Cult movements and community development associations: revolution and evolution in the Papua New Guinea countryside

Michael A.H.B. Walter
February 1981

Number 36

Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research
P.O. Box 5854, Boiroko, Papua New Guinea
Cult movements and community development associations: revolution and evolution in the Papua New Guinea countryside

Michael A.H.B. Walter

Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research
P.O. Box 5854, Boroko, Papua New Guinea
February 1981
Introduction

In his study of the political evolution of rural Papua New Guinea, Rolf Gerritsen (1975) demonstrated the emergence of two major types of groupings: the 'interest group' and the 'dynamic community group'. He portrays them as alternative developments mutually exclusive.

Of the two, the interest groups are far more delimited and precise in ambitions. They represent specific commercial interests (coffee growers, cattle men, etc.) and they seek to control and channel the provision of government services and facilities at the local level. Their memberships are composed of what Gerritsen terms 'big peasants', '... an amalgam of "big man" and entrepreneurs. "Entrepreneurs" in that they are keen innovators eagerly seizing upon new ideas - as the rapid spread of various cash crops, especially coffee and now cattle, has shown' (ibid.:6). These men are only partially educated and are true farmers in contrast with the leaders of the community groups who 'are younger, better educated and often are not farmers in the true sense' (ibid.:14).

Unlike the interest group's class basis, recruitment to the community group is community or ethnic based. Community groups are universalistic and idealistic in their objectives, seeking cultural regeneration as well as organizing economic development, and all within a new frame of local administration of their own making. Gerritsen perceives these groups as the inheritors of the cargo cult legacy (ibid.:14-15).

In this paper I propose to follow up a link Gerritsen has asserted exists between cargo cults and community groups and examine the significance cults may have for the incidence of community groups and what this may tell of the dynamic of rural society in Papua New Guinea today. In relation to Gerritsen's polarization, my approach is one-sided since I am concerned primarily with his community rather than interest groups. But clearly, given the existence of a dichotomy, what I have to say about the one will be pertinent to the other.
One minor point about terminology. In Papua New Guinea I have been accustomed to use the term 'development association' for what Gerritsen calls 'dynamic community groups'. And though 'development' is probably one of the most mouthed and mauled words in modern English and 'association' has many referents, for practical investigative purposes the term is much less confusing than Gerritsen's. Papua New Guineans, moreover, can easily identify it. However, as an analytical term Gerritsen's usage is superior. I intend to make the best of both worlds by marrying the two to produce 'community development association', with both apologies and thanks to Rolf Gerritsen.

Why look at cults?

Like Gerritsen, May (1975a:27) has posited a close identity between cult movement and development association. In his 1975 paper on the Peli cult he concludes: '... the dividing line between "pure cargo cults" and "economic development associations" is often imprecise'. In his Waigani Seminar paper of 1978 May identifies the self-help association as the 'lineal descendant' of the cargo cult. Ken Calvert (1976:211) compares Papua New Guinea and the New Hebrides in a similar vein and concludes: '... the drive and growth of much rural development today comes from the sap of cargo cult mentality'.

No matter that cult and association are bracketed horizontally or vertically, if an affinity is acknowledged, then it is reasonable to suppose that a differential incidence of cult movements, or simply a differential strength and local impact, may have cultural and organizational correlates significant for the appearance of noncult development-oriented associations and movements. I propose that an examination of the social contexts in Papua New Guinea in which cults arose and at least temporarily flourished and a comparison with those social contexts in which cults have never flourished (never appeared or never attracted very large support) might well provide an insight into the social function and functioning of secular and secularized development associations and like movements. Of particular note is that the much cited contrast of cult incidence in the highlands and non-highlands areas seems to be
reflected by a similar incidence of community development associations. Thus of the twenty-six such associations May (1975b) cited (I am omitting Papua Besena and the Highlands Liberation Front), twenty-four occur outside the highlands. Of Gerritsen's examples of dynamic community groups, none occur in the highlands.

Sociological analysis of cult movements in Papua New Guinea

Definitions

A further terminological issue concerns the label 'cargo cult'. It has been commonly used in both academic and non-academic literature on Papua New Guinea for some time now. Berndt (1952/3:47-48) quotes Mair: '... a manifestation which used to be known as the "Vailala Madness", but is now more commonly described as the "cargo cult"', and he footnotes various early references in the literature. The definition, however, has not always been clear. The cargo part seems straightforward enough: any cult promising cargo. But here is a surprising revelation: a large number of cult movements labelled 'cargo' have no explicit message about cargo at all.

What seems to have happened is that the term has gained currency among the educated, both national and expatriate, in Papua New Guinea, and applied, disparagingly by the one and perhaps more for convenience by the other, to a much wider category of phenomena. Indeed, the word 'cult' is itself usually employed in an unrestricted and haphazard way that embraces its different shades of meaning - religious and secular - at different times. In effect, we have a situation in which a particular element found in some cultistic movements is used not only to characterize entire cults, but also to embrace and label movements that do not even exhibit it.

Does it matter? For present purposes, yes! For one thing, a false category is set up. But more important, by characterizing the whole by a component - even though for the European observer it is the most noteworthy component - subsequent attempts at analysis are blinkered. I shall
therefore use 'cult movement' as the generic term and 'cargo cult' only where the concept of cargo is quite explicit. The addition of 'movement' will also serve to distinguish these innovatory cults from established, traditional ones.

Implications of the areal integrative effect

A prominent feature of cult movements has been their local integrative effect on a countryside notably fragmental. Meggitt (1973/4:26-27) provides an informative step-by-step commentary on the actual proselytizing and spreading of a cargo cult through a traditionally hostile countryside, and comments upon the phenomenon:

Two general features of this propagation of Ain's cult are noteworthy. First, the rapidity of the process was remarkable. These journeys and the concomitant recruiting of followers occupied only a few months. Second, apart from the setback Wambilipi received among the Waka, this substantial movement of groups of proselytizers and new adherents back and forth between communities possessing different customs and dialects was accomplished relatively peacefully - even though until recently these people had fought each other.

Many scholars have commented upon this integrative function, some practically positing social and political fission as a necessary condition for the emergence of cults. Worsley (1968:228), for example, asserts:

Such highly segmented societies are incapable of offering resistance to the incoming Europeans. When the need arises for large-scale joint action by members of these separate groups, now faced with the same common problems, they cannot act politically and militarily at all .... Since the people have developed new common political interests where previously they had none, so they must create new political forms of organization to give expression to this new-found unity. It is precisely this integrative function which is served by the millenarian cult.
Probably the best example in the general anthropological literature of the process described by Worsley is the Nuer of the nineteenth century. The unprecedented appearance of prophet figures among them was evoked by the equally unprecedented appearance of English soldiery and its superior firepower and so the need for a united nation beyond all segmental opposition.

Like Worsley I am impressed by the obvious functional role of the cult movements where, beyond a small local area, indigenous forms of institutionalized co-operation are absent. But as is evident in the quotation, Worsley, and other commentators for that matter, sees the significance of this development entirely in terms of the alien invader and of the unprecedented measures necessary for opposing him. The implications for the indigenous polity are ignored. Here are innovative movements receiving considerable popular support and evincing an appeal way beyond traditional boundaries. In effect the leaders of these cult movements were attaining a degree and kind of success that was out of the reach of the leaders of the customary polity. The significance of this becomes more evident when we examine the cults as social movements, rather than solely cultural manifestations.

Cult movements as social revolution

Cult movements are typically analyzed in the literature in terms of their cultural character and import (Reay 1959:194-202; Strathern 1971; and Meggitt 1973/4 are exceptional). Cargo belief is reckoned a function of cultural shock; the magico-religious notions are a function of cultural incapacity; and the excessive and quite un-Melanesian emphasis on regimentation and regularity appear as a function of the impact of European organizational superiority.

But must the accountability of cult movements lie entirely in a self-respecting culture syndrome — a reaction to the unpleasant facts of life revealed by the European's culture?

I certainly do not think that explanations of cult movements can be divorced from the evidences of these links. Yet our understanding of
the movements must not lie solely with them. It is precisely here that the emphasis on cargo and associated elements misdirects: the persuasion is strong that since the cargo belief is the irrational (from an etic viewpoint) reaction of a have-not-culture to the impact of a have-culture, so 'cargo' cults need to be interpreted exclusively in terms of that reaction.

But what if the cult is additionally viewed as a religious movement in its own right? Max Weber (1974) in his essay, 'Religious rejections of the world', established a close identity between salvation religion and political action. Freud (1968:180) in his commentary on Weber writes: 'A salvation religion nearly always assumes the character of a social revolution, in so far as it aspires to a new community founded on a principle, or on new standards'.

The indigenous cargo concept may be rated in European eyes a magico-religious attempt to resist unpalatable truths presented by an alien culture; but in local eyes, and most particularly in the eyes of the local establishment, it must also appear a revolutionary doctrine, a very real and direct attack on the status quo. Here is some non-achieving fellow emerging from the ranks and preaching a doctrine of realizable equality. He promises a coming state of not only endless wealth, but a new kind of wealth, the white man's kind. Most notable of all, he also promises an equal distribution of that wealth - anathema to all respectable achievement-oriented societies, which preach equality of opportunity not of wealth, and to all respectable ascription-oriented societies, which preach that wealth is the prerogative of rank, and to all respectable gerontocracies, which preach that young men should be indebted to their elders.

The message carried by the cargo cult was unlikely to evoke delirious enthusiasm from traditional leaders and elders. They would seem highly incongruent persons, indeed, to be carriers of such a message themselves (unless it were refashioned to a more reactionary style). Conversely, where their authority permitted, leaders most likely would try their utmost to suppress all such movements that so
patently undermined their authority, status and prestige.

Strathern (1971:255) believes: '... we may anticipate that indigenous leaders, the self-made big men, will at times be important in either leading or opposing such cults, depending on how the security of their own power has been increased or diminished through the processes of contact'. I think, however, that we should modify that anticipation somewhat. Leaders would presumably be somewhat circumspect towards getting caught up in such movements, even should they promise initially great advantages. Reay (1959:198) cites a Kuma man who commits suicide because he could not make adequate return for pigs given to him by people to whom he had promised cargo wealth.

If the cargo concept is perceived as a threat to bring the world of the privileged (of achieved or ascribed kinds) crashing down about their ears, then the reports of observers such as Finney about the attitude of privileged individuals towards cargo cults evoke no surprise. Finney (1973:144) writes:

It is no accident, then, that Gorokan business leaders with whom I discussed cargo cults expressed opposition to them vehemently. They seemed to regard cults as more than just misguided attempts by ignorant villagers to seek cargo. To them, cult activity was both an insult and a threat. Their pride seemed to be wounded by the thought that people might choose cult activities over the commercial activities that they had pioneered, and they seemed particularly upset that cult leaders dared to challenge their authority as the modern-day big-men (compare Reay 1964:255).

But what Finney concludes does raise an important query. For Finney 'The message here is plain: work hard, save money, and invest it to be successful. It is a prescription that so far has worked well for the Gorokans and has provided them with a powerful argument against the cargo cult approach to participation in the modern world' (ibid.:145).

Is the message so plain? Finney's concluding statement follows a long quotation from the speech of a big-man businessman to 'the people' in which he exhorts them to hard work. But why the need to harangue if
Indeed 'it is a prescription that so far has worked well for the Gorokans'? The answer to be gathered by reading between Finney's fluent lines is that there are Gorokans and Gorokans:

Several of these business leaders have had the chance to express their opposition to cult movements directly, by participating in government patrols sent to put down outbreaks in Goroka and nearby areas (ibid.:144).

The liklik man perspective

Perhaps the western world needs its concepts of the traditional as a measure of its own dynamism (and correlative assurance of its progress) too much to be able to grant an inherent dynamism to tribal societies. The latter must numbly receive their blows of fate and stumble along as best they can until the blessings of European flag, church, and commerce bring the enlightenment of the white man's way. My evaluation of cargo cults may not agree with that of the Papua New Guinea scholar, John Waiko (1973), who to me seems as cultural in his interpretation as most foreign scholars. Yet I think we have a common ground in asserting, and not merely lip-servicing, the dynamism of Papua New Guinea societies, their potential for organizational change. For me, at any rate, the appearance of cargo cults is its clearest demonstration. (Though it is of no relevance to the immediate context, the Papua New Guinean reader might bear in mind that recognition of this dynamism carries acceptance of a significant corollary: Melanesian values - 'the Melanesian way' - are not fixed and immutable!)

The appeal of the typical cult message is not of an explicit revolutionary ideology. There is no impassioned exhortation to cast off the chains of a class subjection. Chains are indeed to be cast off, but this is solicited implicitly. The direct appeal is rather to the state of 'communitas', the astructural presence to be glimpsed through the ceremonial and ritual rents in the structure of social reality.

Communitas is the state of, or striving for, a situation, often of prescribed duration, of social nondifferentiation in a community. This is not merely in terms of hierarchical ranking. It applies to all social
status and so all social identities and identifications. (In the West in recent times, probably the most sensational example — for structured fancies — has been the astructural, hippie communes.) The theme of communitas may also be relayed by status inversal (including that of the sexes). Usually attempts to prolong a state of communitas result in its succumbing to structuring, primarily through the growth of routine, the surfacing of personality strife, and the emergence of a leadership to solve the organizational dilemmas of a lack of structure. As the structural element increases, the communitas, the astructural element, decreases, and is likely to shrink to a typical ritualistic incidence and garb.

The revolutionary zeal of the cult movement is for the ideal society — that 'true' society that is adumbrated, though certainly not put into practice, by the local culture. It may be attained by reaching forward to things new or by reaching back to things old. The theme common to all such movements is the ending of conflict among individuals, a kind of cleansing of society that establishes or re-establishes altruism as well as equality. The end of conflict, and reference here is to sorcery and mental images as well as to physical strife, establishes the individual’s freedom of action, though the implication of course is of a natural, strong conformity that ensures the lack of all infringement by others. The cargo message with its promise of an equitable distribution of wealth neatly complements the commandment of love thy neighbour.

I believe Marie Reay's few and, in a sense, incidental pages on a cult movement in the Wahgi valley are probably the most insightful of the entire cargo literature. Their relevance and importance to the events and changes occurring in the Papua New Guinea countryside today can not be exaggerated. Reay (1959:1957) is primarily elaborating upon the following observation of Reinhold Niebuhr (1945:83):

The primitive community has no freedom in its social structure, not because the individual lacks an embryonic sense of freedom but precisely because he does have such a sense; and the community is not imaginative enough to deal with this freedom without suppressing it .... In so far
as freedom has risen to destroy the harmony of nature, the community seeks to suppress it for the sake of preserving the social unity.

Tribal society, in other words, is the toughest of all on individualism. States Frank (1958:385): "... it sees the actions and events of a particular time merely as the bodying forth of eternal prototypes". For the present work Reay's remarks are especially pertinent since I am in effect contrasting the weakness or failure of attempts at extending communitas beyond customary ritual contexts in the highlands with the strength and success of such attempts in the lowlands and coastal societies, and the implications this has for the contrasting nature of their social organizations.

One objection raised with me against the revolutionary nature of the cult movements has been that in many of them a major objective, framed in explicit terms, has been the preservation of things traditional.

In answer I would use Firth's (1961:110) statement about cult movements that despite their variation in form they have a certain functional similarity.

On the one hand some cult movements have sought an accommodation with the modern world by an explicit rejection of all the paraphernalia and trappings of traditional society, and have abolished rituals and destroyed artefacts with a will. Some have gone to the extremes of destroying their crops and killing their pigs. They have even revolutionized their moral order by making their womenfolk available to all (actions, surely of little appeal to traditional leaders, for whom control over the labour of wives constituted an important if not vital element in their power and prestige, and not to mention leadership preoccupations with respect).

It is true, on the other hand, that some cults have preached a return to the traditional life. But how different in effect is this from a call for the destruction of the established order? Good old days are never so good than when they are too old to recall accurately. When people speak of a traditional way of life, and even more so when they are calling for a return to one, typically they are referring to some highly
idealized version of fraternity or, in the case of ascribed hierarchical arrangements holding sway - to where rank groans beneath the weight of noblesse oblige.

Why should the social revolutionary aspect of cult movements be so obscured in the literature? Or, if not obscured, why should the bias of analysis in terms of cultural shock nearly always permeate attempts at explanation?

The answer may lie in the extensive preoccupation with leaders and leadership that so distinguishes the ethnographic literature on Papua New Guinea. Much is devoted to the big man, little to the small man. The big man is a leader, the liklik man¹ tends to be social organization. People may have, of course, a vested interest in a discriminatory social system to which there is no feasible or visible alternative. But why should Papua New Guinea be specially favoured with the assumption that the people possess the same enthusiasm as their leaders for maintaining a traditional but inequitable distributive system? Why can adherence to a new system be only a desperate, almost involuntary, reaction to forces of change rather than reflect the use of the new situation as a means of change? Jocano's (1973:200) observations on Filipino millenial movements represent a typical western type of appraisal: '... these radical movements, to my mind, represent the sum total of the peoples' reactions to incongruities that result from the disparity between the adaptive requirements of modernity and the limitations of available local resources to meet them'.

As a major consequence of the constraints of this approach, explanations of the motivations of cult leaders, and indeed of their own rationalizations of their behaviour, are extended to their followers.

¹ As far as I know, the term (as a term) is my own creation. Liklik is tok pisin for small, but 'liklik man' is not a colloquialism like 'bigman'.
This then furnishes the academic mind with the appropriate opportunity for intellectual sophistry about the Papua New Guinea villager's search for 'identity' and 'meaning in life'. Some commentators in their analysis of cultist motivation become as mystical as they reckon the objects of their attentions to be.

The need of an equal awareness of the motivation of the liklik man is indeed noted at times in the literature. The promise, however, is never fulfilled. Sahlins's often quoted article (Sahlins 1963), for example, refers to poor men, rich men, big men, and chiefs, refers to them moreover as political types. But while the inclusion of 'poor men' allows the title of Sahlins's paper to jingle satisfactorily, it has little relevance to the content of that paper.

Cochrane (1970) seems continually to be on the point of remedying the bias, but his liklik man is finally revealed as no more than a device to establish a polarity conceptually essential to Cochrane's discussion of cult leadership.

May (1978:14) warns: 'educated elites [do not] necessarily share the same perception of a movement as the mass of its followers', but he makes his warning preparatory only to a statement about clashes between young activists and traditional leaders.

Most promising, most explicit, and most disappointing of all in this regard is Peter Worsley. In the second edition of The Trumpet Shall Sound (1968) he provides a new and substantial introduction that for much of its course treats with the insights and concepts of Max Weber.

Worsley emphasizes that charisma 'sociologically viewed, is a social relationship, not an attribute of individual personality or a mystical quality' (ibid.:xii). And later he argues: 'Hence, if we permit ourselves to focus our eyes exclusively or even primarily upon the leader element in the leader-follower relationship, our attention is distracted from what is sociologically more important, to wit, the
relationship between the two elements' (ibid.:xviii). But Worsley is patently not at ease in dealing with 'followers'. He recognizes the possibility of unfulfilled aspirations in people, which by implication are dysfunctional for the status quo. 'Followers ... do not follow simply because of some abstracted "mystical" quality: a leader is able to magnetize them because he evokes or plays upon some strand of intellectual or emotional predisposition' (ibid.:xii).

But Worsley is ultimately unable to shift from the leadership perspective:

A more valid model for the analysis of charismatic authority has to be interactionist: one in which followers with possibly utopian or at least diffuse and unrealized aspirations cleave to an appropriate leader because he articulates and consolidates their aspirations. He then specifies and narrows these aspirations, converting them both into more concrete and visible goals towards whose achievement collective action can be oriented and organized, and into beliefs which can be validated by reference to experience (ibid.:xiv).

Worsley proceeds to chastize Weber for a fault which in fact looms large in the literature on cult movements in Papua New Guinea:

From a sociological point of view, too, one would expect attention to be devoted to study of the milieu from which the prophet emerges, to the social groups which receive it readily (and those that resist it), and, as we have seen, to the message and its content, since this is the nexus linking leader and follower in one relationship.

None of these issues is seriously tackled by Weber. In contemporary sociology, too, the 'emergency' crisis, conditions, and the 'challenging' quality of charismatic leadership are too often taken as if given, and, if not as inexplicable, at least are not explained. The discussion stops short of the examination of the situation out of which leadership emerges, and of the social support for the prophet when this is exactly one of the most crucial features demanding explanation (ibid.:xxxviii).
But for Worsley, support for the prophet is essentially linked to the pertinence of his message for the resolution of the conflicts, cultural and psychological, arising from the impact of culture shock. There is no indication that a prophet and his message might be attractive for other than their own sakes -- that, in terms of an inherent dynamism, cult movements are expressions of the adequacy of indigenous societies, not a demonstration of their limitations.

I fully realize that this argument may be taken too far, and I wish to make clear that I recognize the trauma of the advent of the European and the claims of the 'relative deprivation' argument. Still, it seems to me that there can be too extreme a swing to the other side, too. Cult movements, I believe, were and are social as well as cultural protests, constituting reactions against established indigenous social systems as well as endeavours to counter the apparent invincibility of the European culture.

For the present study, it is important to expose the bias in the interpretation and assessment of cult movements precisely because of the perception of community development associations as the successors of cult movements. I am concerned lest the misinterpretation or limited interpretation of the popular appeal of cult movements may be arbitrarily applied to the associations and so perpetuate entirely unsubstantiated verdicts on the motivation of the Papua New Guinea villager in situations of rapid change.

Societal implications of the differential incidence and impact of cult movements

Commentators disagree over the distribution of cargo cults. Some insist upon a fairly uniform incidence, but an earlier view is that incidence is considerably less in the highlands than elsewhere. This is depicted with great clarity by Worsley's map (1968:2-3).

Some observers have made more of this division, or made the division more apparent, than others. Lawrence and Meggitt (1965) explain it as
a function of a polarization they establish of sacred and secular orientations of coastal and highlands cultures respectively. Finney rejects this opposition as being unfounded in the ethnographic record. He also locates a further weakness of the argument when he points out (1973:138) that it ignores 'the ample evidence of cargo cult movements in the Highlands'.

But Finney himself also omits a major variable. In the first place he can find only five cult movements that have received any attention in the general literature on the highlands (and these all occurred in the 1940s). He continues: 'If one were forced to rely solely on published sources, one might therefore conclude that Goroka has had little cargo cult activity. However, the published record can be deceptive, for there are certainly many cult outbreaks in New Guinea that are never recorded in newspapers, journals and books' (ibid.:14). But what interests me is not the number of cult movements that can be scored, but their social impact locally in the highlands - their strength, in other words. And Finney's strivings to increase his tally are evidence enough that in the majority of cases their strength was inconsequential.

Why should this be so? What are the variables operative in the two areas that might produce this differential effect despite the political fragmentation that characterizes both?

Schwartz's (1963) demonstration of an informal areal integration in Manus reveals a kind of reticulated system of kinship ties that could well have acted as a communication grid for the rapid dissemination of anything innovatory like a cult movement. And this system might well have wider application in coastal area societies in general while being restricted topographically in the highlands. Meggitt's (1973/4) account of the rapid spreading of Ain's cult among the Taro Enga, a branch of the Enga who are the largest linguistic group in the country, could be an exception proving the rule.

Yet Meggitt's description of this cult movement also provides a clue to the possibility of another variable. Ain's cult spreads, and it spreads rapidly, but only to those areas where no attempt is made to oppose the
meanderings of its evangelical leaders. An arrow in the leg of one of them brings an abrupt halt to the expansion of the cult in the direction from which the arrow came.

Though Meggitt makes no explicit statement to the effect, the cult movement appears to have embraced those peoples who lacked the strong leadership to organize resistance to it. Significantly there is no mention of any big men in Meggitt's account of the diffusion of the cult among the Taro Enga, only the role of Mae Enga big men in bringing about its dissolution.

In fact the Taro Enga big men are not so big. Referring to Strathern's (1971) paper on a cult at Mount Hagen, Meggitt (1973/4: 123) writes:

The difference between the Ialibu/Mount Hagen and western Enga situations is clear. The Mae Big Men near Wabag were always vastly more influential and wealthy than their Taro and other counterparts further west. The Mae leaders represented (and were supported by) much larger and more powerful clans, they successfully exploited the trade routes along which shells and stone axes came from the east and south-east, and they controlled the elaborate Te ceremonial exchange system (an institution not found among the western fringe Enga - see Meggitt, 1972). The arrival of the Europeans and their wealth from 1938 onwards simply increased the opportunities of the Mae Big Men to deal in goods and people.

Berndt's (1952/3) paper is another of the few published descriptions of a cult movement in the highlands, in this case located in the Kainantu area. The only evidence of any big man involvement was a brief - very brief - recollection given to Berndt by a visitor from the Grufi district (1952/3:216). From the introductory comments on social organization it is not clear how influential were traditional leaders. Berndt simply remarks the rivalry of 'village warrior-leaders'.
If they were anything like the neighbouring Fore, their authority could not have been great. Of the Fore, Sorenson (1974:22) comments that they were 'devoid of chiefs, medicine men - patriarchs and the like'. He also notes (1976:236) the '... "cargo-like" movements, which rapidly altered the Fore way of life after western contact' (ibid.).

Reay's (1959) information on a cult among the Kuma is not so cut-cut about the relation between cult and traditional leaders. The cult occurred in 1949 and Reay's field-work commenced four years later - a much smaller time gap than in the case of Meggitt's and Strathern's investigations. Reay writes (1959:199):

> Isolated 'big men' made a realistic appraisal of the situation, expressed disbelief in the prophets' revelations, and counselled caution which relatively few heeded. Many of the traditional leaders, attracted by the prospect of further wealth, took part in the cult and so gave practical recognition to the prophets' assertions. A few impoverished themselves by giving the prophets and officials most of their pigs and valuables as the less wealthy were doing.

The two individuals who introduced the cult to the Kuma were a young woman and a 'vagrant rubbish man' who was also a thief. As Reay (ibid.:196) points out: 'They represented, of course, the classes that had to bear the biggest costs of traditional life'. But Reay's is not a detailed study of the cult, nor does it profess to be, and there is no analysis of the attitudes of traditional leaders. Indeed, apart from the quotation given above, little else is said about them in the context of the cult, though Reay states the rubbish-man leader of the cult was pressed by the most powerful traditional leader of his group to take himself and his ideas elsewhere. There is also some confusion about Reay's distinctions between 'big men' and 'traditional leader' in the quotation given: does this represent Reay's earlier distinction of 'authorized leaders' and 'spontaneous leaders'?

Only Strathern's (1971) account of the Ialibu/Mount Hagen cult depicts highlands big men not only participating in some degree but actually originating and organizing the cult. However their actions,
according to Strathern, had a specific cause: they were the consequences of a radical shift in the balance of control over the flow of the prized ceremonial shell valuable. The establishment of the European base at Mount Hagen followed by the war with Japan first shifted the flow of trade to the Hagen big men and then sharply reduced the subsequent supply to the Ialibu big men, who then had recourse to the cult movement in a desperate attempt to stave off the disaster that threatened them:

... the fact that real wealth was obtained by selling the cult to northern groups and that this may have redressed imbalances of wealth between big men in the northern and southern areas explains why the innovators’ behaviour was exactly the opposite of what was expected. (ibid.:264)

Evidence exists, circumstantial and negative though it may be, to link the incidence of cults in the highlands with weak leadership, whether personal and transitory or institutionalized and permanent.

Clearly there is considerable variation in the nature of the so-called egalitarian societies of the highlands, but I would relate the low influence and lack of staying power of cults to the presence in the most populated areas, the great valleys, of a system of powerful and vigorous leadership. Compared with the coastal areas the system of socio-economic manipulation by big men appears to have advanced to a much finer degree. Moreover the environment and impact of warfare has yet to be as decisively routed in the highlands as it has long been in the coastal areas. Both factors, I reckon, are considerations of some weight for the individual villager who would like to 'withdraw' and give his allegiance to a distinct and rival societal form.

If we accept that the local impact of cult movements in the non-highlands areas has been much greater, the above statement about the highlands carries the corollary that the organizational basis of leadership in these areas is correspondingly weak.
Two major types of society are found outside the highlands. These might crudely be tagged the egalitarian and the chiefly, according to their respective emphases on achievement and ascription in status (in practice there was often some mixture of the two: see Morauta 1973 for a particular example, Douglas 1979 for a general survey). In either case it is rare for the qualities and authority of leadership to attain the heights or extent of powerful big-man leadership in the highlands. The egalitarian societies of the coastal areas are certainly much more egalitarian in effect than many of their highlands' counterparts, and the wide prevalence of sorcery belief and practice, especially within the local group, is an effective levelling mechanism and an obstacle to economic development: see for example, Connell 1970:46–47; McKillop 1979:37; and Rew 1979:42 on effects in Bogia (Madang), Rigo (Central) and Makamaka (Milne Bay) respectively.

Morauta (1973:145-148) indicates that in the Madang area big-man leaders were in no way typical of the village scene nor indispensable to its organization: their incidence was quite irregular. Not surprisingly, when they did emerge they tended to be very formidable characters (ibid.:148).

In the lowlands, coastal, and islands areas, as in the highlands, few cult leaders have been able to claim high or effective traditional status and authority. Typically, cult leaders have been insignificants bursting into prominence, or men returning to their village area having acquired some standing in, as well as experience of, the culture of the European. And just as in the highlands women have inspired and led cult movements (Reay 1959:196; Gibbs 1977:19–20), so women have also been prominent in some of the coastal cult movements. Cotton (1979) cites cases in the Markham Valley, Mekeo and Garia.

---

1 To what extent this characteristic of coastal egalitarian areas is a function of a long-enduring pacification is difficult to determine. Bill Standish states (personal communication) that after warfare in the highlands was dampened by legislation, Andrew Strathern informed him of his great surprise at the considerable preoccupation with sorcery shown by Hageners.
One notable example of a cult movement being introduced into a society by a man of traditional rank occurred in Manam. Manam is a chiefly society, and the Yali cult, or a version of it, introduced into some of the villages by a sorcerer 'chief' has from the beginning been a strong bulwark of the indigenous ranking system in some areas there. (personal communication, N. Lutkehaus 1979).

In chiefly societies the 'warehouse' distributive system of a chief lacks the emphasis on individual bilateral relationships that characterizes the cumulative system of the big man. The chief demands of inferiors by right and no matter how careful he may be to practise his obligations also, the contractual element of the relationship between him and his subjects tends to get submerged. The effectiveness of his leadership then rests primarily on the strength of the sanctions he can bring to bear to ensure compliance with his wishes and aims.

But in the coastal societies of Papua New Guinea, while the chief could invoke sanctions, he was yet personally separated from them. Sorcery, his principal medium of social control, and warfare were hereditary occupations and offices wielded by others on his behalf (Chowning 1979:75).

Since this kind of chiefship lacked all the trappings and inhering powers of divine right that might compensate for the diffused nature of its sanctions, it was potentially (that is, in terms of adaptation to new circumstances) a vulnerable institution. Nevertheless, the association of formal institutions underpinning beliefs in ascribed status made it easier for chiefly leaders to entrap a cult movement and turn it to their own use. Cargo wealth did not challenge so directly the integrity of vertical social links of chief and commoner as it did the basis of the horizontal egalitarian network of the big man.

Comparison of chiefship in Papua New Guinea with the highly stratified societies of eastern Melanesian and Polynesia is instructive for cult movements have attained far less prominence in these societies. The complex of divine and sacred beliefs that surrounded their high chiefship, while it might not obstruct the overthrow of a weak
or tyrannical incumbent, was yet a solid buttress against overthrow of the institution. And this power and protection was part of the chiefly system permeating even the lowest levels of the hierarchy where 'chiefs' might command little more inherent authority than their peers in Mekeo or Manam. Where introduced disease ravaged societies Polynesian chiefship was certainly undermined, but elsewhere only with the growth of urban society and culture and the extension of a western education system (or at least the opportunities for it) to the people have intellectually founded messages and alien social contexts begun to threaten the traditional stratification of the chiefly system.

If the potential weakness (in adaptational terms) of social control mechanisms was typical of the lowland coastal and island regions of Papua New Guinea, then should there not have been a far greater incidence of cults than has been the case?

In answer to this we should first of all remember that indigenous societies were no longer independent entities. Colonial administrations (German or Australian), if they could not adhere to quiescere non movere, were quite ready themselves to move to administer the kicks to achieve the quiescence.

Moreover, other alien organizations operated in indigenous society, organizations actively seeking a far greater recruitment to their ranks – the churches. To me it seems highly likely that most of the potentially innovative, radical leadership in the younger generations would have been gathered into the missionary folds, would indeed have been intellectually attracted there. Some, in fact, proceeded from missionary zeal to revolutionary appeal.

It is something of a paradox for the modern western mind that the so-called egalitarian societies of Melanesia should be more susceptible to social revolution than highly stratified societies in Polynesia. But the very fact that leadership in the village was not heavily institutionalized and was a function of personal qualities and achievement meant that any pronounced environmental change provided the potential for challenge from an innovative leadership. It was precisely this situation that the arrival of the European produced. The ease of
European control and the severity of the cultural impact, by calling into question the very premises of the indigenous cultures, made local leadership accountable for the relevancy of an enormously expanded range of phenomena.

Colonial endorsement as administrative chiefs, headmen, or whatever had no necessary restitutive or revivifying effect. The power of African and Polynesian chiefs might be braced by policies of Indirect Rule, for though the latter distorted their political position, the formal institutional props ensured the coverture of alien sanctions for most of the time. In Papua New Guinea these props were not available and consequently the strings by which any but an independently effectual headman might operate were wholly visible.

By creating a new societal environment the political and cultural impact of the Europeans had produced not only new criteria of leadership and new means of attaining leadership, but also new means of resisting leadership. While these additional contexts — the accountability for both the Europeans' presence and their culture — exposed traditional leadership where it was weak, yet they did not provide the compensatory means to make innovatory leadership secure. The obvious solutions (in an emic sense) to problems intellectual (European culture) and political (European conquest) that the first and many subsequent innovative leaders proposed, cargo and suchlike, did not work.

The survival capacity of some cult organizations has surprised many observers, including the young, educated elite of the country. Nevertheless, though cargo cults I am sure will continue to appear, the odds are against their individual persistence without adaptation to the pressures of the changing socio-economic and cultural situations. A major obstacle that cult leaders have to counter effectively is the increasing likelihood of local opposition from their own young men who will try to use the esteem of educational status and knowledge to match and overcome the charismatic basis and millenial message of the cult, often employing derision as a major weapon. Furthermore, not only has the non-appearance of the cargo to be continually accounted for, but also 'development', the rival concept to cargo and millennium, has to be
catered for or held at bay. And this becomes an increasingly more difficult achievement given villagers' greater reliance on a cash economy and their much greater mobility.

Some cult movements have challenged the development process head-on. Thus the early days of the Kivung at Pomio appear to have initiated the neglect of the cocoa and coconut plantations in the area (according to Tovalele 1977:136; though with the exceedingly poor shipping services they suffer, I imagine many of the people saw their action as a gesture against their neglect). But the cash needs generated by the cult beliefs (not to speak of the ordinary cash needs of the villagers) then meant a considerable dependence upon the remittances of absentees; not the firmest foundation for a cult, no matter how rigorous the regimentation of its active membership.

In other cases cult movements have tempered their dogma of imminent material return with more pliable doctrines of delayed spiritual return and reward, and have overtly embraced economic as well as social developmental objectives. I see this transformation as an alternative to a severe, rigid regimentalization for the perpetuation of a cult movement. In effect the cult, often with its membership fairly widely diffused but strong locally, returns to the societal fold as a sectarian way of life. As its revolutionary zeal falls away, it begins to gain partial respectability, or at least acceptance, in the eyes of the authorities and nonmembers. The Kivung movement (a later stage of the Pomio cult) and the Yali and associated cult movements appear to have undergone or to be undergoing this kind of metamorphosis (see Louise Morauta's 1972 Postscript and November 1973 Footnote to her book on the Madang area, 1974:163-170), however De'ath (1978:95) points out that the latter still suffer economic discrimination by government.

---

1 Some scholars insist that 'cargo' and 'development' are not rival concepts. Etically I agree it could be argued (but only finelly) they are not. But in the emic perspective they most certainly always are. All villagers I have talked with, educated and noneducated, have been quite positive in their distinction. Finney (1973) also makes this clear.
The most famous sectarian survival is surely the Paliau movement. It suffered from being the first of its kind and from being initially too successful. A worried colonial government destroyed the effectiveness of its secular organization by introducing an official local government and by cleverly causing Paliau to identify with it. The Paliau Church is still quite rigorous in its traditional areas, but the movement's unprecedentedly extensive integrative effect has long been spoiled. (Some of its last vestiges are disappearing now as the Nali people leave the joint Titaian-Nali coastal village at Baluan to return to their lands in an interior recently opened up by the new Manus Highway.)

**Conclusions: Significance of the cult movement analysis for an understanding of present-day rural dynamics**

If the community development association is accepted as a kind of functional equivalent of the cult movement, then like the latter its emergence indicates an attempt to replace ineffectual mechanisms of community integration, and possibly a response to development pressures for community coalescence and extension.

Therefore such groups, like cult movements, are unlikely to appear and certainly not to flourish in areas of established strong leadership and vigorous integrative social mechanisms.

Gerritsen's (1975) dichotomy is by no means pervasive in Papua New Guinea and this may account for the fact that he fails to develop the implications of the antithesis he discerns (**ibid.**. 1). Few community development associations have so far appeared in the highlands. The best known is undoubtedly that initiated and led by Philip Kama at Olu-Bus, Minj (Kama 1975). But a sudden increase in the incidence of these groups would suggest a radical change was taking place in highlands' societies.

The emergence of a big-peasant class institutionalized by the kind of interest groups that Gerritsen describes could itself pose a threat to the structural stability of highlands' societies. Big men possessed of the traditional acumen for the manipulation of social relationships that marks the customary achievement style can capitalize upon their followers' customary expectations and establish sometimes considerable business...
ventures. As Nicholls (1972:179, cited by Gerritsen 1975:6) observes: '... the entrepreneur-producer of course manipulates clan obligations to acquire labour cheaper than the rural wage awards'. But in pursuing cash at the expense of kin there arrives a time of decision between business and bisnis, contract and custom. Cash is dear and no big businessman can attempt to gratify the wants of his followers on the increasing scales demanded and remain in business. Gerritsen cites Moulik's (1973, chapter 9) remark that the big peasants '... are beginning to show a proper entrepreneurial distaste for the distributive norms their societies traditionally attach to the attainment of wealth'. (Gerritsen 1975).

But the longer the big payout is delayed the greater the likelihood that the big peasant's authority and following will wane. So having used custom to establish his ventures, the convinced businessman is likely to succumb to the temptation of converting to contract to perpetuate them, and in so doing to abdicate his natural leadership.

An examination of the present fighting in the highlands might yield some highly informative data on the dynamics of rural leadership. The Post-Courier (6 July 1979) asserts that big men are responsible for fostering unrest in the highlands. Yet it is difficult to imagine Gerritsen's and Finney's emergent big peasant and businessman types encouraging the filling in of their followers' labour hours by the widespread vandalism of cash crops (though the recent attempt to put coffee trees out of war bounds fits the scenario a little better). Are emergent leaders using warfare to divert attention from embarrassing domestic issues? Or does warfare reflect the rise of a rural leadership, new but traditional? Or is it simply a case of warfare occurring in areas where emergent big types have yet to appear on the scene?

Gerritsen has remarked the already increasing generational conflict in the highlands between big peasants and the educated young. This seems likely to accelerate as the number of baccalaureates disappointed of prestigious government employment, both nationally and provincially, expands annually and individuals seek to put their education to use and prestige in the village. The big man institution in the highlands appears to have remained viable because it has been readily able to incorporate the young educated returnees of obvious ability. But clearly the institution cannot provide returned students with ex-officio membership even
if the students wanted it. And certainly many of them do not judge the demonstration effect to be the most appropriate way of helping their people.

The appearance of Gerritsen's dichotomy outside the highlands may well augur an entirely different situation, though it is not clear as yet the extent to which the dichotomy is already in evidence. Two of Gerritsen's interest groups (not counting the Damuni association which he sees as some kind of hybrid) are in Papua: The Mekoe Rice Growers' Association and the Northern District Cattle Farmers Association. However these do not belong to Gerritsen's unelaborated subcategory of 'classic' interest groups (Gerritsen 1975), which from his examples appear to be confined to the highlands. I am unacquainted with both the nonhighlands associations he uses as case studies and so cannot negatively infer the characteristics of the classic form to which he refers.

Nevertheless, even the limited appearance outside the highlands of big peasants in organized combinations could be of considerable significance for lowlands and coastal societies. According to Gerritsen both interest and community development groups are functions of a search to escape the stagnation of a situation of terminal development and to seek new developmental opportunities (Howlett 1973). But the community development associations, which have occurred predominantly in the lowlands, coastal, and island areas, have tended to be short-lived and markedly unsuccessful in achieving their aims. The event of big peasant associations might be, as for the highlands, an indication of a new leadership and social design, but in this case with the promise of greater stability and more effective integration.
References


Frank, J. 1958. 'Spatial forms in modern literature', in Schorer, 
'Literary modernism: The ambiguous legacy of progress', Social 
Research 14:130, 1974.


Gerritsen, R., 1975. 'Aspects of the political evolution of rural Papua 
New Guinea: towards a political economy of the terminal peasantry', 
Department of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences, 
Australian National University, Canberra. Mimeographed.


Howlett, D., 1973. 'Terminal development: from tribalism to peasantry', 
in H.C. Brookfield, ed., The Pacific in Transition: Geographical 
Perspectives on Adaptation and Change. London: Edward Arnold, 
pp. 249-273.

in H.D. Evers, ed., Modernization in South-East Asia, Oxford 
University Press, Singapore, pp. 199-222.

Kaman, P., 1975. 'The community self-help project at Olu-Bus, Minj', 
Yagl Ambu, 2: 28-50.

Lawrence, P.J., and M.J. Meggitt, 1965. 'Introduction', in P.J. Lawrence 
and M.J. Meggitt, eds., Gods, Ghosts and Men in Melanesia. 

May, R.J., 1975a. 'The view from Huron, the Peli Association of the East 


Waigani Seminar, Port Moresby. Mimeographed.

McKillop, R., 1979. 'Rigo site: final report', in TASER Social Feasibility 
Study of Extensive Beef Cattle Ranching Proposals for Papua New 


DISCUSSION PAPERS

1. A plea for language planning in Papua New Guinea by Ranier Lang, April 1976. (21pp.)


5. The community corporation in Papua New Guinea by Peter Fitzpatrick and Julie Southwood, November 1976. (45pp.)


8. The artifact industry: maximising returns to producers by R.J. May, January 1977. (27pp.)


12. Reforming the government of Port Moresby by Hal Colebatch, June 1977. (31pp.)


15. The burden of agricultural export taxation in Papua New Guinea: a comparative analysis and a proposal by M.V. Lam, December 1977. (49pp.)


19. Fiscal responses to export instability in Papua New Guinea by N.V. Lam, April 1978. (28pp.)

20. Monetary policies and options for domestic economic stabilization in Papua New Guinea by N.V. Lam, May 1978. (21pp.)


22. The 'Big-man Model' reconsidered: power and stratification in Chimbu by Bill Standish, November 1978. (43pp.)


24. Fertility change in Papua New Guinea during the late 1960s: evidence from the 1966 and 1971 Censuses by Thomas M. McDevitt, April 1979. (10pp.)

25. Rural-urban relationships in Papua New Guinea: case material from the Gulf Province on net flows by Louise Morauta and Morauta Hasu, August 1979. (36pp.)

26. Facing the facts: the need for policies for permanent urban residents by Louise Morauta, October 1979. (21pp.)

27. The building industry in Papua New Guinea by Alan Stretton, November 1979. (30pp.)


30. IASER Alcohol Research—IASER Alcohol Project: Final project outline by Mac Marshall; Expenditure on alcohol in Port Moresby households by Louise Morauta and Camille Olela, April 1980. (25pp.)

31. Levels of infant mortality in Papua New Guinea's urban centres: A note by Thomas M. McDevitt, April 1980. (27pp.)

32. Infant mortality decline in the post-war period: A further application of Feeney's method to Papua New Guinea data by Thomas M. McDevitt, August 1980. (31pp.)


Eight discussion papers are published every year. Discussion papers cost K1 (postage 50 toea flat rate) or K8 ($US12) including surface postage per calendar year.