

## Cargo and Condescension

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### Abstract

'Cargoism' is the widely used derivative of what used to be the great insult in colonial Melanesia, 'cargo cultism.' Now, however, it refers to all kinds of social, economic and institutional behaviour that results from inflated expectations and a naïveté of market economics. Development economists and anthropologists have long abandoned linear ideas of growth that make LDC's look 'backward', and yet the local meaning of capitalism (and cargo) remains ignored in big picture discussions of politico-economic growth. This essay remembers Madang's legendary 'cargoist' Yali Singina for what he meant then, and means now, and looks at his global reputation through a personal lens.

### Cargo

'Cargoism' is the great bugbear of Melanesian development. Having derived from 'cargo cultism' (the greater bugbear of colonial Melanesia) 'cargoism' has jumped regional boundaries to become a popular English language reference to all kinds of raised expectations, any general devotion to materialism and, most surprisingly, the slippage between investment and return for everything from environmentalism to economics.<sup>1</sup> The ideas that once surrounded quasi-religious social movements in colonial Melanesia, those 'cults' that rejected Christian and/or administrative authority and generated a great deal of European anxiety for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, have been so widely applied to other phenomena across the globe that they've lost their bearings in the original historical issues. And yet, ironically, the term 'cargoism' continues to invoke fantasies of naïve Papua New Guineans marching with balsa wood rifles and worshipping American presidents.<sup>2</sup>

It is this 'postmodern' usage that interests me here, the broad 'cargoism' that refers to inflated expectations and no knowledge of the means of production. Today's head-shaking and tsk-tsking of 'cargoism' no longer refers to crazy villagers, or charismatic micronationalists, but, for example, to all ungrateful beneficiaries of donor aid who continue to demand more and more power in the form of more cargo, more modern things. Europeans remain alarmed by the apparent conflation of social and material worth in Melanesia, by parishioners who take homiletic metaphors at face value (searching for the *rewards* of a life in Christ), and who refuse to see beyond the material inequity of expatriates and indigenes to understand the Western cultural offer of social equality.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for examples, Catton (1980), Bigelow (2005).

<sup>2</sup> In truth, however, 'cargo cult' was coined for African phenomena that predate Melanesian movements; see Stanner (1958).

Meanwhile, Papua New Guineans continue to demand greater control over their politico-economic destiny, demurring in the face of generous international assistance because they have been frisked at the airport, or because Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) refuse to acknowledge traditional ceremonial calendars. Don't these people know what they're risking? Can't they weight the significance of the offer being made? Resistance to the hegemony of monopoly capital is absolutely delusional, it is cargoist. And yet development economics has been informed by anthropology for the past sixty years, insisting that monetary values be seen as embedded in local cultural contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Anthropologists have increasingly come to regard the original phenomena of 'cargo cults' as fabrications of a European discourse anyway. That is, they acknowledge their existence, but say they only became a special social and metaphysical category through the writing of colonial administrators, missionaries, academics, journalists and satirists, all of whom had their own reasons for making these behaviours appear more bizarre than other social or political movements. A hard separation between these 'cults' and the micronationalist movements that led to and precipitated PNG's Independence has never been firmly drawn, and some have even argued that the more recent waves of religious cultism have themselves been modelled after sensational media reports.<sup>4</sup>

'Cargo cults' have occurred around Melanesia for more than 100 years, but they really gained momentum in PNG following the cataclysmic events of WWII. Splintered from church and/or political action groups, these groups rejected the slow and sometimes fruitless roads to development proposed by either church or the state, and turned to traditional powers to open the road to political and economic progress. Almost always led by a charismatic man or woman, these 'new orders' or 'new societies' have always expressed dashed hopes in the imposed administrations and renewed hope in the ways of the ancestors, even as those ways are almost always adapted to the modern project (see, e.g. Gesch 1985, 1990). These are revivalist programs as protest movements, and they continue to recur in places around PNG that have not been touched by government or church-sponsored development.

Some of the post-war movements quickly evolved into self-reliance and small business groups; others grew into micronationalist movements. Nowadays, simply to apply the term 'cargo cult' to some of these is to impute irrationality to what were actually very successful development strategies—such as Paliau's

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<sup>3</sup> See, for examples, Karl Polanyi (1944), Cyril Belshaw (1956), and of course Amartya Sen (1997), Hernando de Soto (2000) and Jeffrey Sachs (2005). Polanyi first argued that economic theory cannot be used to analyze nonwestern economies, and that the very term 'economy' has two meanings, the formal and the substantive, which only *coincide* in the modern market economy. This is related to Max Weber's distinctions between 'economic action' and 'rational economic action,' a distinction that incidentally underpins Peter Worsley's analysis of Melanesian cargo cults (Worsley 1968).

<sup>4</sup> For examples, Errington (1974); Hermann (1997); Lindstrom (1993a, 1995); and Schieffelin (1981).

Win Nasin Movement, Papua Besena, Kabisawali, Purari Action Group, Mataungan Association, and others. Indeed, many leaders of these movements have gone on to successful public service careers, and even—in the case of Paliau Moloat and Josephine Abajjah—been knighted for their contributions to the nation.

### Condescension

It has always been the religious organizations, those wrapped in quasi-Christian idioms granting grand supernatural authority to their leaders, which have stirred fear and prurient interest in observers. These include the ‘cults’ that have inspired lurid tales of fertility orgies, human sacrifice, and avowed Satanism.<sup>5</sup> Missionaries tend to talk about cargoism as an epistemological confusion, stemming from the inability to normalize rapid social upheaval brought on by the cash economy, a short-circuit so to speak of the social ‘evolutionary’ process. Never mind that the cash economy has always itself been part of the Mission, there seems to be a basic inability on the part of Melanesians to grasp a distinction between homiletic speech and a monopoly capital value system. Missionaries speak from the pulpit of the rewards of a life in Christ, and His bounteous good will, but cannot seem to impress upon their flock that these are just metaphors. From the web page of one PNG missionary, for example, we learn that:

Cargoism has come to mean any tribal preoccupation with the mystery of foreigner's gadgets and treasures. Cargoism is the natural outworking of their world-view assumptions as they try to make sense of the traumatic upheaval that foreign contact has caused. Thus cargo cults have emerged to somehow explain their wild experiences with

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<sup>5</sup> Such ‘cults’ have become inextricably linked to sorcery, traditional fears of female pollution and the new threats posed by HIV infection. See, for example, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 2, 2004: Tortures linked to AIDS ‘witchcraft’, By Craig Skehan. ‘An Australian researcher has linked Papua New Guinea’s burgeoning HIV/AIDS epidemic to the torture and murder of women accused of witchcraft. It was revealed yesterday that one woman died after having her uterus ripped out with a steel hook and others were held down and burned with hot metal. In one of the worst cases, witnesses say women were publicly tortured over almost two weeks to extract confessions they had killed people using sorcery. Nicole Haley, who recently returned from the remote, poverty-stricken Lake Kapiago area of the rugged Southern Highlands, interviewed victims and perpetrators. Since December, there had been four public vigilante-style ‘trials’ of accused witches involving prolonged torture, she said. However, there are no police stationed in the area to investigate and local elders who objected to the treatment of the women were threatened with firearms by young men, some high on marijuana. Dr Haley - a postgraduate research fellow at the Australian National University - has lived, studied and worked among the Duna people of Lake Kapiago for extended periods since 1994....At Lake Kapiago, an old man has admitted to beginning the first of what has become a spate of witchhunts by naming women he said he saw in dreams using sorcery to make people ill. A tragedy unfolded as six women - aged from their early 20s to early 50s - were held and tortured over 13 days. ‘They were beaten, stabbed, cut with bush knives, burnt with reinforcing iron and crowbars,’ Dr Haley said. ‘Two of the women were sexually assaulted and one had her uterus ripped out with an iron hook. That woman died as a result and others sustained horrific, disabling injuries.’ ...She said that the link between HIV/AIDS and witchcraft was being made elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, especially in the Eastern Highlands and Simbu provinces where dozens of women had been tortured.’

Westerners. They are especially eager to discover the mystery of the white man's wealth.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, the religious scholar G.W. Trompf has related the movements called 'cargo cults' to the more fundamental ethic of reciprocity in Melanesia, looking at them as either the 'payback' against colonialism, or retribution against non-reciprocal social relationships between colonial and church figures and PNG villagers.<sup>7</sup> This has also been the preferred theoretical framework for most anthropological explanations of cargo cultism. Anthropologist Lamont Lindstrom, for example, likens the cults to sociopolitical rebellions, on the order of peasant revolutions. And this is in keeping with the continuums other social scientists have constructed from Melanesian micronationalist movements (as rational responses to colonialism) to cargo cults (as extreme irrational responses), all of a piece as dialectical responses to colonial subordination. But whether we see these historical phenomena as primarily metaphysical or sociopolitical, they remain irresistible fodder for European readers. According to Lindstrom, cargo cults have always been 'a bit like cannibalism on the European palate. They are so tasty that people are prone to write and talk about them whether or not they are really cults or really about cargo, and whether or not observers have much direct experience of them.'

In a play on Edward Said's Orientalism, Lindstrom even calls this genre of writing about the astonishing and sensational Melanesian reactions to Western culture as an example of auto-Occidentalism: Europeans caricaturing themselves in the process of caricaturing the Other.<sup>8</sup> It is no small irony that one of the most prolific sources of this genre has long been PNG's own print media, in newspapers like the *Post-Courier*, where new 'cargo cults' periodically bubble up on the front pages.<sup>9</sup>

### **The new cargo**

Economists, political scientists, policy makers, legislators and pundits are all likely to use the term 'cargoism' in reference to naïve or excessively materialist

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<sup>6</sup> Sitton (1991).

<sup>7</sup> See Trompf (1994).

<sup>8</sup> See Lindstrom (1995).

<sup>9</sup> Just one example, which makes a cult's aspirations look suspiciously like the UN's: *Post Courier*, Thursday April 7, 1994 p.20: 'King' a cult leader—Kabwums. By Malum Nalu. 'Yesterday's Post-Courier story about a 'King' and a bizarre cult in the Kabwum area of Morobe Province has kicked up a storm among the Kabwum people. 'King' Locket J.B. Luam has reportedly sent messengers, some of whom talked to reporter Grace Maribu, with the message to 'Bring world leaders to our home so that we can all work for peace and goodwill.' The group has been working for 'One World Government' and sees the Queen, the Pope, the Australian Prime Minister, and the American President as members of the association. Whatever, Kabwum people who spoke to the Post-Courier admit that such a cult does exist in 'King' Lockety's village of Iloko. Their major concern, however, was the damage done to the Kabwum people by 'King' Lockety's followers going to the media. 'This is a real cargo cult,' complained Robert Ayang, a leader of the Maus Morobe Association in Lae. 'All this talk about One World Government from the Queen—that's impossible. How could they bypass the Government and go and see these people? What they are doing is real cargo cult as far as we are concerned. These people are not recognized by other people in Kabwum.'

behavior in the developed, rather than the developing world. Who are these people who want everything handed to them? Do they really think a Coke bottle (or bottling plant) can fall from the sky?

Inflated expectations in the village are always matched, somehow, by impossible assumptions in the donor office. What development officer really believes that Papua New Guinean villagers share the same relationship to money and private property as themselves? (Then the Gods surely must be crazy). Just as Melanesians are blind to means of production they cannot see (in a world without downstream processing), so too are expatriate laborers blind to the ideological bases of Melanesian cultures behind the thatch houses and *kaukau* gardens. Western culture is forever characterized as dominant, irresistible, a juggernaut of better technology and cleaner kitchens, higher moral standards and historical conquests. Melanesian culture is increasingly reduced to a compromised socialism, a distortion of a once-paradisiacal ethic of communal reciprocity into a nefarious anti-western '*wantokism*.' Hardly worth being propped up, better off being reduced to a signature virtue like 'hospitality' (so suitable to a tourism industry), Melanesian culture is inevitably to be subsumed by Western modernity.<sup>10</sup>

But development does not have to be as contentious as this. The very language of capitalism can be unpacked, so to speak, in a host country.<sup>11</sup> It can be adapted as an operational system to the local economy and its social meanings, rather than transshipped without an owner's manual. Currently the argot of aid agencies is so filled with 'project-speak' as to be at least as esoteric as a DVD warranty. Biodiverse, sustainable, gender-neutral, democratic, free-press, transparent, literate and ethnically diverse human development objectives are, first and foremost, imported, and yet rarely given their due as such. What are the 'rights of the child' in rural Enga Province? We continue to search for the noble savage who shares 'our' desire to extirpate political incorrectness from his/her own culture. But this is, of course, another form of cargoism: an impossible quest to find the universal cultural values, no less quixotically heroic than the clan councillor asking for a Pajero.

How do we continue to believe, for example, that grassroots Papua New Guineans have any free choice in their development anyway? With the proliferation of NGO's, CBO's and other acronyms with a storefront and desktop computer, it would appear that villagers can shop from a great marketplace of development possibilities, be that biodiversity, free enterprise, political transparency, capacity building, literacy, community health or whatever. Is there some trade fair for all the community trusts, conservation

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<sup>10</sup> 'We wanted to preserve Rai Coast culture and give it to the Lord,' explains Fr. Golly (pers. comm. 2001), speaking of the first days of the Catholic Church in Madang Province, in distinction from what he considers the more culturally annihilating policies of the Lutheran Church. 'The root of the problem,' he says, 'is the traditional PNG culture doesn't separate religion, culture and education, they're all in one.'

<sup>11</sup> See for examples Errinton (1974), Gregory (1980), Strathern (1971), Trompf (1994); cf. Polyani (1944).

alliances, global and world and international development cooperation conservancy agency habitat foundations? Do we really believe remote villagers are any more free to choose their development programme than they are their religious denomination? Is this not a part of voodoo development and evangelical economics?<sup>12</sup>

### **The King of Madang**

Between 1948 and 1955 no one in New Guinea was more controversial, more beloved and more maligned than Yali Singina, leader of the ‘Yali cult,’ ‘Wok Belong Yali,’ and later, the Dabsau Association. Yali himself lived just long enough to witness the declaration of PNG Independence, his life-long goal. However many of his followers remain alive and active around Madang, some of whom also see the election of James Yali, Yali’s son, as a fulfilment of their leader’s prophesy. Sunggum, Yali’s beloved wife and ‘Kwin’ is still alive, now living in Umuin Village part time, and Sor, Yali’s Rai Coast home, the rest of the time. Suabul Dui, one of Yali’s top flower girls, or *Plaua Meri*—the ‘sisters’ of the Yali church ... and a handful of other women of the movement still convene in Umuin every Tuesday, which has always been Yali’s holy day.

Yali was the prototypical ‘new man’ of the colonial era. He had been taught in the traditional *haus tambaran*, visited Australia during the war, attended Catholic church in his Rai Coast region, and looked to many German and Australian colonials to personify a bridge between traditional leadership and self-government to come. He was a bar boy, a Police Sergeant, an AIB Sergeant-Major, a WWII soldier, and a Patrol Officer for the Australian administration, in a career that seemed unstoppable. But a series of ‘revelations’ undermined his trust in authority and sidelined him, so to speak, from this stellar track. These ‘events’ are etched in the sacred lore of his life.

In the army, Yali was taken to Brisbane where he saw the zoo. It struck him that, despite church teachings, Australians might really be descended of animal *masalai* in the same way New Guineans were: Why else would they house and exhibit certain species? This was driven home to him when he saw an illustration of Darwin’s origin of species, charting the move from fish to rodent to monkey to man. More astonishingly, he discovered Australian museums held all the *tumbuna* carvings and war regalia the church had labelled ‘pagan’ and forcefully removed from New Guinea. Here was unimpeachable evidence of hypocrisy to Yali—proof, in effect, that church and government had been lying to New Guineans all along about the European’s origins, their religion, and their production of material wealth.

But as Yali’s political profile rose, and he became known for championing traditional culture, all kinds of ‘cult’ activists set up shop in his name. Soon there were ‘Yali’ cults all over the province and even in the Eastern Highlands—not all of which, however, had Yali’s approval. Two Yali imitators, Yakob and Kaumaip, espoused group sex and the bottling of semen

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<sup>12</sup> See Bigelow (2005); cf. Polyani (1944), Belshaw (1956).

in the name of fertility; they did much to taint Yali's original message. But it was Yali's own secretaries who eventually accused him of molesting a young *plaua meri*, some say because he had rejected their proposal to start a cult brothel. Yali did spend five years in goal, and his beloved wife, Sunggum, also spent a month in jail for cargo cult activity. Upon her release, she apparently told authorities she was willing to take all blame for anything they wished to attribute to her husband.

But Yali did not invent 'cargo cultism' in Madang. Some say the idea of 'cargo cult' was actually inserted in Yali's platform by Gurek, follower of the earlier local *Letub* cult. In point of fact, 'cargoism' arrived in Madang as early as the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> There were a number of 'cargo' events, all of them anti-authoritarian (against either church or government), including a planned uprising against the Germans in 1904, as reprisal for mistreatment of workers and hoarding all the material goods. The plan was to kill all German men, and adopt and marry their women and children. But it was scotched at the last minute when a *hausboi* spilled the secret to his boss. Around 1920 villagers gave up resistance and turned to the church as the safer route to a better life, sparking a wave of Catholic and Lutheran conversion up and down the coast. Pagan beliefs and practices become '*saming bilong satan*' and villagers threw themselves into baptismal ceremonies in the hopes of a fully-realized modern life. But by around 1935 such enthusiasm began to wane, and people began wondering when the bounty of the lord and of modernity would ever come their way. More importantly, they wanted their political autonomy back, their freedom and traditional authority. At the 1938 Lutheran conference at Mis and in 1939 at Bilau and Rai Coast, local teachers publicly asked missionaries what the secret of cargo was that they were hiding?

It was after this point (and what must have been unsatisfactory answers to the question) that a return to traditional culture began to sweep through the region. The old way became the new better way. Foreigners had long divested local culture of its *tambaran* powers in great bonfires of religious exorcism. Now was the time to get these powers back. If villagers couldn't get the church 'secrets,' they could get their old cultural authority back.<sup>14</sup>

### Yali's question

Perhaps most remarkably, the evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond gave Yali prominent billing in his 1997 bestselling history of human societies and their

<sup>13</sup> It came with Miklouho Maclay on his arrival in 1871 at Bongu on the Rai Coast. He suddenly appeared, as if from the moon, people said—the avatar of an ancestral *masalai*. And just as suddenly, he left. Then he came back in 1876, handing out *laplaps* and small gifts, even though he noted that people in some places already had stone tools and European clothes. By this time people began calling him Tibud, or god, and *Buga*, meaning *masalai*, or spirit of the dead. To this day, in some places, people still say '*magalai*' for '*masalai*', in a derivation of Maclay.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Lawrence's (1964) *Road Belong Cargo* is the first and still most definitive book on Yali's life and movement (remarkable also for being one of the few studies of PNG translated to Tok Pisin, as *Rot Bilong Kago*). Louise Morauta's *Beyond the Village* (1974) followed ten years later, only a year before Yali's own death. Since then several anthropologists have returned to Madang to talk about his legacy and what it means today.

unequal roads to development. *Guns, Germs and Steel* opens with a chapter entitled, 'Yali's question.' But just as films like *The Gods Must Be Crazy* are more entertainment than explanation of events, so too does Diamond's book simply perpetuate the clichés about Yali by recreating a scene between Diamond and Yali that more or less reduces the latter's life to a simple question: '... with yet another penetrating glance of his flashing eyes, [Yali] asked me, 'Why is it you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had so little cargo of our own?' (Diamond 1997:14).

'This book,' Diamond says, 'written twenty-five years later, attempts to answer Yali.'

But could that really have been Yali's question, or is it another example of Lindstrom's auto-Occidentalism—the projection of our own beliefs about how the humble villager views our bounteous good fortune? Virtually every scholarly analysis of 'cargoism' in Melanesia, and of Yali's movement in particular, dismisses the popular idea that New Guineans simply envy all the stuff white people have, in favour of a discussion of social inequality and (lack of) social reciprocity between Europeans and New Guineans.<sup>15</sup> As Frederick Errington and Deborah Gewertz point out in a history of Ramu Sugar Limited, Yali was most probably not asking Diamond about material goods, but rather about social equality.

Whereas Diamond thinks Yali coveted nifty Western stuff, Yali actually resented the not-so-nifty Western condescension that allowed Europeans to deny Papua New Guineans fundamental worth. The misunderstanding matters, we think, as more than an issue of factual error. That Diamond does not stretch his imagination to understand Yali's cultural views of the desirable and the feasible is consistent with the history he presents. (Errington and Gewertz 2004:8).

All the 'cargo' movements around PNG, including all those rightly or wrongly attributed to Yali, are at their very least, reactions to the inequality between villagers and their white overlords. In the continued debate over these movements, it is interesting that all sides claim higher ground for giving women more freedoms. The churches would abolish the *haus tambaran* or else release the secrets it hides from women, in the name of progress. And Yali's followers, too, emphasize that he abolished the *tambaran* secrets in an effort to achieve a male-female equality, as the way to modernize traditional culture. Catholics called the Lutherans repressive, the administration called all churches repressive, and Yali followers called the Europeans unfair.

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<sup>15</sup> See Adas (1979); Errington (1974); Errington and Gewertz (2004); Hermann (1987, 1997); Lawrence (1964); Lindstrom (1993, 1994); Otto (1992); Schwartz (1976); Stanner (1958); Trompf (1990, 1991, 1994); and Worsely (1968).

So, why *do* Papua New Guineans have so little when Europeans and Australians have so much? This might be put to the Yali followers who continue to meet every Tuesday around Madang. The heart of the surviving Yali movement is its Queen, Yali's wife, Sunggum, and the many *plaua meri* still alive, who continue to testify to Yali's efforts to elevate women's status. Amongst these amiable, intelligent older women, there appears no sign of the infighting and backbiting that turned the male *lo boses* and *membas* against each other in Yali's time. Like wartime nurses or sorority sisters, they exude pride and camaraderie. In Umuin Village, where they continue to meet, sometimes as many as seventeen *plaua meri* come together for hot tea, biscuits and talk on Tuesday mornings. But if they can be said to have an implicit question about inequality, it might not concern material wealth so much as social and political status. They never seem to lack for anything, and even when Mama Sunggum is whisked away by James Yali for a visit to the Governor's mansion, she's eager to get back to her tiny limbum palm house in Umuin.

It is Europeans who continue to conflate economic with social worth by mistaking 'Yali's question' about social equality for one about material wealth (and greed).

Fr Golly of Madang's Catholic church's Yomba Parish, tells us Yali supporters still come to him to consecrate their rituals and confirm or dispel rumors of Yali's second coming.<sup>16</sup> The man is legend now and no longer an urgent administrative problem. But it would seem that the threat he represented to church and the Australian administration can never be entirely forgotten. Fr Golly sees the persistence of cargo thinking amongst his parishioners as something fundamentally base and self-serving. He believes the agents of Satan did not die with Yali at Independence.

Yali was born in the Ngaing bush area of Sor, in the Rai Coast, about 1912. During the 1920s Lutherans were missionizing on the coast, but the Ngaing resisted both Lutheran and Samoan congregationalists working inland because they refused to give up their *Kabu* ceremony and dances. They were not averse,

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<sup>16</sup> Fr. Golly arrived in the Rai Coast in 1962 at the height of Yali's powers. Although he befriended the charismatic man and spent a great deal of time in his company, he believes Yali squandered his potential and eventually led his followers down the wrong path. 'Destruction,' he says of Yali's work. 'Total destruction.' (personal comment, 2001). He also says it was the fault of District Administrator Jack McCarthy, who was himself avowedly anti-church, in appointing Yali as the district's first indigenous Kiap. Following Yali's appointment the young man himself abandoned Christianity and instigated a return to 'paganism', in Golly's words, throughout Madang. But Yali was appointed by the lord to be a big leader, Golly says. 'He went to the devil, that's all. Satan took him.' He was blessed by the administrator early on, and they sent him on patrol, but he was Christian and was also preaching on patrol. 'But when he came back from his patrol to Manam, he went to report to the kiaps and they scolded him for his preachiness, they told him Christianity had nothing to do with this.' Golly continues: 'The government hadn't done much in New Guinea, not like Papua; it'd been the church that put in schools and hospitals, so the government was always a little jealous of the church, and McCarthy came from that position....But there were many many good kiaps, many good Christians,' says Fr Golly. (Ibid).

however, to exploiting church rivalries to their advantage, and Yali himself invited the first Catholic priest to Sor on the condition that the Catholics allowed them to keep the *Kabu* ceremony. On the other hand, their relationship with the Australian administration was such that, in 1942-3, the Southern Madang District actually welcomed the Japanese as liberators, and were not too happy when they were routed by the Allies in 1944. Peter Lawrence reports, 'On the one hand Allied troops treated them as human beings, sharing food, cigarettes and other luxuries, and paying handsomely for curios. Native soldiers attached to Allied units had been accepted more or less as equals, and those now employed by the Services in other capacities enjoyed similarly good relations. On the other hand, the behavior of ANGAU personnel was at times so inhuman that the Japanese, in places that escaped their brutalities while they were in retreat, were thought of with nostalgia.' (Lawrence 1964:60).

Lawrence (1964) called Yali Singina's development efforts his 'Raikos Rehabilitation Scheme', and it began after his return home to Sor in 1945, following the Japanese occupation and Allied liberation, and just before the installment of a Catholic priest, and months prior to the return of the Lutheran mission. At the same time, a number of Yali imitators and carpetbaggers built a momentum that became counterproductive to their real aims of attracting administrative interest and development to the area. They revived cult ceremonies and beliefs that gave the most secular of activities a sacred edge and once again alienated themselves from both government and church authority, giving the charismatic leader a reputation he had not intended and contributing to his eventual imprisonment for five years. Pales, Kasan, Gurek, Kaum, Uririba, Tagarab, Tarosi, Polelesi --to name a few, locally--claimed to be inspired by and variously accredited by Yali in their more bizarre cult rituals, while Yali remained variously Delphic and/or adamant in his denial of their claims, increasingly aware of his widening sphere of followers.

In 1947 Yali went to Port Moresby, then Lae, and suffered the disillusionment of other postwar colonial peoples: the awareness that their 'reward' for fighting alongside their masters during the War was not to be immediate or even substantive. He went home to institute the Yali laws covering: 'organization of work in the villages; house-building; marriage rules; sanitation rules; pig husbandry; road-work; water rights; reef rights; land rights; funeral ceremonies; polygyny; pregnancy; betrothal; proper conduct when away from home; the use of sorcery and love magic; penile incision; cargo cult prophesies; ritual honour to the spirits of the dead (*Kabu*); work on European plantations. playing *laki* (cards); drinking alcohol; fighting and generally disturbing the peace.' (Ibid:172-3).

A number of Yali's *lo bos* still live in Bilbil and around Madang, and they tell fantastic Yali and pre-Yali *Letub* cult stories, like the one about Lakit in 1962, when he invited Bishop Noser<sup>17</sup> to witness a demonstration of his traditional powers. He called for a volunteer, and someone stepped out of the crowd, bent

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<sup>17</sup> Whose library in Divine Word University contains one of the best collections of church history involving Yali and his movement.

down, and was swiftly beheaded by Lakit's bushknife. Lakit turned to the Bishop and said, 'That's *my* power—now what's yours?'

More often than not, however, it was Yali being challenged to prove his powers. Father Golly tells of a time just before Independence, he says, when he travelled to Sor on his motorbike, along a road built by Yali followers that still exists today. He saw about 300 men gathered there, but no women. This was after Yali had had his second stroke, he explains, and was half paralyzed. He was said to be giving his powers to his offside, Yangsai Dui. Beck [another follower] was talking, and he was saying, 'Yali is God. If Yali wants it to rain, it'll rain.' Fr Golly stood against a coconut tree and just laughed, he remembers. Beck went on to say that '*Ol misineri kam na oli tok God ino stap, istap antap. Tasol oli giaman. Yali stap, na Yali emi god.* If he wants the earth to quake, he can do it, if he wants the sea to wash over us, it will.' And Fr. Golly laughed and said, 'Okay, try it. Make it rain!' And everyone sort of waited for rain, and there was none. So Beck asked him to talk, recalls Golly, 'and I said that I had an abiding respect for Yali as a leader, and for his original vocation as a development leader. But the power of Satan was too strong and the witness of his body was just too big. After his first stroke I actually went to Sidor hospital and asked him to stop calling himself God and acting like this. I told him (Yali) he is ruined'. And at the meeting, too, I said, 'Prove your power!' He was so possessed by the devil that he must now be in purgatory. (personal comment, 1981).

## Dui

Yangsai Dui was a fellow Rai Coast man and Yali's *Lo Bos* Chairman and Campaign Manager. His wife, Suabul Areg, was a *plaua meri* from Sor hand picked by Yali to marry Dui; and when Yali died, Dui and Suabal became the caretakers of Yali's wife, Sugum, the *Kwin*. As for my own connection to Yali, Yangsai Dui was an important figure in my own life for several years until his death in 2003. John Doa (of Raun Raun Theatre) and I were researching a play to be based on the life of Yali, and we were in Amele, taking stories from the old Lo Bosses and other Yali followers, when one after another, we were referred to Dui, as keeper of the Yali flame. And he was. Loyalist and self-appointed historian, Dui was always in need of an audience and he took over our research immediately. He soon became a surrogate father to me and my family, as well, lord of our verandah and the centrepiece of the Madang town Yali community. Born in 1930, he was a young follower of Yali after the War, and, like Yali himself, a tireless campaigner for PNG Independence. Dui also befriended Professor Peter Lawrence whose 1964 *Road Belong Cargo* put Yali Singina on the world's intellectual map, so that students of Introductory Anthropology everywhere would eventually know his name (as I first came to know it).

Dui always wanted me to be more restrictive about the people who came through my house, which was soon his home away from the village. 'Don't let too many people stay,' he would tell me, 'don't let them bleed you.' He wanted my place to be his exclusive domain, and it soon was. Dui was the only person

who could really boss me around and make demands, fully aware of how much he gave in return. None of this involved material goods or 'development' per se, although I was always printing letters for Dui and he was forever arriving with garden food for the house. Dui was meticulous about clan dietary taboos, and would whisper a Yali prayer in *tok ples* whenever one of us felt sick or had a problem. We would sometimes visit Yali's widow, Sunggum, on the Rai Coast for the weekend, and on one such trip, I remember being almost asleep in the banana boat, in the kind of dream state that comes from the sound of a 40 hp motor plowing over calm seas. The boat bounced, and suddenly spun around above the surface of the water, knocked sideways, we saw, by a school of dolphins. They were dashing toward the shore and we were a toy, motor sputtering and all of us bolt upright and gripping the sides. Dui, never one to miss the signs of the supernatural monitoring his welfare, simply said, 'Dolphins. They saw me coming.' I completely believed him.

*A man can't be too careful in the choice of his enemies (Oscar Wilde).*

However broadened or softened Yali the King's image has become in the thirty years since his death, the man Yali Singina certainly left immutable impressions. Dui made a life from his memories of Yali, and never wavered in his belief that Yali was spiritually guiding him all the time. Father Father Golly, on the other hand, will never shake a feeling of disappointment. More than anyone else I have spoken to about Yali, it is Fr Golly who remains most condemnatory, most certain that Satan intercepted the course of the great man's career. What Yali meant to the people who knew him, and what he means to those left behind, is clearly distinct from what he has come to mean to a world of anthropologists, and political and religious scholars. He is a mutable symbol and a member of the global community of ideas now. But for Fr. Golly he remains a friend who betrayed his promise. 'My sister came here and offered herself to Yali as a witness, so that when he died she would carry his sins', he explains, 'and she was always sick with a battery of problems, heart, everything. But after Yali died she stayed sick. He couldn't help her. How could he if he was in hell? But he is not in hell. He is in purgatory for a long time, I think. It is clear he is not in heaven, or my sister would be helped by him now. But when I go to heaven I will see my old friend Yali there. Then on Independence Day Yali was begging me to help him. On Independence Day his followers all dressed beautifully in *tambaran* traditional dress, which is beautiful, and they waited because they expected cargo to come. They waited for cargo. Yali was scared because he was convinced they would slaughter him if cargo didn't come. But when I started out for Sor, after a session of speeches where I got the medal of honor in Saidor, I set off on my motorbike and saw Yali's true brother on the road who said, 'Don't go father. It's all *tambaran* people there,' he said. 'And we know you, you'll speak up and make fun of us. You go home and we'll call you later.' So Golly went home and he waited; he waited a week. And then the following Friday Beck showed up and asked the father to use the wireless to make the announcement over Radio Madang that Yali was dead. 'It was too late. Yali saw the Lord before he died, but he didn't take him in time. His adopted son, a catechist, had tried to go to him, to baptise him, but he arrived too late, too, and the body was already cold. I still wonder

why they didn't kill him Independence Day, and whether this was the work of Satan or the Lord that prevented him from being martyred.' (Op cit.)

### **Yali Junior**

Just to stir this pot a bit more, a new 'son of Yali' has emerged in Madang. Just after Pope John Paul passed away this year, a young man showed up in Matupi, a village inland from Madang's north coast, calling himself the new Yali- the son of Yali, or 'Yali Junior'. Matupi has always been a stronghold of Yali followers, although certainly not as important as neighbouring Umuin, where Yali's wife now resides with Dui's widow and family. But it was central enough to draw a sympathetic audience almost immediately. This young man claims to have no name or exact origin, other than being the son of Yali Singina. Some say he is an illegitimate last child, although others would call this unlikely, as Yali was ultimately considered infertile. James Yali, the most prominent of Yali's adopted offspring, has been too busy as Governor to attend to this claimant, but Yali followers from all over the province have been traveling to Matupi for Sunday sermons from Yali Junior since late April. By the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday Yali Junior was claiming that his own mother would arrive to see him soon. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Dui's widow, Suabul Dui, made her way to see this young man and was sitting anonymously in the crowd when the 'prophet' pointed her out, saying 'This old woman is my mother'. He could not have been more politic in his selection, as Saubel is a leading 'Flower Meri' in the Umuin area and a primary caregiver for Yali's elderly wife. Mama Sunggum herself has not met the prophet, but she has apparently told others he is the real thing. Many have been persuaded by the memory of a claim Yali himself made before his death, that he will return in the form of someone unrecognizable, perhaps a madman. And since the horrible 1962 incident with Lakit and Bishop Noser, the tale has permuted to be proof of Yali's anti-Papist powers. So when Yali Junior first arrived on the scene and claimed to have killed the Pope at his father's behest, it was powerful substantiation. He told the crowd he had been taken by Yali to Rome with five bullets to shoot the Pope. When asked what type of bullets these were, he responded by saying they were Heaven, Hell, Sun, Moon and Earth.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Dui's son Kuku was there to witness the prophet's claims, and he too found the man convincing enough to join the movement. By early July it had gained enough momentum to attract the constabulary, and police arrived to take Yali Junior into jail, on the basis of fomenting unrest. Rumours now swirl around this arrest, about how he was shackled, and how his young Flower Meri associate was raped by a policeman. At his July court appearance in Madang, Yali Junior was charismatic enough to draw a packed courtroom and private donations to secure him counsel. Most interesting perhaps about this figure is his physical self, because many now claim to have seen him change form, from a small dark-skinned man (resembling one of James Yali's sons, in fact) to a light skinned Papuan type while he waited in Madang town jail. 'He is a shape-shifter, possibly a spirit and not a man at all,' some say.

Over the years, many Yali imitators have come and gone. Two years ago a North Coast village claimed to be in the thrall of a new Yali cult, apparently in a bid to attract a Christian mission of some sort to their remote location. But what does the groundswell of empathy for this new claimant mean? Apparently he has no single message, no immediate goal (besides taking credit for the Pope's death). But he did spend time on each Sunday with the Book of Revelation, explaining to his followers that this is all *tok bokis* or parable for a real meaning only Yali knew. 'For that matter', he said, 'Yahweh is only a misspelling of Yali, whereas Jehovah is the name of the god for white people.'

What does this spiritual revival in Yali mean? There is something poignant about this phenomenon in 2005, something nostalgic and perhaps naïve. Whereas on the one hand Yali's actual son is running the province, he has not exactly been the prophecy fulfilled for some of his father's supporters. Thoroughly secular, socially flawed, and always mobile-phone equipped, some might call him the ultimate anti-Yali. No one would expect him to attend Tuesday meetings in Umuin with the Flower Meri. Indeed, perhaps the last doctrinal gesture of the elder *lo bos* and *plaua meri* has been to bequeath upon this stranger, this nameless shape-shifting charismatic, the spiritual authority of Yali Singina. They are taking the 'Sunni' stand against the prophet's direct descendents, and in many ways signaling the incorruptibility of Yali's libertarianism. Perhaps you cannot be Yali from a secure position in government, church or even commerce. Perhaps it is the resistance to any external authority that constitutes this kind of leadership, and ensures the profound empathy of grassroots everywhere. In 1972, one of the many charismatics who emerged in the wake of Yali Singina, an East Sepik leader named Yaliwan, got himself elected into the House of Assembly for Yangoru Saussia. But unlike Paliau Moloat or other charismatic leaders, Yaliwan couldn't thrive in Port Moresby. He was not meant for a national or international stage. 'Yaliwan's performance in the House was a sad one,' Michael Somare writes in his autobiography *Sana* (1975:85).

He did not really know how to handle the proceedings. He had no friends or supporters there. He just sat there and said nothing. Once he got up and said: 'I am the leader of Papua New Guinea!' Everyone clapped, and that was that. Another time he got up and said simply, 'Let's have independence.' On another occasion when the House wasn't sitting, he went into the empty chamber of the House and sat in the Speaker's chair. He had one of his supporters photograph him sitting there, presumably so he could tell his followers back in Yangoru that he had been recognized by the House as the leader of Papua New Guinea. Yaliwan became more and more disturbed and confused, and in 1973 he resigned.

Even though Yali Junior looks anachronistic today, and could be lumped with the under-medicated cult personalities who make more headlines than social development, he is not out of time or place. While there is a growing need for the sophisticated Bigmen of Moresby, there is no less need for the grassroots visionary today, the leader beholden to no one but his ancestors. It is in this respect that Yali and others like him will continue to raise questions regarding

equality, leadership and reciprocity in PNG. There will always be a Yali standing apart from any and all imported authority systems, be they ecclesiastic, economic or parliamentary, still asking, 'Where is *your* power?'. If this new Yali Junior can pull a wide and mixed following in 2005, without a clear message or agenda, then it is safe to say there is still a need for the charismatic common man leader in PNG—the anti-Bigman or Big Woman: the un-knighted, un-Land Cruised, un-lapped village leader. Where are those men today whom Michael Somare could hail so proudly in 1975 (Ibid, 56-7) as 'men fully committed to constructive opposition and not prepared to trade their political beliefs for the possibility of status, prestige, higher salaries and big black cars'? One of them might just be sitting in Beon jail, Madang.

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