined with *ung kis* 'bad words': *ung kis pára si-*. One is that, among Ku Waru speakers who also speak English, this is the standard way of translating the verb 'to confess' in cases where the confession is about something that the person confessing has done to someone else. Second, there is a more-or-less corresponding verb *konfes* in Tok Pisin (the Lingua Franca of this region and most of the rest of Papua New Guinea) and *ung kis pára si-* is also treated as the Ku Waru translation equivalent of that verb—in reference both to confession as institutionalized within the Roman Catholic Church (Tok Pisin: *konfesio*), and in secular contexts such as confession of a crime to the police, or in a village court proceeding. The third thing to notice, however, is that there are at least two important aspects of the meaning of the Ku Waru expression *ung kis pára si-* that are lost or downplayed in this translation. One of these is inherent in the expression *pára si-*, i.e., that the act predicated by this expression is an inherently "neutralizing" one, i.e., an act which removes a certain power from that which is acted upon (the referent of its grammatical object). The other nuance that is lost in translation concerns the expression for that which is neutralized: *ung kis*. As I have said, this expression translates literally as 'bad talk,' but in this context, what is understood to be bad (*kis*) about it is not just the fact that the talk is about something bad. It is bad also because, for as long as it remains hidden with the mind of the person who has done the bad deed, it can make that person phys-

ically ill and even kill them. Indeed, it can even have this effect on a close relative of that person, such as their child or sibling.

Besides the set phase *ung kis pára si-*, there is another family of expressions that also get translated as into Tok Pisin as *konfes*. One of these is: *ariribe mons- pára si-*. This expression uses the same verb as the other one, *pára si-* 'disarm, neutralize,' but in this case that which is neutralized by the confession is not a bad deed that has been committed by the person who confesses, but a feeling of anger or resentment (*ariribe*[2]) that that person feels towards another on account of something that person has done to them. Other more or less synonymous expressions of this second sort include *boni kan- kodi tens-* 'forgive someone for a grievance one has against them' and *boni waku tons-* 'get rid of a grievance.' Just as with confession of the other sort—confession of a bad deed done to someone else—there is a strong underlying belief that pent-up anger or grievance of this kind can bring illness or death to the aggrieved person or a close relative of theirs.

I turn now to an account of the social contexts within which these kinds of confession are practiced by Ku Waru people. In the great majority of cases the parties involved are close kin: often full siblings. One of the contexts within which confession is most highly prescribed is when clansmen are preparing for important, risky activities that require close cooperation. These include interclan *makayl* exchange events (more commonly known in the anthropological literature by the Melpa term *moka*), which require the intricate coordination of multiple interpersonal transactions and forms of ceremonial display (Merlan and Rumsey 1991); and, above all, warfare. Before a clan or group of allied clans goes into battle, the regular practice is for the men to go to a secluded shrine in the forest, kill and roast pigs, share the meat with each other, and confess the transgressions they have committed or feelings of anger that they have been harboring against each other. In the Kailge region where Francesca Merlan and I have been working on and off since 1981, group confessions of this kind have been held in association with both of the rounds of warfare that have taken place there, in 1982 and 2005–2006. In 2005, separate confessional events were put on by each of the two allied groups there, at which a total of nine pigs were killed, one contributed by each major named segment of the two groups.[3] Examples of the confessions made at those events include ones by: 1) a man to his brother that he had stolen his hand-cranked coffee husking machine about twelve years earlier; 2) a man to his close classificatory "brother" (father's brother's son)

that he had sex with the man's wife about a year before; 3) a man to his father's brother that he had stolen a bag of coffee beans from him about 9 years earlier. In each case, after hearing the confession, the man to whom it had been made forgave the man who had confessed. In case 1 it was said that the man who confessed was very sick at the time and quickly recovered after the confession, so that he was able to fight in the war.

Unlike in most instances where transgressions such as the above have been exposed, there was reportedly no demand by the victim for compensation from the perpetrator after any of these confessions. Indeed, in the reports I have been given of cases 2 and 3, the victims were portrayed as having proffered their approval of what had been done ("Brother, it's fine that you have slept with my wife; "It's good that you have stolen my bag of coffee: I forgive you for it").

I was not on the scene at Kailge during the 2005–6 war or the preparation for it, but in the detailed account of it that I have gotten in 2007 from one of the Kopia participants, he has highlighted two points about the group confessions that were held. One is that there is extra pressure to confess at such occasions because people believe that those who go into battle with unexpressed grievances or concealed transgressions on their minds are much more likely to be killed in the fighting. The other is that such occasions are especially opportune ones for confession, because there is also extra pressure for forgiveness on the part of those to whom the confessions are made, since they too are believed to be more likely to be killed if they go into battle feeling aggrieved at one of their clansmen. As my Ku Waru friend John Onga pointed out about the examples listed above: "Ordinarily, people would be taken to the village court for those things."

Much the same practices and beliefs are attested in ethnography from the nearby Melpa region by Lutheran missionary-anthropologist Herman Strauss (1990), based on work there beginning in 1934, just one year after the first Europeans arrived in the area. They are also corroborated for the Melpa region in the later ethnography of Strathern and Stewart (1998). While the group form of confession is perhaps the mostly highly institutionalized endogenous form of it across the Melpa and Ku Waru regions, confession is also practiced in less formal settings where the group dimension is not in focus. Examples I have been told about include confession by: 1) a man to his brother that he had stolen, killed and eaten a pig of his; 2) a man that he had killed and eaten his classificatory father's dog;

3) a man to his clansman that he was angry at them for not supporting him in the local government council election; 4) by a man to his brother that he was angry with him for beating the man's young son for stealing sweet potatoes from his garden. Notably, in the account I was given of case 1 (and some other cases) it was mentioned that, when the confession was offered, there had been a discussion between the confessant and the victim about why the bad deed had been done and it had been determined to the victim's satisfaction that it had not been out of any animus against the victim. In all four cases, the man confessing had forgiven the other(s), in no case demanding compensation from them. In cases 3 and 4, the man confessing had been ill and recovered after confessing.

In this connection it is relevant to note that in dispute settlement generally within this region (Merlan and Rumsey 1986) as elsewhere (Goldman 1983), there is heavy emphasis on working towards confession of wrong-doing, usually accompanied by payment of compensation, as a way to redress it. A key factor at play here is the belief that pent-up anger and concealed wrong-doing can cause bodily illness.

Identical or recognizably related practices and beliefs are attested from many other Melanesian locales. For example, among the Somaip people of the West Mendi region, about 50 miles to the west of the Ku Waru region, Hans Reithofer (2006:95, n. 43) reports that "Prophylactic 'confessions' were commonly conducted before a group engaged in warfare. If a serious breach of conduct against a clan brother was not confessed, it was believed to cause many casualties and nasty wounds."[4]

From the other side of Ku Waru - Melpa country, based on his fieldwork in the (lowland) Tangu area of Madang Province, about 75 miles to the northeast, Kenelm Burridge reports that among the Tangu "an angry man should come out with it cleanly and publicly, for anger kept in the heart is reckoned to lead to sorcery—which may mean sickness or death for a person who has caused the anger" (Burridge 1969:127). A man who finds fault within himself for having breached the norms of reciprocity, even if no one else knows about it, if he is a good man:

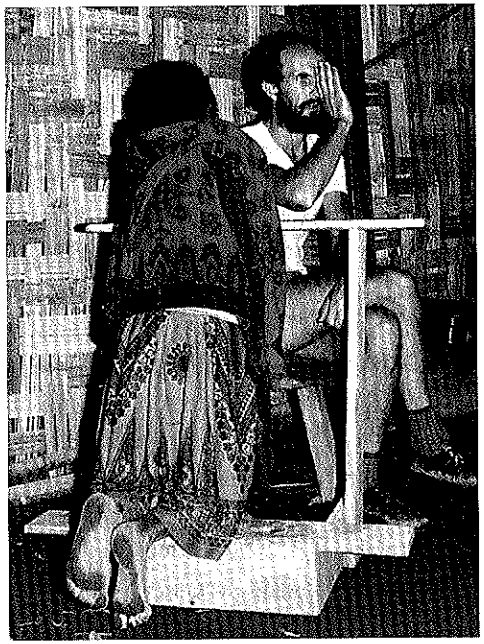
> ...will confess such a breach either to a friend, or to an old man—each of whom is formally outside the focal range of reciprocities clustering about marriage and siblingship, and therefore uninvolved. Nevertheless a confessor is not bound to secrecy, and the content of confessions quickly becomes general knowledge. So that through a private confession, which is covertly disseminated through the community, an individual...covertly surrenders to the moral and is covertly reaccepted into the moral community (1969:130–1).

Two aspects of these Tangu beliefs and practices are different from the Ku Waru ones I have described above. One is that in the Ku Waru cases where the object of confession is a feeling of anger against someone, the confession is usually made directly to the person with whom the confessant is angry rather than through an intermediary. The other difference is that among the Tangu, the person whose health and life are believed to be endangered by concealed anger is the person who has caused the anger, whereas among Ku Waru it is the person who feels angry. But notwithstanding these differences, in both regions there is an underlying belief that concealed anger has the power to cause sickness and death, and that this power can be neutralized by confessing the anger.

Now let us consider some of the newer kinds of confession which have come in with Christianity, beginning with the Urapmin case that Robbins discusses in this collection, and at length in Robbins (2004). In what sense is this a "new" practice? First, in the fact that Urapmin have become Christian only within the past thirty years, and apparently did not previously practice any prescribed form of confession, much less one with an all-knowing and all-powerful, personal savior as its addressee or targeted overhearer. Less obviously, it is new in that, as Robbins points out in his essay, the metropolitan version of the evangelical Baptist Protestantism from which it derives does not include any form of auricular (private, one-to-one) confession among its prescribed practices. Rather than having been introduced in this form, auricular confession has evolved locally out of an earlier Christian form in which people confessed their sins publicly.[5]

It is interesting to compare this Urapmin development with what has happened in areas of Papua New Guinea with an introduced form of Christianity which, unlike the Baptist one, does have an established practice of auricular confession, namely, Roman Catholicism. One such is the Ku Waru region, which for most of the 27 years that Francesca Merlan and I have worked there has been almost entirely Catholic. Whatever the role of confession as a part of the sacrament of penance within the parent church, in our experience it has not played nearly as big a role in the lives of Ku Waru Catholics as it apparently does in that of Urapmin Protestants. The official requirement is that all baptized Catholics confess to the priest at least once a year,

and most of them do so, but this is viewed mainly as a prerequisite to participation in the Eucharist. Until recently, the parish priest had always been a European who did not speak or understand the local language in which most of the confessions were given. When we have asked people about this, neither the priest nor his parishioners has seen it as a problem, as God would hear and understand, and in any case already knew of the sin they had committed. The important thing was for the confessant to acknowledge those sins as such, express contrition, and in return to be absolved of them.

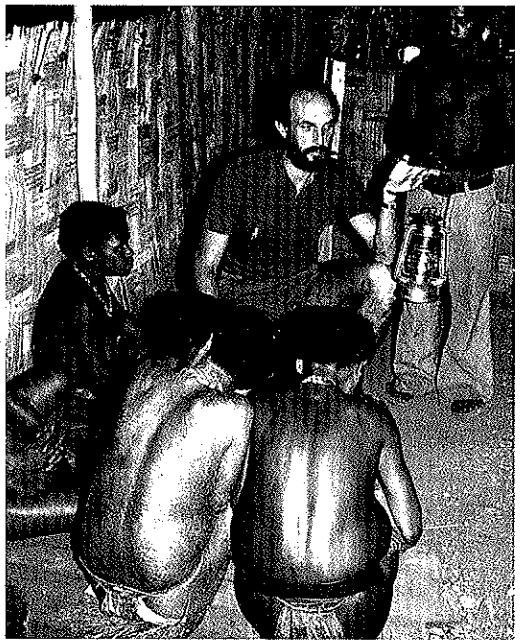


Father Josef Wycisk hearing confession from a Gamagai woman at Rulna.

Papua New Guinea, January, 1981. Photo by Wojciech Dabrowski.

In some other Catholic areas in the New Guinea Highlands, the priests *have* seen their lack of understanding as a problem and tried to deal with it by changing the form of confession. One such is Rulna Mission, in the northern reaches of Melpa country, where anthropologist Wojciech Dabrowski worked among the Gamagai clan. He reports that in the early 1980s, the priest there, Father Josef Wycisk, introduced a collective confession in which:

> he recited words of forgiveness and the parishioners where supposed to express contrition in their minds. After that they would obtain a collective absolution for their sins. However, the Gamagai considered this absolution to have only limited validity. They believed it would only clear one's conscience of minor sins...but not the sins due to a serious misdemeanor or crime.[6]
>
> Their reservation was based on the opinion that personal contrition within one's own mind was not sufficient. It lacked all the elements of the traditional process of dealing with culpability: public admission of



Father Josef Wycisk proselytizing among the yet-unconverted in the Jimi Valley.

Papua New Guinea, June 1982. Photo by Wojciech Dabrowski.

> sin and the punishment inflicted by clan ghosts[7] (Dabrowski 1991:207–8).

Seventeen years later, unaware of this failed experiment with general confession at Rulna, Hans Reithofer, then also working as a Catholic priest,[8] initiated another form of it at Honda, among the Somaip in the West Mendi region, about 80 miles to the west-southwest of Rulna. His aim was to "shift the focus from the individual and his or her personal relationship to God back to the community and provide a platform for communal reflections, confessions and reconciliation" (Reithofer 2006:325). To that end, Reithofer convened a workshop among his parishioners "to work at a suitable basic structure for a *Lotu Penans* (Service of Reconciliation), which we modelled on Catholic guidelines concerning the 'Communal Form of the Sacrament of Reconciliation' " (Reithofer 2006:325). After concluding the workshop Reithofer left Honda on other business. He reports that when he returned a few days later he found that

> the communities had decided to conduct a whole series of *Lotu Penans*, which took place on successively higher levels of social organization: first within families, then within patrilines and lineages, finally within subclan communities. Public confessions and pledges formed the core part of these *Lotu Penans*...In a manner much more direct and open than I had dared, or even wanted, to suggest in the workshop, sins, conflicts, grudges between spouses, parents and children, and individuals, were named, confessed or put aside as a thing of the past (Reithofer 2006:325).

Before discussing the relation between these Christian practices of confession and others of longer standing, we must ask, why bring them together in a single analytical frame under the rubric of "confession"? Is this not perhaps an unwarranted reification of "confession" as a cross-culturally applicable category (cf. Tambling 1990:2)? My answer is that in at least some cases the practitioners themselves make such an identification. As I mentioned above when discussing the Ku Waru endogenous practice referred to by the expression *ung kis pára si-*, this is also the expression that is regularly used in reference to the rite of confession as practiced by the Catholic Church.

It is evident also from Dabrowski's remarks on the Gamagai case that people were understanding the canonical Catholic version of auricular confession as something recognizably similar to their own[9] (more so than their priest's attempted innovation, which in their view was deficient insofar as his version of confession lacked the key element of disclosure.) In the Somaip case, as recognized by Reithofer (2006:325, n. 73), the newly-developed form of Christian confession was more rather than less similar to the older established, pre-Christian one, which was presumably one reason for its popularity.[10] And even among the Urapmin, where Robbins does not describe any established forms of confession that may have been in use before the Christian ones, it seems to me telling that the *content* of their Christian confessions is strikingly similar to that of the "traditional" Tangu ones discussed by Burridge, and many Ku Waru ones also, in that by far the majority of the confessions recorded by Robbins have to do with feelings of anger against other Urapmin.[11] This is no doubt related to the fact that Urapmin, in common with Melpa, Tangu and many other New Guineans, share the belief I have mentioned above in connection with Ku Waru confession, that concealed anger can cause bodily illness (Robbins 2004:135–6).[12]

This brings us to the question of how these practices of confession are to be understood in relation to the idea of mental opacity. Before discussing this issue I must register a qualification with respect to that idea, namely, that although it is strongly evident among Ku Waru people, as described in Merlan and Rumsey (1991:224–6), so also are certain other ideas, expectations and motifs which in some ways contradict it. One is the idea that, although the content of people's minds may differ, the way in which their minds work is similar, notwithstanding other more superficial differences. So for example, a standard remark which Francesca Merlan and I often heard as the first foreigners to live for an extended period at Kailge was

"Your skin is red [*kuduyl*] and ours is black, but we are have the same heart [*mudumong tilupu*], the same mind [*numan tilupu*], and the same eyes [*mong tilupu*]." This being the case, as has been pointed out to me recently by a long-time Ku Waru friend John Onga, even when people are trying to deceive each other, by observing their actions it is possible to discern at least some of the thoughts that motivate those actions. These can then be taken account of in one's own actions, in ways that need not involve any verbally explicit attribution of thoughts to others.

For example, at an exchange event which is discussed in detail in Merlan and Rumsey (1991, ch. 6), a man named Kasipa gave a speech in which he praised another man Noma for making sure that Kasipa was included among the recipients of compensation payments that were being presented by Noma's clan to others who had come to their aid in battle. The main payment had gone to a group that Kasipa did not belong to, and at first it looked as if Kasipa was going to be overlooked. In praising Noma and his clan for including him, Kasipa said "You look with the eyes of a flea and recognize."[13] This image draws upon the fact that, like the Melpa (Strathern 1975), Ku Waru people believe that the condition of one's skin provides a reliable indicator of one's state of mind.[14] To observe a person's skin from the perspective of a flea on it would be to know their mind very well indeed.[15]

Another context in which Ku Waru people's general skepticism about knowing other minds is routinely suspended is within their accounts of courtship and erotic love. In cases of strong mutual attraction it is said to be possible for each member of a couple to know what is in the other's mind because it is the same as what is in their own. This scenario figures regularly in the Ku Waru genre of sung narrative poetry known as *tom yaya kange*.[16] As with the cognate *kang rom* genre among the Melpa (Strathern and Stewart 2005), courtship is the most common theme of these sung tales. And at the point in the story when the lovers first meet, this merger of minds is regularly remarked. Here is an example from the tale of Kupi Tagla and Kalkagla Tanga as performed by Engal Kep in 1997:[17]

i lyid papu-o nyiba-a	Right then he wanted to marry her.
nyiba yi kaniyl pilyirim-o	That's what the man was thinking.
ab kaniyl na yi-yl pud papu-o nyiba pilyirim-o	And she thought the same about him.
elsinga numun kanisil-o kana	The minds of both, you see
ne kanuna terileki pora siringl-o	Were working completely as one.

Having reviewed some exceptions to the general emphasis on mental opacity among Ku Waru people, let us now consider that emphasis in comparative terms. As mentioned in the introduction to this collection, the opacity doctrine is not limited to Melanesia or the Pacific. It is widely attested in ethnography from elsewhere, often in strikingly similar terms. For example, Ortner (1989:216, n. 17) writes of the Sherpas of Nepal that "as a general rule [they] are not very informative in response to questions of motive. If one asks why somebody did something, one gets a shrug and a one-word answer..., or even a hostile response: 'How should I know, we can't see into other people's heads?'" Similar examples can be found in the ethnography of Michelle Rosaldo on the Ilongot of Northern Luzon,[18] Robert Levine on Gusii people of Kenya,[19] and probably many others as well.

So in order to understand why people assume such a stance, we cannot treat it as something peculiar to Melanesia or the Pacific. Nor can we conclude from such statements that Melanesians or anybody else gets on in the world without making provisional inferences—working assumptions—about the intentional states of others, or expecting to be able to do so.[20] Nor should we assume that they attribute intentions only to individuals, or regard individual minds as invariably unitary in intention.[21] Disavowals about the appropriateness of probing or revealing private thoughts necessarily operate at the level of metapragmatic discourse rather than at the level of discourse pragmatics per se, or what Pierre Bourdieu would have called practical mastery. In the absence of specific ideological formations warranting something like the "modern" notion of sincerity that Webb Keane (1997, 2002, 2007) has written about, we have to agree with Robert Paul, who also worked among the Sherpas, that

> there would be no point in asking why [people] do not talk "truthfully" and "objectively" about intention and inner states. Why should they?...What point would there be in translating their already adequate abilities and mechanisms for coping into a blunter and more destructive language, the "psychologizing" language of intent, fault, blame and inner state? (Paul 1995:36)

Or at least, we have to look for such a point if we find that people have indeed developed such a psychologizing language, or metapragmatic regime. In the Melanesian communities I have been discussing here, contra Abercrombie, Hill and Turner's generalization about non-Western soci-

eties, one can see from my examples of traditional confessional practices that people have indeed developed such a regime, but that it has a limited scope as compared with, say, western notions of sincerity, or the confessional mode of conversational interaction that Australians find so distinctively American. It is a regime that is deployed with the avowed aim of truthfully revealing those specific inner states which are potentially lethal to people who are in their grip—concealed anger at others, or conversely, festering internal awareness of one's transgressions against them. The indigenized Christian practices of confession that I have discussed are continuous with those older ones insofar as they are in practice focused on those very same inner states. But they have been, as Strathern and Stewart (1998:53) put it, "turned ninety degrees" insofar as the revelation of anger or wrongdoing is not directed at the person who has caused it or was wronged. Rather, the confession is addressed to God, treating it as a sin for the confessant to be absolved of. The differences between these two kind of transaction are such that, in practice, the latter can never completely replace for former in Ku Waru social life, or even among the more fervently Christian Urapmin (Robbins 2004:249). But the fact that the two come to be understood in relation to each other shows the great potential of practices of confession to serve as points of articulation between endogenous and exogenous socio-cultural orders and forms of personhood.

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ENDNOTES

[1]For details concerning this speech variety, see Merlan and Rumsey (1991:102–11).

[2]The Ku Waru concept of *ariribe* is similar or identical to the concept of *popokl* as described for the nearby Melpa in M. Strathern (1968). I say this based on what I have been told about the matter by people who speak both Melpa and Ku Waru, and also on what I know about the uses of a cognate term *popuglu* in the Meam dialect, which is spoken in the region between Melpa and Ku Waru. Indeed, the term *popuglu* is also used in Ku Waru as a synonym of *ariribe*.

[3]I am told that all the other groups involved in this war held similar group confessions, but I have not been able to find out any of the details about these yet.

[4]Reithofer (email communication January 29, 2008) reports that in discussions among catechist trainees from around the PNG Highlands it has been found that these practices of pre-war confession "were prevalent in all Highland groups, from the Jimi Valley and [Western Highlands Province] to [Southern Highlands Province] and Enga." He adds the interesting comment that "The practice of 'confessions' prior to engaging in warfare has to do, I think, with the idea that fighting is a means of establishing or revealing the truth. The Karinj [/Somaip] say that 'bow and arrow will see,' i.e., will see and make apparent who's right and who's wrong. To engage successfully in warfare, one had better free oneself from any hidden wrongdoings before the arrows themselves (injuries and casualties) force their revelation. In this sense, warfare is similar to dance display (singsing), which is also thought to reveal the inner value or moral status of a person."

[5]Interestingly, this innovation by the Urapmin based on their short-term experience with public confession parallels what happened over a millennium or more in the Roman Catholic Church. Confession, and the entire sacrament of penance in which it figured, were carried out in public until the middle of the seventh century (Tentler 1977:4). Around that time, an alternative system of penance developed in Ireland in which the rite was carried out in private between the penitent and a single priest. That system spread to the continent and grew in importance until it was established by the Lateran Council of 1215 as the canonical form of penance, which all baptized Catholics were require to undergo at least once a year (loc. cit. 9–16).

[6]Here again, the New Guinea parishioners' views were in line with long-term developments in the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to the auricular confession which became canonical in 1215, there had long been a practice of "general confession" in which the assembled laypeople at mass recited a set confessional text in unison, to which the priest responded with a general absolution. But although "theologians debated its exact nature, by the beginning of the sixteenth century most held that general confession was not a sacrament and, at best, provided forgiveness for venial sins only" (Rittgers 2004:85). (The practice of general confession of course eventually became the basis for the standard forms of confession used in most Protestant churches).

[7]The contrast that Dabrowski makes with the word "public" here is to confession which is made to God within one's own mind rather than aloud. "Open confession" or "spoken confession" would perhaps have been a more appropriate way to put this, since the established form of auricular confession that the Gamagai were contrasting to the new one was still relatively "private" in involving only the priest as a human addressee. But Dabrowski makes it clear that the Gamagai treated God as an "intraclan" interlocutor who was also part of the relevant "public" for the spoken confession as well as the priest (Dabrowski 1991:208).

[8]Some time after the incident described below, Reithofer resigned from the priesthood and did a PhD in anthropology at the University of Göttingen, based on fieldwork among the Somaip. His thesis was published as the excellent book on Somaip ancestral religion and engagement with Christianity from which this information has been cited (Reithofer 2006).

[9]Similarly, Geoffrey White (1990:93, n. 2) reports, based on his work on the Santa Isobel in the Solomon Islands, that people there draw an "analogy" between the dispute settlement procedure they call "disentangling" and Anglican confession: "I was told by more than one informant that the confessional provided an alternative way of fulfilling the cultural 'requirement' of divulging transgressions without the sorts of public revelation that would lead to further entanglements."

[10]Another reason for its popularity in November 1999—and for the Somaip's taking a keen interest in developing such a new liturgical form at that time—was that there was a strong expectation among them, as elsewhere in Papua New Guinea (Schmid 1999) that the millennium would take place in the year 2000, so that an all-out effort was required to attain reconciliation in time for it. For details see Reithofer 2006:310–32 et passim.

[11]In answer to my emailed query to Robbins about whether the sample of 14 confessions discussed in *Becoming Sinners* is typical in this respect of the range of them that he has heard about, he replied that it is, and that "anger really is the key sin in Urapmin" (pers. comm., Oct 19, 2006).

[12]There has, however, been a transformation insofar as the Urapmin Christianity—like the Melpa version described by Strathern and Stewart (1998)—treats anger as a sin for which the angry person is responsible rather than an affliction caused by another person which must be expunged.

[13]For a full transcript of this speech see Merlan and Rumsey (1991:312). For further discussion of the speech in context, see Merlan and Rumsey (1991:147–52).

[14]Compare also Strathern and Stewart (1998:44–5).

[15]When I read out the Ku Waru original of this line of Kasipa's to John Onga in 2007 and asked him to explain it in English he said: "It's like reading someone's mind; sometimes we can do that. Not often, but sometimes."

[16]For details concerning this genre see Rumsey 2001, 2005.

[17]For a full prose summary of the plot of this tale and discussion of it, see Rumsey 2005:54–60.

[18]"Among Ilongots, personality descriptions are extremely rare, as are strategic reckonings of motivation. Accounts of why particular persons acted as they did refer almost exclusively to public and political concerns—surprising actions giving rise to the claim that "one can never know the hidden reaches of another's heart" (Rosaldo 1984:146).

[19]"Normal Gusii conversation contains very little reference to personal intentions on the part of the speaker or others; actions are described for which attributions of intention are so well established in conventional discourse that explicit reference is unnecessary—and may also be experienced as dangerous...In their social discourse, then, the Gusii avoid 'psychologizing,' preferring to talk about the overt behavior of adults and children." (Levine 1984:82–3).

[20]On this matter I agree with Alessandro Duranti's current position that "there exists a level of intentionality that is pervasive in human action, a level that cannot be denied and at the same time is distinct from the particular conceptualizations offered by a particular language or discourse" (Duranti 2006:33). I also agree with, among others, Robert Paul (1995:17–21) and Raymond Gibbs (1999:24ff) that, in practice, the discernment of such intentionality in others is a generic human capacity and prerequisite of social existence, and that recognizing this "requires no assumption of intuitive ability to read the other's mind or see into the other's being; it simply involves a working knowledge of the personnel of society and the kinds of situations that crop up in one's own cultural milieu" (Paul 1995:18). Citing an example from Ryle (1949), Paul says

We need not mysteriously empathize or commune with another's consciousness or rapidly decode the minute workings of the muscles of his countenance to know that our companion wants us to pass him the salt at the dinner table. We notice that he is casting his eyes about, that his food is of the kind that goes well with salt, and so forth, and that is why we pass him the salt. No more arcane reasons or processes need to be adduced (Paul 1995:18–19).

In a parallel example from his field experience among the Mianmin (near neighbors of the Urapmin, in the Mountain Ok region of Papua New Guinea), Don Gardner (pers. comm. Nov. 1, 2006) says:

> a Mianmin (or Telefolmin or Urapmin) will wordlessly place a piece of tobacco plus a scrap of newspaper (if he has it) in front of those sitting nearby (who, meanwhile, having noticed the guy fishing in his [net bag], will be looking in a studied manner ANYWHERE else but at him) because he wants to smoke and knows that they will want to as well.

Everyday events of this kind suggest that people's statements about their inability to see inside the mind of another should not be taken to mean that they do not, in practice, make inferences about other people's intentional states, and act more-or-less successfully on them. Indeed, in my experience with Ku Waru people, those disavowals do not arise in relation to most events of this kind, but only in relation to certain ones in which the relevant matters of intentionality are potentially contentious: matters such as the ones that Korowai people cited to Rupert Stasch as prototypical cases of unspoken thoughts, namely ones about "shooting somebody, of having sex with someone's wife, or of killing someone's pig" (Stasch this collection, p. 448).

[21]Ku Waru people speak of their segmentary groups (*talapi*) as acting—when functioning properly—with "one mind" (*numan tilupu*). Conversely, they speak of individuals when acting indecisively as having "many minds" (*numan ausiyl*).

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SOCIAL THOUGHT & COMMENTARY SPECIAL SECTION:
Anthropology and the Opacity of Other Minds

Others, Other Minds, and Others' Theories of Other Minds: An Afterword on the Psychology and Politics of Opacity Claims

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The remarkable coherence of this collection of papers may be due to their shared footing in Melanesia. But we should also take seriously Alan Rumsey's suggestion that we not think of these issues as being peculiarly Melanesian, and use them to help us think comparatively across cases. I want to offer some suggestions about how opacity claims, which can seem to be so specific to a certain ethnographic region, can help illuminate problems of mind and speech elsewhere. This means both entering into the specificity of the Melanesian examples to see what people might be up to when they talk this way, and drawing from our ethnographic insights those themes that turn up in all sorts of other places, including the Euro-American West. Certainly Melanesia is a locus classicus for opacity statements, which we might summarize as the claim that it is impossible to know what is in the mind of another person. But how "other" is the opacity claim, as we can call such statements about "other minds"? Perhaps both less and more than might at first seem to be the case.

The opacity claim, that it is impossible to know what is in the mind of another person, has commonly been treated as an assertion about psy-