Chapter 7

How the World Turns Upside Down: Changing Geographies of Power and Spiritual Influence among the Gebusi

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If the divide between precolonial and postcolonial circumstances is poignant in areas such as Melanesia, the need for perspectives that can encompass this apparent divide is also particularly great. In anthropology's present terminology, "gifts" are easily pitted against "commodities," "custom" against "business," "rituals" against "churches," and "myths" against "gospel"—sometimes as if these live in mutually exclusive worlds. In the midst of such conceptual dichotomies, it is important to understand rather than elide the processes whereby local people themselves experience change. On the one hand, long-standing cultural values and customs provide enduring axes of orientation to interpret new phenomena. But these axes themselves bend and twist as changed circumstances threaten core cultural assumptions.

In terms of space and territory, it is tempting to posit a contrast between smaller and sometimes shifting Melanesian village sites and the growth of permanent towns or cities. The former have long been connected by tracks or paths, while the latter bequeath roads in the colonial and postcolonial eras. Like their precolonial counterparts, towns and roads have their own brands of spiritual and social connectivity. Built-up sites of government presence or economic development are in some ways like sacred sites of power found in many New Guinea ethnogeographies, but they radiate economic and political impact as well as a distinctive kind of cultural influence. They can exert what appears to be a magnetic attraction on outlying areas through the hope of windfall profit, goods and wages or contractual trade. If spiritual power in the precolonial world was, as Kenelm Burridge (1969) described it, divine and nonreciprocating, the present imbalance between Melanesian centers of development and their surrounding villages renders the former paragons of power under postcolonial conditions. This influence is often asymmetrical; where tracks have long linked communities

in diffuse networks of spiritual connection or exchange, roads tend to subordinate outlying locations to centralized sites of economic development and political power. Rural areas can be seen as peripheral within these unequal hub-and-spoke configurations; "outlying" gets defined negatively against a centralized projection of economic largesse, including in local perception.

The present chapter considers geographies of power and spiritual influence as experienced precolonially and then postcolonially by Gebusi of the Strickland-Bosavi area. This general region was considered by some Huli peoples to be an area of spiritual power and the terminus of one of their important *Dindi Gamu* ritual tracks (Ballard, this volume). In Frankel's (1986: 19) initial statement, "The geographical dimension of the *Dindi Gamu* cycle concerns the flow of the ritual power broadly from south-west to north-east, from the Papuan Plateau to the central Highlands." These peoples to the southwest were also frequently believed to harbor the knowledge and ability to send dangerous sorcery. From the vantage point of the Great Papuan Plateau, however, groups to the north such as the Huli—who dwarfed the peoples to their south by their total numbers as well as by their population density—were themselves feared as warriors even as they were also accepted as trading partners. The same was true internally among many of the peoples of the Strickland-Bosavi area, which includes the Great Papuan Plateau and groups west to the Strickland River. For instance, the small Gebusi population feared their upstream Bedamini neighbors—who were more numerous and more densely settled than themselves—at the same time that they traded with them. Reciprocally, the Gebusi were perceived by the Bedamini as a source of sorcery power and of primordial mythic fertility.

These local dynamics, which form the subject of the present chapter, shed light on larger regional processes in two senses. First, they illustrate some of the ways that peoples considered to be a source point for spiritual force at the "end of the ritual track" may, from their own vantage point, experience a complementary or opposed flow of power and influence. Perceived by an adjacent group to be a source of fertility or spirituality, they may themselves feel overshadowed culturally if not demographically and militarily by these same neighbors. The extension of this trend, both analytically and geographically, is found along large sections of the south New Guinea coast, where groups ranging from the Asmat in the west to the Marind and thence to the Purari in the east derived their sense of primordial fertility and spiritual force from the same enemies from which they procured life-force through systematic headhunting.[1] In some cases, such as the Marind-anim, a reinforcing relationship between fertility extraction and ethnic domination was quite dramatic (van Baal 1966; Ernst 1979; Knauft 1993: ch. 8).

In the present case, a partly analogous dynamic can be put in motion to illustrate, second, how locally perceived tracks of spiritual and political influence have radically changed in recent decades. Cultural ascription of power and spiritual influence now includes new sites of development over which there is little local influence or control. These sites may comprise an administrative post or

town, as in the present case, or they may be remote sites recently found to have rich oil or mineral deposits, such as Mt. Kare, Porgera or the Hides oil reserve in the wider Papua New Guinea context. A number of southern highlands groups now magnify such lucrative sites within an expanding track of local mythological or ritual affiliation (see Ballard, Strathern and Biersack, this volume, and Clark 1993). As such, groups can harbor hopes—largely futile in fact—of establishing identification with, and land compensation for, a rich locale that lies beyond their own zone of primary habitation and resource use.

In larger theoretical terms, the present chapter attempts to show how the connection between ethnography and history can be a corrective against two complementary biases. One bias is to accord too much attention to gone or dying customs; ethnography can become an academic reconstruction that has declining significance for the present. In comparative terms, this bias has often been associated with the ethnography of Melanesia as a world area (Knauft 1995). An opposed bias, however, harbors excessive attention to radical change, including the suggestion that things indigenous have been washed away in a sea of postcolonial if not postmodern transformation.

These biases inflect the way that place and space are academically viewed. On the one hand is the assumption that indigenous conceptions of space and place—the spiritual and social cartography of a precolonial era—persist into the present. This suggests, as Sahlins (1981) puts it, that the more things appear to change, the more they in fact stay the same. But this perspective ultimately denies the structural and epistemological as well as the material dimensions of historical alteration.

On the other hand lies the notion that identities of spatial connection transform through recent change into ultraflexible "imaginaries." The ethnoscapes and postnational identities that Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1993), among others, talks about do have intriguing resonance with recent developments—including features in Papua New Guinea such as the proliferation of a far-flung "wantok" system and poignant contestations of regional and national identity (see Foster 1995; Errington and Gewertz 1995; Carrier and Carrier 1989). But in the theory that attends these developments, concrete spaces and places can become a singularly abstract and postmodernized Space that proliferates more in the imagination of the analyst than in the concrete beliefs and images of people on the ground (e.g., Keith and Pile 1993; Bird et al. 1993; Lash and Friedman 1992; Miller 1995; Featherstone et al. 1995; cf. more ethnographically articulated analysis following Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Knauft 1996: ch. 4).

Despite excesses and oppositions, these polar positions have something to recommend insofar as they can combine in the analysis of historical and contemporary specifics. Permutations on older beliefs and practices can remain relevant *especially* when the world becomes topsy-turvy with change. But resultant innovations sometimes do move in genuinely new directions. This twirling relationship—between received influences and altered circumstances—needs to be

documented and analyzed at its intersection rather than polarized into separable processes or theoretical divergences.

RECEIVED PATTERNS OF PLACE, POWER AND DIRECTION

To start literally on the ground, as it were, conceptions of place and directionality are deeply important among the groups of the Strickland-Bosavi area, as they are in many areas of New Guinea. Schieffelin (1976) has shown the spiritual and emotional significance of forest sites and the experiential track between them for the Kaluli. Shaw has documented the linguistic centrality of locatives and directionality among the Samo (1990: 32–34; Shaw and Shaw 1973). Sørum (1990) has emphasized the importance of Bedamini spatial direction through the idiom of locational confluence, or "coming together," which includes the convergence of tributary streams on the landscape; kinship coalescence, clanship and coresidence; and the "forked branch" of ribs on the chest that is literally the heart of Bedamini male initiation.

For the Gebusi, the ultimate locative contrast has been between the upper world, the terrestrial world of people, and the lower world. The upper and the lower worlds are populated by distinctive spirits, who have visible form through living species of animals or plants. Many of these are graphically embodied as a compressed tableau in the upper and lower body-costume forms of the Gebusi ritual dancer (see Table 7.1). In general, spirits and species that are "above," or "higher" (*helo*) are associated with treetops, beneficent spirits and the upstream. Conversely, spirits and species of the world "below," or "lower" (*hemo*) are associated with water, spiritual malevolence and the downstream. On the terrestrial world that mediates them, these contrasts are directional as well as locational; they inform the perception of upstream and downstream movement and relative position. Given that there is an average elevation of only 200 meters, the distinction between upstream and downstream may seem fine, but the Gebusi area drains in a consistently east-to-west direction, from the foothills of the Great Papuan Plateau downward to the Strickland River (see Figure 7.1).

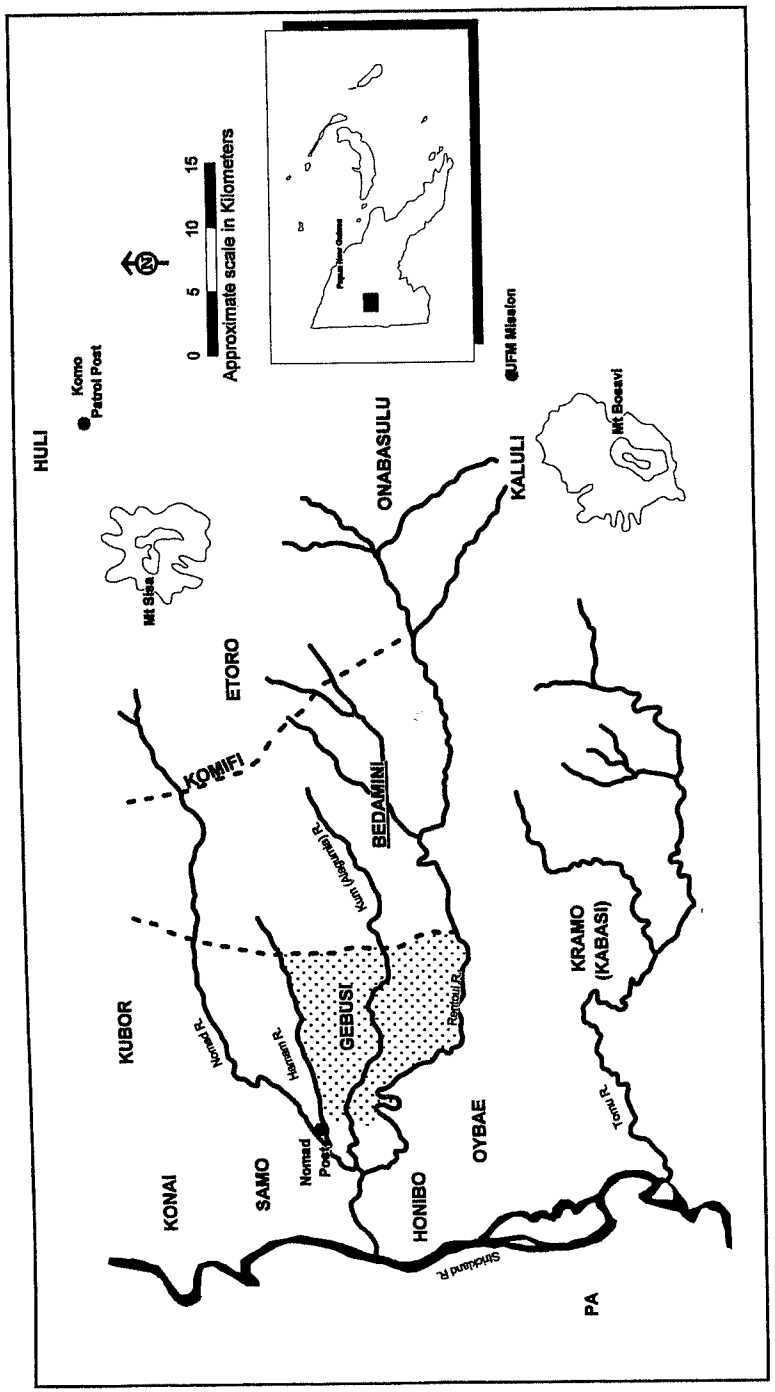
In the precolonial Gebusi world, political and spiritual power intruded primarily from upstream. The Gebusi were a target of predation by the numerous Bedamini people to their east; Bedamini attacked them in large-scale and sometimes long-distance cannibal raids, actively displaced those Gebusi in border areas and extorted Gebusi women (Knauft 1985a: Ch. 8; 1985b). Linguistic evidence and ethnohistory indicate that the Bedamini had already decimated and obliterated groups once intermediate between Gebusi and Bedamini communities and were actively "Bedamini-izing" Gebusi border areas at the time of sustained Australian contact, which began in 1962. This pattern continued in the colonial era; between 1968 and 1979, census records suggest that a natural decline in the Gebusi population of 179 persons was countered by immigra-

Table 7.1
Significance of Various Dance Costume Parts[a]

Costume Part	*Gebusi name*	spirit form	Age/sex of spirit form	spirit abode
Upper world - Young spirits				
Two swaying beige hornbill tail feathers	*Barg⊃faf*	Hornbill	young man	treetops
Red bird of paradise headdress	*Sagrab doli*	Red bird of paradise	young woman	treetops
Cassowary headdress[b]	*Koyayp doli*	Cassowary	old woman	ground/ underground
Cuscus fur headband	*Boyam tow⊃*	Cuscus	young woman/young man	trees
"Halo" of white egret feathers	*Bilway*	White egret	young woman	treetops
dogs teeth eye-band	*S⊃f moy*	Dog	(none)	land
Pearlshell (under chin)	*B k*	Crescent moon	(none)	sky
Bark shoulder cape	*Dug⊃*	Mulberry tree bark	young woman	tree
1 to 3 stuffed red birds of paradise	*Sagrab*	red bird of paradise	young woman	treetops
Lizard skin drumhead	*Kalaw k⊃ t⊃f*	Lizard	young man	trees
Lower world - Older spirits				
Drum body	*Du⊃*	Crocodile	older man	underwater
Drum mouth	*Di⊃ Mogar*	Fish mouth	older man	underwater
Wali palm "tail" plumage	*Wali*	Fast-flowing stream/river	(none)	water
Crayfish claw rear rattle	*Dias moliar*	Big fish (tail)	older man	underwater

[a] Significations are stated outright by informants when asked or are clear from narratives and seance songs.

[b] The cassowary feathers are screened by the red bird of paradise in front of them and are not a visible part of the costume. The primary purpose of the cassowary headdress in the dance costume is to provide a base and point of attachment for the swaying barg ⊃ feather which protrudes above it (and above the red bird of paradise). This may help explain the presence of cassowary as an "older person/underworld" costume form on the upper half of the body.



Map 1
The Strickland-Bosavi Area

tion—almost entirely by Bedamini—of 192 persons, leading to a net population increase of 1 person per year (Knauft 1985a: 239).

Bedamini intrusion was reflected and facilitated by the tendency of Gebusi in border areas to rely on Bedamini spirit mediums to conduct sorcery inquests and arrange retribution against Gebusi sorcerers in the wake of Gebusi deaths from sickness. Indeed, all long-distance Bedamini raids into central Gebusi territory are believed by the Gebusi to have been abetted by the Gebusi themselves—with the Bedamini extending their mandate to a generalized killing of the targeted settlement as a whole.

Vectors of political and spiritual power were exercised asymmetrically in an upstream-to-downstream direction *within* as well as between ethnic groups. In Bedamini, the word "Gebusi" itself means "lower down people," who were also referred to as "our meat"—that is, human hunting ground.[2] Even within Bedamini territory, upstream groups colloquially referred to Bedamini neighbors downstream as "their Gebusi" (Sørum, personal communication). Available evidence suggests that downstream military pressure may have originated near the border between the Bedamini and the Komifi (or "hill people"), who were located just east of the Bedamini and west of the Etoro (Sørum, personal communication; cf. Kelly 1977: 10–11; 1993). Over time, and despite fluid and complex countercurrents, military and perhaps demographic pressure ultimately pushed westward and downstream from eastern Bedamini territory, reverberating from group to group in domino fashion.

Patterns of violence among the Gebusi themselves were directed in a decidedly east-to-west direction, that is, from upstream to downstream along Gebusi settlements. In a corpus of 118 Gebusi sorcery accusations for which a locational difference between sorcerer and avenger was discernible, exile, attempted homicide or homicide eventuated in 82 percent (50/62) of the accusations made in a northeast-to-southwest direction. By contrast, such outcomes eventuated in only 18 percent (11/56) of the accusations made in a southwest-to-northeast direction (Knauft 1985a: 227). Violent forays downstream also included incursions by the Gebusi against yet lower elevation populations such as the Honibo or the Oybae, who seldom if ever retaliated. As between Gebusi and Bedamini peoples in border areas, the downstream group alternately intermarried with, lost women to, and were the target of aggression from, upstream settlements.

These patterns correspond with ecological and population gradients. Within the area under consideration, elevation ranges from up to 700 meters among Bedamini communities down to 125 meters for the Honibo along the banks of the Strickland River. As one descends this gradient, root crops diminish incrementally in favor of bananas and sago—and malaria. Though longhouse settlements are common throughout this area, their concentration diminishes commensurately. The population density of the Bedamini at 5.5 per square kilometer more than halves to 2.7 per square kilometer among the Gebusi and drops to 0.8 among the Honibo and to 0.4 among the Oybae. Linguistic and ethnic population sizes are particularly discrepant—even though all groups are small

Table 7.2
Intergroup Contrasts

Group	Elevation	Population	Population Density
Bedamini	200-700m	4,000	5.5 per sq km
Gebusi	150 - 200 m	450	2.7 per sq km
Honibo	120 m	125	0.8 per sq km
Oybae	120 m	150	0.4 per sq km

by highlands standards: Bedamini numbered between 3,800 and 4,000, whereas Gebusi numbered 450, Oybae 150 and Honibo 125 (see Table 7.2).

It is important to note, if only briefly, that local differences in marriage, compensatory exchange and leadership parallel this gradient. Virtually all the Strickland-Bosavi groups practiced what might in general terms be considered direct, or person-for-person, reciprocity in marriage and homicide, as well as shamanistic, or great-man, leadership (see Godelier 1986; Godelier and Strathern 1991). However, those groups at higher elevations toward the southern highlands, such as the Etoro and the Kaluli, cross-cut direct exchange with payment of compensation valuables, termed *su*, at marriage and sometimes as recompense in cases of sorcery or homicide (Schieffelin 1976; Kelly 1977, 1993). Marriage exchange among these groups was generationally delayed, with a man preferentially marrying a woman from the clan his father's sister had been given to. Lower elevation groups such as the Gebusi, however, have practiced a purer form of direct exchange that did not involve raising bridewealth and did not allow for material compensation in cases of sorcery and homicide. Gebusi marital exchange is direct and tallied only with respect to the current generation. Correspondingly, Gebusi secular leadership roles have been more attenuated than among the Bedamini, Etoro and Kaluli peoples to their east.

Some of these differences were illustrated in an incident in which a large contingent of Bedamini men marched into our settlement. Their leader loudly demanded—and quickly received—a large live pig and 20 kina as recompense for a Bedamini man who had died (assumedly from sorcery) while living in Gebusi territory. The pig was appropriated as a substitute for the life of the Gebusi man suspected as the sorcerer responsible. Indeed, the Bedamini leader announced to the suspected sorcerer that he would kill and eat him if the pig was not turned over. While the payment of a pig appeared as legitimate "compensation" to the Bedamini, it was perceived as a bald and alien form of extortion to the Gebusi.

The Gebusi ultimately kill their own sorcery suspects rather than discussing, demanding or receiving compensation from them. (In the interim, Gebusi may *give* pork rather than extorting it from one of their suspected sorcerers, that is, to shame him or her.) On the other hand, the Gebusi never appear to have generalized killing of sorcery suspects to other members of a settlement as a general massacre, even in downstream interethnic conflict. Instead, practices of raiding and collective slaughter were redirected as "raids" against fish people, who provided the Gebusi with their own lower-living meat. Large-scale Gebusi fish poisoning is organized like a military expedition against an enemy who may be preyed upon with impunity. The Gebusi may even float a lighted bundle of sticks and thatch downstream with the derris-root poison. This is said to burn the top of the fish-world abode and help flush out the fish for slaughter. The Gebusi liken this to the traditional Bedamini practice of torching Gebusi longhouses and forcing out the inhabitants for dispatch by the encircling warriors.

COUNTERCURRENTS AND COMPLEMENTS

Despite such upstream-downstream asymmetries, the Gebusi were feared by the Bedamini for their sorcery. Correspondingly, the Gebusi feared the Oybae and Honibo peoples to their west and claimed that these groups sent the epidemic sickness associated with the cooler weather and clouds that roll in from the lowlands during March and April.[3] (So, too, the Gebusi believe that spirits of crocodiles and particularly large fish that live on the river bottom can send debilitating sickness.) Projection of sorcery onto adjacent lower-elevation peoples is common in interior New Guinea; the Huli feared sorcery from Great Papuan Plateau groups, and Weiner (1988: 1) cites analogous examples across other sections of the highlands-fringe border.

In addition to the upward flow of imputed sorcery, valued trade items also moved in an upstream manner across the Strickland-Bosavi landscape, including red ocher, tobacco, dogs teeth necklaces, sago, bone-tipped arrow points and black stone from the Strickland River used for stone adzes. In aesthetic terms, drum and arrow designs were adopted by the Bedamini from peoples to the west such as Gebusi and Samo (Sørum, personal communication). Reciprocally, pearlshell crescents and shell pendants were traded from highland areas downstream, at least by the 1950s.

In short, indigenous spiritual and economic influences tracked both ways across upstream/downstream gradients from the Strickland River to the Great Papuan Plateau. These tracks were facilitated by border settlements and intermarriage between adjacent ethnic groups. The result was a graded cultural continuum that stretched at least from the Strickland River in the west to the Etoro by Mt. Sisa and the Kaluli by Mt. Bosavi in the east. This pattern is reflected linguistically in the chaining of closely related dialects across the region, with each group having a high percentage of cognates with adjacent peoples (e.g., 70–90%) but a progressively lower percentage of cognates with groups further

Table 7.3
Linguistic Association between Gebusi and Adjacent Linguistic Groups

Linguistic Group	Approximate population	Percentage cognate with Gebusi	Years since diverged from Gebusi[a]
Honibo	125	88.2	290 ± 60
Oybae	150	81.5	470 ± 80
Samo	650	70.2	815 ± 110
Kubor	450	46.1	1780 ± 175
Bedamini	4000	32.0	2625 ± 235

[a] Glottochronology has been estimated using the formula $t = \log C/2\ r$, where t is the time depth in millennia, C is the percentage of cognates (expressed as a fraction of 1), and r is 0.805, the generally accepted constant for cognates remaining permillennium. Standard error is estimated as $\sigma = C(1 = C/n)$, where σ is standard error, C the percentage cognate, error is estimated as $\sigma = C(1 = C/n)$ where σ is standard error, C is the percentage cognate and n is the number of word pairs compared. By adding C and σ, a new C_1 is obtained, which is resubstituted in the original formula to compute the potential error variance in years. Formulae are taken from Gudschinsky (1964).

distant (Shaw 1986). The extent of the Bedamini's westward demographic and cultural intrusion is a remarkable counterexample to this more general pattern; Gebusi and Bedamini share only 32 percent cognates in basic vocabulary despite their extensive border zone and joint villages (see Table 7.3).

The complementary relationship between Gebusi and Bedamini societies is nicely illustrated in their origin myths. For the Gebusi, we can consider the origin myth of a major clan that was displaced downstream from what is now a Gebusi/Bedamini border area. The myth (Knauft 1985a: App. C) starts as an attempt by men of the Gebusi clan to marry tree-women who come down but get scared and run back to the sky. The women return later, accompanied by their armed male kin. In a scene echoing the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, the Gebusi on the ground think the sky-men have come to give away their daughters in marriage. Instead, however, the sky rumbles with war cries and rains down huge boulders, which crush to death all those who live below. Only a brother and his sister survive, until another storm rains down smaller stones, the size of eggs. One of these smaller stone eggs splits. The halves hatch into a boy and a girl, who are cared for by the original brother and sister until the youngsters grow up and marry each other. The descendants of these children are said to be the modern-day descendants of the clan.

Clearly here, the strong, angry people from "above" disdain giving their daughters away in marriage and rain unilateral violence upon the Gebusi below. The latter, however, must aid these stony progeny if they wish to repopulate their clan. The connotations of stone are highly resonant in this regard. There is almost no stone in the Gebusi landscape itself, apart from that which washes down the river beds, sometimes in a torrent, from upstream elevations. The primary characteristic of stone for the Gebusi, its hardness, or *gof*, is also the word for anger, strength, violence and the hardness of penile erection. The conceptual universe of *gof*, which is deeply ensconced in Gebusi ethnopsychology (Knauft 1985a: ch. 3), thus has locative features that almost intrinsically associate it with the upstream Bedamini. These associations are especially strong for clans in border areas, who are closer to higher-elevation "rock country" and whose identity and physical survival have also been most directly shaped by Bedamini encroachment from above/upstream.

The Bedamini origin myth, by contrast, is based on the appropriation of a lower-world woman named Dunumuni (Sørum 1990: 189). It begins with a boy going down to fetch water from a spring. Water pours forth from a hole in the rock, but the water has "rubbish" in it and is not clean. A very small woman emerges from the lower world. Seeing the woman, the boy becomes aroused and gets an erection. But when the woman grabs his penis and wants to have sex, an older man watching from the bushes becomes angry at the woman and shoots her with an arrow. The woman screams and disappears. She is not dead, however, and appears later further to the west. All the Bedamini gather downstream to shoot at her, but still she doesn't die.

The subsequent section of the Dunumuni myth resonates with cult practices north of the Strickland-Bosavi area:

> The men tied her hands and legs to a stick and carried her all around the Bedamini area. As they carried her from place to place she urinated. The urine formed small brooks, the brooks grew into rivers, and from the rivers came pigs, cassowaries, birds, fish, snakes, lizards, and all animals. [In another variant of the Dunumuni myth, the men cut open her stomach and the animals emerge from it.] Before there were no rivers, only bush. But she did not die. . . . They carried her everywhere. (Sørum 1990)

As the Bedamini carry Dunumuni and put her down in the various sections of their territory, the dips and hills of its present landscape are formed; her urine forms its streams. But even as the land is formed, Dunumuni doesn't die. Finally the people of Lugumari—the center of Bedamini territory—gather and kill Dunumuni by pelting her with small sticks. Her body is put on a burial platform, and her shoulders and raised knees become the hills in that area. Then her body is cut in pieces and divided among all the Bedamini clans. Each clan takes its part of Dunumuni's body and buries it individually in its own clan land.

As clearly indicated in the final episodes of this myth, Dunumuni's body and bodily effluvia, which originate from downstream/below, are appropriated to

animate and invigorate the Bedamini landscape. As such, the myth resonates with Duna/Huli themes to the north in which body parts of a foreign victim and/or female effluvia form a primordial basis for the fertility of the land and the grounding point for sustainable existence (Strathern, this volume). From a certain frame of reference, the myth of Dunumuni forms the southern terminus of the ritual track that flows through the fluid landscape of Duna and Huli identity to the lowland people whom they refer to as "Duguba."

A point of final articulation along this track is indicated by its rebound and redirection back to the Bedamini in the Gebusi story. Whereas the Bedamini world originates in lethal appropriation of a lower-world woman—a woman who affords their landscape form and fertility—out of a rock from a watery and trashy hole, the Gebusi fail to marry women from above and are largely crushed to death by the women's stony kinsmen. The crude social and demographic analogue to these complements is that downstream Gebusi groups have provided women, fertility and additional topography for the Bedamini to populate. Conversely, the strength and violence of the Bedamini men from above form the hard context that the Gebusi in border areas must tolerate and absorb in order to themselves survive.

As opposed to alien exclusivity, each side of this cultural border acknowledges the other as its primordial complement. From their own vantage point, then, the Gebusi do not continue the spiritual projection of primordial fertility to groups further west or south, such as the Honibo or the Oybae. Claiming they have always lived in their present location, Gebusi clans eschew any mythic derivation or external source of primordial power.[4]

NOMAD STATION

Examples of ethnic complementarity informed by political or military asymmetry are evident from many areas of Melanesia. These include relationships between riverine and bush peoples along the Sepik and other major rivers and inland versus coastal peoples in insular Melanesia and along the New Guinea south coast.[5] But spatial relations and directions of power can change dramatically, if not turn upside down, with colonial intrusion. For the Gebusi and the Bedamini, a new site of power arose with the establishment of the Nomad patrol post. The Nomad station was established at the downstream edge of Gebusi territory in 1962. Construction patrols led by Australian officers arrived by land from the east, having traveled from Kiunga and then fording the Strickland River—which the Gebusi see as the boundary between the lower world and the yet more ominous land of the dead. The main task of the Nomad patrol officers during the 1960s was to lead pacification patrols upstream into Bedamini territory, which was at that time considered the last major uncontrolled area of tribal warfare—not to mention cannibalism—in Australian Papua and New Guinea (Ryan 1969: ch. 6; Kirk 1969). Saturation patrolling of the Bedamini was largely successful in suppressing warfare by the 1970s. It also facilitated

the onset of Bedamini missionization and other outside influence. The Gebusi, on the other hand, were described in patrol reports as "quiet tractable people." For Gebusi clans, patrol officers became the new paragons of military power as well as the possessors of amazing wealth. But having bypassed the Gebusi, the government had little interest in either disparaging or enlightening these seemingly timid people. Their contacts with Gebusi people were generally limited to cursory census patrols—a couple of hours spent in each major village once a year tabulating households. Even this contact dropped off with the departure of the Australian administration in 1975. The Gebusi's own practices of homosexual initiation, spirit séances, and internal sorcery retribution were left remarkably intact through the early 1980s; indeed, the direction of government attention to the Bedamini left Gebusi individuals free to pursue their own internal sorcery killings with surprising impunity (Knauft 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1989; cf. 1993). In larger terms, however, the effective source of external influence—not to mention unprecedented material wealth—now effused from the downstream rather than upstream end of Gebusi land. By the mid-1970s, the Bedamini were effectively pacified by the new men from Nomad. The source and direction of power were reversed; it was almost as if the rivers were flowing upstream.

During the 1970s, though it still had no store, Nomad, with its government post and airstrip gradually became a center for schooling, health administration, a jail, and a sporadic market. By the early 1980s, it had rows of houses for government workers and was developing "corners" where increasing numbers of village people, especially young men, might stay for shorter or longer periods of time. In short, Nomad was on its way to becoming a town. The main road in the area—largely impassable but still symbolically important—led from Nomad to the mission station at Mougulu, bypassing Gebusi territory but running into the heart of Bedamini country.[6] Between missionary interest and their legacy of pacification, the Bedamini became the focus of several economic and spiritual development schemes during the 1970s. The Gebusi, however, felt very little in the way of government influence, money, schooling or missionization through the early 1980s. The reversed flow of influence seemed to be going around rather than through Gebusi territory. Particularly for those living at a distance, the patrol post remained a powerful, feared and somewhat magical place between 1980 and 1982. Indeed, it became the haven of those Gebusi sorcerers wily enough to realize that living under the shadow of the patrol officers gave them a practical immunity from being pursued or executed by another Gebusi.

PORTRAITS OF CHANGE IN SPIRITUAL GEOGRAPHY

Gebusi rumors about pending wealth and power increased when a base camp for a temporary seismic survey was set up next to the Nomad station by Chevron Oil in late 1981. It was at this time that Wahiaw, a spirit medium living in a remote Gebusi hamlet, developed a new genre of spirit séance. His innovation

was to turn the fleeting and ephemeral images of most spirit songs into coherent and evolving mythical dramas. These spirit-stories were avidly listened to, remembered and recounted by audience members to other listeners afterward; they became a regular part of the Gebusi narrative corpus.

One of Wahiaw's most celebrated narratives provided a rich interpretation of the changes augured by the Nomad patrol post. The narrative begins with four children being enticed down a hole by an old woman; they are kidnapped and disappear. Searching for them, their mother finds the hole and descends a cavernous underground waterfall, emerging, like Alice in Wonderland, on the other side of the millennial looking glass.

Much of the narrative takes place in this lower world. As opposed to a murky place of danger and notoriety—associated usually with sorcerers and evil spirits—the lower world in the narrative is a revelation of cargo. Under the water, the woman in the narrative finds a huge Western-style house, fully furnished, where she is welcomed by another woman. Together, they dig a few netbags of sweet potatoes (seldom raised by the Gebusi but known to be eaten by patrol officers) and bring them to the patrol post. Shaking with fear, the women are admitted through a series of doors until they finally meet the Patrol Officer. Gruff, fearsome and with a nose as big as a housepost, he swivels in his office chair all day and alternately dispenses orders and grants favors. Significantly, he is called a "culture mother" (*kogway wi*)—the same persona who, in other myths, displays Gebusi customs of reciprocity and cannibalism. To the woman's amazement, this unusual culture mother gives them Western-style trunks packed with money and clothes in exchange for their meager bags of sweet potatoes. (The audience exclaims in surprise and delight.) The women take the trunks home in a new pickup truck. They examine their wealth, shower with soap, get dressed in new clothes, turn on their pressure lamp and then eat a store-bought meal from plates with Western utensils. After dinner they go to sleep on mattresses with sheets under a mosquito net. All this is high fantasy for the Gebusi; the audience goes wild.

A daily scenario then develops, with the Patrol Officer giving the women trunks of clothes and money in exchange for their sweet potatoes. When the woman asks for the missing children, however, the Patrol Officer becomes angry. The children are under contract to work at the patrol post; their absence is the price of the goods the woman receives in trade. Since the children are indentured, the very process of earning them back ensconces their mother in the same material seductions that continue to separate them from her. Over time, she becomes despondent and cries for her missing children. The Gebusi audience expresses sympathy; one man exclaimed that "Living like that would be like living in jail [at Nomad], even if she did have clothes and money!" Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980) could hardly have found a more appropriate analogue.

Eventually, however, the contract is up; the children are returned. Moreover, the mother receives the patrol boxes full of goods and money that each of the children has earned. Though they all drive in their new truck back to their original settlement in the upper world, they do not stay there long. The woman's husband has forsaken her by taking a new wife during her absence; he has been untrue and must suffer the consequences. The woman and her children thus leave him and go back down to the patrol post, leaving the village, still impoverished, behind forever. Down below, on the other hand, the Patrol Officer welcomes the family back and gives them all big houses to live in, full of Western amenities. The children all marry outsiders, with huge bridewealth (a custom the Gebusi themselves have so far steadfastly refused). The tale ends with a Gebusi heaven-on-earth down at the patrol post, and the audience exclaims about what a fine way to live that would be.

At one level, Wahiaw's narrative emphasizes the split between indigenous and wage economies. He plumbs the deep sorrow that is pervasive in Papua New Guinea due to the schism of separation between relatives in town and those in the village—the new "Sorrow of the Lonely" in a postcolonial world (cf. Schieffelin 1976). Nevertheless, doubts are all resolved and washed away through narrative as the wage economy persists in its largesse; what starts as pain ends up as millenarian luxury.

Wahiaw's innovative challenge to both received and intruding forms of power is especially remarkable given his personal circumstances. Besides living in a particularly remote settlement, Wahiaw himself was a cripple; he had to be carried to other hamlets, and it is quite possible that he himself had never even seen the patrol post. His exceptional vision of wage labor, commodities and their tension was generated from tranced associations—his spirit-world visions—informed only by the fleeting and uncertain observations of others.

Wahiaw's prescient awareness suggests several things. First, it shows how ritual and economic tracks may change from a precolonial to a postcolonial condition. The image of dominant-outsider has been shifted from the Bedamini to the officers at Nomad. In the process, the directional flow of power has been reversed or inverted—from the people above to the people below. The giver of custom has become the giver of commodities. The revolutionary nature of this inversion easily provides the grist for further millenarian transformations. In the process, the fear and former terror of outside power give way to a world of unprecedented wealth.

However, this image of abundance is patently utopian. Moreover, it presumes a kind of exchange between the Gebusi and outsiders that is doomed in both economic and cultural terms. If the Bedamini killed Gebusi people, often with impunity, they also intermarried them and actively incorporated them as mythical, economic and even linguistic parts of themselves. For the Nomad administration, on the other hand, the Gebusi have been largely a nonentity; their ultimate treatment is one of neglect and noninterference rather than active engagement.[7] Nomad was often considered a remote, bushy and uninviting patrol post—a desultory "Siberia" for government workers within Papua New Guinea's remote Western Province.

For the Gebusi, however, Nomad is increasingly important as a site of power that emanates spiritual as well as political and military influences. Try as they might to infiltrate its corners, the kinds of wealth and activity that Gebusi people glimpse remain outside their grasp. More deeply, the ongoing reciprocity and direct exchange that are still axiomatic in Gebusi life and myth typically cannot be found in town. This is likely to be the case even if some Gebusi do adopt bridewealth and other forms of person-for-wealth compensation, as Wahiaw's second narrative begins to suggest. Insofar as Nomad town becomes increasingly important for the Gebusi, their world may indeed turn upside down.

CONCLUSION

Spiritually as well as economically and politically, Gebusi worlds of power have inalterably changed. If anything, the Gebusi find colonial and postcolonial government far more beneficent than they did Bedamini rule during the precolonial era, despite their fear, uncertainty and sense of exclusion from the Nomad post. Even the most basic structures of Gebusi reciprocity and sociality may alter in concert with outside influence. As Wahiaw clearly realized, the price of wealth can be social relationships based on contracts that one has little control over rather than solicitous exchange or person-for-person reciprocity.

But these changes occur via the influence of indigenous configurations of power—here power in its epistemic as well as its political or economic dimension. As against this awareness, there remains a tendency in many large-scale politicoeconomic analyses to consider local groups as subject to intrusion and domination without adequately considering the way cultures reach out and actively inflect or embrace change. So, too, newer perspectives stressing the impact of late modern or postmodern cultural and economic development often underrate how change is shaped by the twisting of longer-standing cultural orientations. As the present case equally illustrates, outside opportunities and pressures are engaged through deeply rooted cultural and social orientations. Developments are not just viewed through Gebusi perspectives; they are defined by uniquely Gebusi responses. These responses are inflected by the creative awareness of persons such as Wahiaw.

It is basic but still important to remember that patterns of change are a spiral between pressures intruding from the outside and those emanating internally. Our models of change and transformation, both spiritual and socioeconomic, need to engage this interaction ethnographically and analytically without neglecting one side over the other.

As this chapter has tried to illustrate, one window into this process is to examine the changing cartography of spiritual and social influence. These tracks of dynamic force have both cultural and economic dimensions. They track concretely on the ground as well as in the perceptions of local people and outsiders. As such, they provide an important vantage point on changing configurations of culture and power. If older paths connect with newer roads, they should be seen in the continuing context of each other, even as they turn each other upside down.

NOTES

1. Zegwaard 1959; van Baal 1966; Williams 1924; see Knauft 1993.
2. A likely cognate of this term, "Kabasi," was also used to refer to the sparse and fragmented Tomu River peoples who inhabited the lowland forests further south.
3. The Gebusi associated the Bedamini with a different and less collectively lethal form of sorcery, termed *ogowili*.
4. Analytically, however, it is evident based on the distribution of customs—including longhouse dwelling, sister-exchange, sorcery patterns, cannibalism and ritual homosexuality—that the deeper cultural affiliation of the Strickland-Bosavi groups is toward the south coast (cf. Knauft 1993).
5. For instance, see Gewertz 1983; Harrison 1993; Schwartz 1963; Layard 1942; Harrisson 1937; Guiart 1963; Knauft 1993.
6. This road passed roughly along the northern Gebusi frontier; there were no roads through Gebusi territory itself in the early 1980s.
7. Part of this antipathy is structural rather than personal. When we first arrived at Nomad, the Officer-in-Charge (a man from New Ireland) was in fact highly interested in and largely respectful of indigenous customs.

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