

ritual form and permutation in New Guinea: implications of symbolic process for socio-political evolution

BRUCE M. KNAUFT—University of California, San Diego

Since the work of Durkheim (1965 [1915]) it has been considered almost a truism that ritual fosters social cohesion. In many parts of precolonial Melanesia, cult complexes had a striking impact in facilitating residential aggregation, areal integration, and/or political centralization. Ritual associations had particular socio-political prominence in areas such as the New Guinea south coast, the Sepik, the Mountain Ok area, and parts of New Britain, New Ireland, and Vanuatu.¹ Commonly, however, divergence, exclusivity, or autonomy of religious belief and practice also served to impede contact and cooperation among local groups. Religious beliefs and ritual practices as markers of exclusive ethnic identity have facilitated the cultural and political atomism so pronounced in precontact Melanesia (Schwartz 1975; Chowning 1977).

What determines the potentially divergent impact of ritual in these respects? Underlying social-structural and political factors are certainly relevant—cf. Durkheim—as are historical and economic/ecological determinants. However, the socio-political power of symbolic orientation and ritual practice in and of themselves should not be overlooked; as the Weberian tradition has shown, religion can have an important independent impact on social grouping and socio-political development. In many precolonial Melanesian cultures, religious and ritual motivations were at the heart of political action (Allen 1984a; Bateson 1958[1936]; Douglas 1979; Ernst 1979; Errington 1974; Lindstrom 1984; Rappaport 1979, 1984).

The present paper considers ritual in one of the more politically fragmented areas of New Guinea: the Strickland-Bosavi area. Variations in the ritual as practiced by different societies in this area are documented, and the structure of these variations is analyzed. It is then shown how ritual has served in one locality as a vehicle for socio-political fragmentation, and in another for cultural and political expansion. The symbolic processes elucidated provide a baseline for the comparative study of more elaborate and extensive forms of ritual association that

Ritual and religion have had an important impact upon political dynamics and societal size in many Melanesian societies, especially prior to Western influence. In the Strickland-Bosavi area, the rituals of several societies appear as structural transformations of one another, but with crucial pragmatic differences. Ritual belief helped preclude some intergroup contacts, while facilitating others to the point of cultural amalgamation and political expansion. Religious and symbolic processes must be considered on a par with social-structural, economic, and ecological factors in explaining cultural development and political evolution. [ritual, structuralism, evolution, Melanesia, Strickland-Bosavi]

have existed in Melanesia. While the dynamics of ritual itself are highlighted, it is evident that religious practices and symbolic orientations are intertwined with social structural and economic factors.²

ethnographic setting

The Strickland-Bosavi area is at the northern reaches of the Strickland Plain, straddling the boundary between the Southern Highlands and Western Provinces of Papua New Guinea. The area extends from the Strickland River in the west to Mount Bosavi and Mount Sisa, some 50 miles to the east, with settlements situated at elevations ranging from 120 meters to 1050 meters.³ Throughout the area, subsistence is based on a combination of nonintensive shifting horticulture, sago palm exploitation, foraging, opportunistic hunting, fishing, and rudimentary pig husbandry. (Pigs are semidomesticated and few in number.) The horticultural staple at higher elevations is sweet potato, with progressively greater reliance on banana and sago at lower elevations. Population densities range incrementally from 1.1 persons per square mile in the southwest to as high as 17 per square mile in the east.

Linguistically, the Strickland-Bosavi area constitutes the northeastern-most extremity of the South and Central New Guinea stock, which extends along southern New Guinea from Etna Bay to Lake Kutubu, abutting the very different language forms of the southern highlands (Voorhoeve 1968; Franklin and Voorhoeve 1973). Culturally, the Strickland-Bosavi area is divided into at least 13 distinct groups (or "societies"): the Agala, Konai, Samo, and Kubor in the northwest (Shaw 1973, 1975), the Honibo, Oybae, Gebusi, and Kabasi to the southwest (Knauf in press a), the Bedamini in the central area (Sørum 1980, 1984), the Kaluli and Sonia to the southeast (E. Schieffelin 1976; Feld 1982), the Onabasulu in the east (Ernst 1978, 1984), and the Etoro in the northeast (Kelly 1976, 1977).⁴ Each of these societies is an indigenously named group of people who perceive themselves to share a distinctively named linguistic form, to share all the same customs, and to occupy a common bounded territory. Raiding was rare within each cultural group, though it was not uncommon between them. At the same time, each society has a high degree of cultural and linguistic similarity to adjacent groups. This is reflected linguistically in a "communalect chain" across the area, with most adjacent societies sharing a high degree of cognates (60–90 percent) and a progressively lower percentage shared with groups further away (Shaw 1973). A significant break in this linguistic (and cultural) gradient occurs between the Bedamini—who occupy the central Strickland-Bosavi area—and some of their neighbors to the southeast and southwest (Shaw 1973; Ernst 1984:33ff.; Knauf in press a). As discussed below, the Bedamini were the largest and most aggressive of the Strickland-Bosavi societies, and there is evidence that in precolonial times they were expanding at the expense of their neighbors. The first government outpost in the region was established at Nomad in 1962 to curtail the raiding of the Bedamini, who were considered at the time to be the last major unpacified tribe in New Guinea (Ryan 1969:ch. 6).

The population of Strickland-Bosavi societies ranges between 150 and 700 persons, with the exception of the Kaluli (1200) and the much larger Bedamini (3800). In all groups, residence was in longhouse settlements, with men and women sleeping in separate sections of the dwelling. Leadership is everywhere egalitarian and extremely decentralized, with a marked absence of status rivalry or competitive exchange. There was a general absence as well of secular leadership roles, such as Big Man or fight leader, nor has there been a discernible gerontocracy.⁵ Decisions of import are forged on a consensual basis, with each adult man (or group of adult brothers) acting ultimately as an autonomous unit. Social organization throughout is based on residentially dispersed and politically fragmented patrilines. Adult male coresidence is based on a diverse combination of agnatic, affinal, and/or matrilineal ties, with alliance and resi-

dence shifting fluidly. Divorce rates are quite low, and while male and female activities are highly segregated, domestic relations are predominantly tranquil.

In the precontact era, settlements in close proximity comprised a self-contained kinship, ceremonial, and economic unit. Travel to and awareness of peoples more than a few miles distant was in most cases minimal. The central Gebusi, for instance, had no precontact knowledge of the Kabasi people who lived 10 miles to their south, nor of groups across the Strickland River (their “land of the dead”) just 10 miles to the west. Even in 1982, they did not know that the slopes of Mount Bosavi were inhabited by people—the mountain being visible on the horizon some 40 miles to their ESE. Judging from early patrol reports, this degree of isolation was typical, the main exception being the somewhat greater movement and trade in the east, around Mount Bosavi and Mount Sisa.⁶

The societies of the Strickland-Bosavi area all practiced spirit mediumship in all-night spirit séances. Everywhere, séances addressed issues of sickness and curing, the undertaking of collective subsistence activity, witchcraft or sorcery, and armed conflict. All societies in the area appear to have practiced a single stage initiation or celebratory transition into manhood. In most groups, boys’ growth to adult stature was associated with insemination by older males.

Strickland-Bosavi ritual

The same basic ritual form has been a key element of traditional culture in all the Strickland-Bosavi societies. Local variations in meaning and audience response have distinguished the ritual performance in each group. While the degree of local variation is in some respects quite extreme, the overarching similarity of ritual form creates an awareness of diffuse common identity between many adjacent groups. To illustrate the underlying pattern of ritual permutation, the ritual practices of the Gebusi and the Samo—who live on the Strickland Plain in the west—will be compared with their dominant form among the Kaluli, who live on the slopes of Mount Bosavi in the east.⁷

The commonalities may be noted first. The ritual is essentially an all-night dance and songfest at which persons from two or more longhouses aggregate. Upon the visitors’ arrival, there is some initial display of anger, social distance, or provocation between visitors and those from the hosting longhouse, ranging in severity from ritual fighting or self-aggrandized posturing, to taunts, mild provocation, or studied indifference. In all instances, however, persons who come to the event ultimately share a friendly experience. The gathering is a principal forum for hospitality, for socializing, and often for public (noncompetitive) food-giving, particularly between hosts and their visiting affines.

The primary aesthetic and symbolic focus of the ritual is the dancing of one or more men (usually visitors) and accompanying singing. The dance begins late in the evening and lasts until dawn, watched through the night by the assembled hosts and visitors. The dance costume is quite spectacular and is almost identical throughout the region. Specific arrays of plumage, leaves, fur, painted designs, and other decorations are affixed to the dancer as delineated in Table 1. The spiritual signification of individual costume parts varies significantly both in content and in degree of specified meaning from group to group. The dancer in full costume, however, is almost invariably described as a beautiful bird, such as the red bird of paradise.

At the ritual performance, the dancer appears as a figure of resplendent plumage and foliage, bouncing slowly and sensuously. His dance step and posture are quite subdued, and he exhibits a generally downcast and somber demeanor. This demeanor is reflected in the dance songs, which are sorrowful depictions of persons alone at various places in the forest. The persona of the beautiful but melancholy dancer arouses a strong and distinct sense of pathos among the audience. The dance lasts until dawn, at which time the visitors bid the hosts good-bye and

Table 1. Common characteristics of Strickland-Bosavi ritual gatherings.

Held in one longhouse, with residents from one or more other longhouses as visitors. Affines are hosted specially, but with all from visiting settlement(s) welcome, regardless of kinship.
All-night dance, performed typically by one or two visiting men (or by many visitors, one at a time).
Dance costume is standard, including:
Large upright "halo" of white feathers (egret or white cockatoo) in woven support, framing dancer's head and face*
Cassowary feather headdress with one or two white hornbill tail feathers swaying at the top—over the white "halo" headdress
Red body paint
Painted black facial mask, edged in yellow, covering eyes and nose (symbolically masks identity)
Large rear spray of stripped green-yellow palm leaves
Sprays of red bird of paradise feathers in armbands or on tapa cloth over shoulders
Crossed chest bands or crossed chest painting in red, yellow, and brown/black
Shell pendant hanging over sternum
Arms and legs banded with bark bands or paint
Beaded wrist band
Bark waistband, wound with cane strips
Long drum or shell bounce-rattle (both variants in all groups)
Dance form is slow hopping step with feet together "like a bird." Dancer's mood is downcast, somber, and withdrawn.
Dance songs are plaintive and melancholy, depicting persons alone at various forest places. Audience is imbued with strong sense of pathos.
Dance continues all night and ends at dawn, with visitors departing for their own settlements.
Ritual provides the primary peaceful setting for groups of people from neighboring longhouses to coalesce.

*This costume element is absent in Kaluli *gisaro* but present in three other Kaluli ritual variants.

return to their settlements. Throughout the Strickland-Bosavi area, this basic ritual is a major form of aesthetic expression as well as being the primary peaceful setting for neighboring settlements to coalesce, irrespective of kinship.

The variations of the ritual in different societies are as striking as their similarities. Among the Kaluli, the *gisaro* ritual, described by E. Schieffelin (1976, 1979) and Feld (1982), develops an aura of deep grief and violent pathos.⁸ Kaluli dance songs are composed and rehearsed specially for the occasion by the visitors, using evocative place names of the hosts' nearby lands and streams. When sung by the visiting male dancer and chorus, the songs evoke sudden and heartfelt memories among the hosts for their deceased loved ones. The grief-stricken hosts begin to wail and weep violently, until some of them vent their sorrow by grabbing burning resin torches and plunging them furiously into the shoulders of the singing dancer. The dancer appears oblivious to these actions, however, and continues unwavering and unperturbed in his song and in his quiet sorrowful demeanor—despite the many second-degree burns he receives on his shoulders and back. The dance continues in this manner through the night, with the visiting dancers taking turns singing, dancing, and being burned. The dance is judged to be successful by both sides, including the dancers, when the songs are especially moving, the hosts' weeping particularly uncontrolled, and the dancers severely burned. The aesthetic value that Kaluli attribute generally to the occasion is reflected in the fact that a surplus of young men always volunteers to dance and sing, even though they are typically unrelated to those in the host settlement.

The Kaluli *gisaro* may be contrasted to its Gebusi ritual counterpart. As among the Kaluli, Gebusi dance songs are plaintive melodies, employing cryptic metaphors and place names to depict persons alone in the forest. However, place names in Gebusi songs are rarely those of the Gebusi hosts' lands. Typically, they refer to distant and remote locations perceived in the

abstract as ideal places for secret encounters and sexual trysts. Trysting with a young woman in the forest is a common male Gebusi fantasy, strongly fueled by the ritual dancing and singing. The connection is reinforced by the fact that the songs are sung not by men—as in the Kaluli *gisaro*—but by the assembled women, who sit off to the side of the central longhouse corridor. (The men thus hear the women's singing as "offstage" as they sit together and watch the beautiful male dancer.) Dance songs are invariably interpreted by the men as scenes of sexual loneliness, innuendo, and seduction. Their response to the song and dance is hence not one of weeping and violence, but rather an enthusiastic and bawdy expression of sexual vitality. Hosts and visitors joke hilariously, fantasizing how they will bring to fruition the sexual scenario evoked by the beautiful dancer and the women's seductive songs.

Gebusi sometimes say that unrelated men and women try to arrange sexual trysts unobtrusively at ritual dances. However, such liaisons, staunchly opposed by women's male guardians (husband, brother, and/or father), risk immediate violence and are more fantasy than reality. While at the dance, Gebusi women may smile or laugh privately at male jokes, but they remain assembled as a singing group and do not interact or flirt publicly with men.⁹ Sexual joking at the dance thus tends to be an exclusively male activity.

Male sexual arousal at Gebusi rituals is in fact most apt to find release between men themselves, in homosexual trysts in the bush outside the longhouse. Homosexual encounters occur particularly between unrelated male visitors and hosts. Indeed, given the number of unrelated men present, the ritual dance is said to be one of the primary contexts for Gebusi homosexuality. The transformation of heterosexual into homosexual desire is reflected in the strong transvestite images that Gebusi men project onto the male dancer, and is evident also in their mutual joking. Men often make loud, bantering proclamations that their heterosexual arousal is so great that it cannot wait for an available female, but demands immediate sexual release, that is, with other men.

Gebusi heterosexual arousal is thus transformed, first, into heterosexual fantasy, and then into homosexual desire or activity.¹⁰ In analytic terms, these transformations can be seen to defuse potential male competition and divisiveness over women. Due to the marriage customs the Gebusi follow, the potential for antagonism among affines—who are the principal hosts, guests, and joking partners at feasts—is particularly great. Marriage is ideally based on sister exchange, but only 52.2 percent of all Gebusi first marriages actually entail marital reciprocity (within one generation). Yet, there is no custom of compensation through bridewealth or even through brideservice (cf. Collier and Rosaldo 1981). A lack of person-for-person reciprocity in marriage easily leads to a complementary person-for-person exchange through violent sorcery retribution following sickness death, i.e., the murder of the affinal sorcery suspect as reciprocity for the death of his or her alleged victim (see Modjeska 1982; Strathern 1982).¹¹ In contrast to such antagonism, ritual dances bring Gebusi affines together in a peaceful setting. In this context, sexual access to women, a major social problem, becomes a fantasy that leads to camaraderie, even mutual male desire and homosexual gratification. The result is an atmosphere of intense goodwill and genuine enjoyment among all the assembled men.

The ritual as performed by the Gebusi is practiced with significant differences among the Samo, neighbors to their northwest. Among Samo, the dance once again has a strong component of male camaraderie and vitality expressed in sexual joking (Shaw 1975, 1981b). However, Samo sexual arousal is reported to be exclusively heterosexual, and is hence more problematic for the male and female segments of the audience. Samo women present at the dance are said to be scared and withdrawn in response to men's heterosexual joking. For their part, men drink kava (*Piper mythesticum*) and are permitted a unique cultural context for expressing heterosexual desires, described as suppressed when they are not in an inebriated state. Thus, Samo men play a special lewd rhyming game called "laughing about women."

Gebusi do not jest about women in this manner; their ritual is a more open and celebratory proclamation of sexual desire. Gebusi male joking tends to be sexually targeted at other men or expressed in mocking self-reference, rather than directed at women. The difference is perhaps best symbolized by the fact that kava drinking among Gebusi men is not thought to promote heterosexual longing; rather, the “serving,” “acceptance,” and “drinking” of kava are much joked about metaphors for the transfer of semen between males—a bawdy allusion to homosexual fellatio (see Knauf in press b).¹²

The ultimate meaning and significance of the ritual in the three societies discussed thus diverges, particularly between the Gebusi and Samo, on the one hand, and the Kaluli, on the other. However, it is nonetheless true that the costuming, dance, songs, and ritual format are exceedingly similar in all three cases. Moreover, the dominant emphasis given the ritual in each group is not totally absent in the others, but is present as a minor and undeveloped theme. For instance, both Gebusi and Samo use heterosexual fantasies at the event to foster intense male camaraderie, though in the Samo variant, the homosexual aspects of this solidarity appear to be latent. A permutation of this same pattern is found in the Kaluli *gisaro*, which begins with graphic homosexual joking and taunting between hosts and visitors, lapsing later into sadness, grief, and anger.

Conversely, the violent sadness found in the Kaluli *gisaro* is found in pro forma fashion among male Gebusi audiences. Gebusi men often joke that they would like to hit, burn, or even kill the male dancer for having incited their sexual arousal. Of 20 Gebusi dance rituals observed, 2 included brief attempts by an aroused audience member to drip a few drops of burning torch resin onto the shoulders or arms of a dancer. (This was done in a playful spirit, however, and the dancer was allowed to dance in or out of the falling resin as he wished.¹³) Moreover, while Gebusi men’s shouted exclamations of “longing” (*fafadagim-da*) have a predominant meaning of pent-up sexuality, the concept also connotes the frustrated sadness and loneliness that characterize any prolonged separation. “Longing” in this sense can have a component of genuine sorrow, particularly for the Gebusi women at the ritual. While Gebusi women are well aware of men’s humor and not infrequently enjoy it, unlike men, they occasionally interpret the songs as sad tales about their deceased relatives, somewhat as the Kaluli do (Eileen Cantrell, personal communication). In general, then, the dominant emotional tone and meaning of the ritual in each society is found in subdued form in its other cultural variants.

the structure of ritual permutation

The patterning of Strickland-Bosavi rituals appears to be one of structural permutation, in which the same elements of ritual form and structure are present in all societies, but are subject to distinctive emphases and combinations in each. In some respects, this pattern is an analogue of the Lévi-Straussian (1964–1971) paradigm, in which versions of myths from related societies are seen to be structural transformations of one another. In the present context, the structuralist analogy between cultural and linguistic form is strengthened by the known pattern of language chaining across the Strickland-Bosavi area; the basic grammatical structure is common throughout but with progressive divergence of lexical terms as distance increases. The same appears true in terms of ritual form and structure. The basic ritual form is the same throughout the area. Adjacent societies, such as the Gebusi and Samo, have rituals that vary slightly; those at greater distance, such as the Kaluli and Gebusi (or Kaluli and Samo) show major transformations of meaning and signification.

Unlike the structuralist model, however, the decisive cultural variations are not in the present case best elucidated by considering the formal structure of the ritual, such as the semiotics or conceptual oppositions of dance or costume elements, sung verses, or mythic orientation (Gell

1975; Leach 1976; cf. Biersack 1982; Hugh-Jones 1979). Rather, this crucial diversity is revealed by considering the meaning of the ritual to the indigenous audience itself, as indicated by its own set of reactions and associations (Herdt 1982; Feld 1982; Keesing 1982; cf. Lewis 1980). The significance of each ritual variant alters dramatically when this dimension of symbolic association and affective response is taken into account. This key variation can be refractory to structural or sociological analysis by itself, especially when—as has often occurred in Melanesia—ritual forms from one group are borrowed, incorporated, and reinterpreted by their neighbors (Wagner 1972).

In Eco's (1979) terms, it may be said that ritual form is to a significant degree an open text, the meaning and salience of which is tied to local interpretation. In the present case, this variation is not personal or idiosyncratic; rather, the variation occurs on a societal level and is central to understanding—both analytically and in indigenous terms—what the ritual performance is all about. Performatively speaking, the cultural significance of the ritual—what one might be tempted to call its “deeper structure of meaning”—is quite variable, whereas its “surface structure,” the basic song and dance style, remains largely constant throughout the Strickland-Bosavi area. When considered in terms of cultural significance rather than in terms of a universal logic, these meanings exhibit a diversity of underlying problems and contradictions. The Gebusi ritual, for instance, deals with problems and contradictions of male control and female sexuality; it transforms the potential for affinal disgruntlement into pronounced social and even sexual male bonding. These issues seem quite unrelated, for example, to the problems of mortality and bereavement that motivate the Kaluli *gisaro* (see E. Schieffelin 1976; Feld 1982).¹⁴ In a sense, we here arrive at an inversion of the classic Lévi-Straussian model: rather than a diversity of surface (syntagmatic) forms being linked by a single paradigmatic structure, a single basic syntagm of ritual form is performed in different societies to express a diverse set of underlying cultural tensions. As Silverstein (1976:46) has put it, an “apparent structural continuity of surface form” belies its true “multifunctional_{1,2} nature.”

An analogous variable relationship between textual form and indigenous meaning can be noted for Gebusi myths; their pragmatic significance to the Gebusi cannot be derived from the recited narrative, but is revealed in spontaneous audience responses of irony, humor, and fantasy. Most Gebusi narratives appear to be tales of sexual propriety, depicting a handsome and virtuous hero who resists the seductive charms of a voluptuous woman. Other characters, not so self-restrained, are destined to a dismal or fatal denouement. The male listeners, however, make bold and lewd proclamations as to how they would exploit and savor the heterosexual opportunities described; they use the surface propriety of the plot as a convenient foil for their own desires. (The pursuit of adulterous or premarital liaisons in real life is, in fact, a significant cause of discord in Gebusi society.) Thus, the meaning and practical impact of the narrative is not to encourage sexual morality, as one would think from listening to the narrative plot alone (cf. Meggitt 1976), but is exactly the reverse (Knauff n.d.).

The variable relation between form and meaning raises intriguing issues for the study of comparative aesthetics. In the present context, however, the larger sociological and political ramifications of this relation can be considered, that is, the practical outcome of divergent versus convergent symbolic interpretations by different groups of people. The discussion focuses on alternative outcomes rather than tackling the more difficult question of motivating causes—these being best considered through a more fine-grained articulation of symbolic and sociopolitical analysis than is possible here.

On the one hand, as Fernandez (1965) has effectively shown, differences in ritual meaning, identification, and interpretation can themselves become matters of contention or dispute. This is clearly evident, for instance, in Bateson's (1958[1936]:222ff.) account of Iatmul disputes over esoteric knowledge. On a collective level, symbolic divergence can lead to what Schwartz (1975) has called “ethnic totemism”: polarization of cultural or ethnic groups on the basis of

select and sometimes minute differences of custom. This process can be clearly seen in the eastern part of the Strickland-Bosavi area, where groups differentiate themselves largely on the basis of initiation customs (Kelly 1977:16). All groups believe that boys must be inseminated in order to reach adulthood, but the mode of semen transmission is different in each society: anal intercourse among the Kaluli, fellatio among the Etoro, and smearing semen on the novices among the Onabasulu. The Etoro disparage what they consider to be the repulsive customs of the Onabasulu and Kaluli, and Kelly (1977) speculates that the feeling of these groups toward the Etoro is mutual (cf. Ernst 1984:36ff.). The Bedamini, who, like the Etoro, practice oral insemination, believe their boys will get pregnant and die if subjected to the anal intercourse practiced by the Kaluli (Sørum 1984:324). Such beliefs, regardless of their origin, can easily become part of a cycle of increasing intergroup enmity, acting ultimately as an impediment to intergroup association or socio-political alliance.¹⁵

A crucial aspect of symbolic polarization in this respect is an exegetically explicit and rigid correspondence between local beliefs and specific religious behaviors. Where the linkage between behavior and symbolic meaning is more general, ambiguous, and/or diffuse (as discussed below), ritual has a much greater capacity to draw together persons or groups who have significant differences of belief or interpretation. A looser fit between exegesis and ritual behavior also allows greater tolerance for variation in the ritual proceedings themselves. In some cases, variation in ritual structure may be positively valued as creative aesthetic elaboration and hence actively sought out. This has occurred in many parts of Melanesia in the borrowing, reinterpretation, and syncretism of rituals across cultural and linguistic boundaries. In some cases, the very incomprehensibility of foreign symbolism or liturgy can imbue the performance with a special aura of sanctity or mystical efficacy (cf. Rappaport 1971).

A loose association between local exegetical tradition and the specific symbolism of ritual performance is characteristic of the Strickland-Bosavi dance ritual. In several parts of the Strickland-Bosavi area, the sharing of ritual dance forms and/or joint ritual participation occurred across societal and linguistic boundaries. Some groups thrived on this contact; among the Kaluli, only one of their six dances (the *gisaro*) originated locally; the other five were variants borrowed from neighboring groups to their southeast and west (E. Schieffelin 1976:225ff.). A more extreme case of ritual borrowing can be seen between the Etoro or Bedamini and the Huli, who live to the north in the Southern Highlands. Despite major differences of language and culture, Huli have become an enthusiastic audience of the Strickland-Bosavi dance ritual performed by their southern neighbors (who are collectively called *Dugube* by Huli). According to Laurence Goldman (personal communication) Huli invite contingents of *Dugube* to stay with them for extended periods of time and perform the beautiful ritual. The outsiders' performance of the dance in Huli territory has in fact been a significant part of the Huli's earth fertility cycle (*Dindi Pongo*) at least since the 1950s, that is, since prior to Western contact (see L. Goldman 1984:ch. 4).

ritual in cultural and political expansion

Common participation in a diffusely shared ritual form can easily become the point of departure for expanding social and political interaction. Celebratory or calendrical rituals have a special capacity in this regard because the proceedings can entail aggregation without enjoining specificity of instrumental purpose or uniformity of belief. As Silverstein (1976:47) has noted, such "pragmatic indeterminacy" also affords a potential for individual manipulation. The surface function of the ritual may thus provide a safe and indisputable context for establishing and reinforcing a particular mode of social relationship, such as domination or hierarchy (see Bloch 1973, 1978; Bourdieu 1977). The mechanisms by which ritual may facilitate

cultural dominance and political expansion are illustrated in the relationship between two adjacent cultural groups in the central-western Strickland-Bosavi area: the Gebusi and the Bedamini.

Given the general pattern of incremental linguistic and cultural gradation across the Strickland-Bosavi area, the Gebusi and Bedamini manifest striking disparities. Despite an extensive common border, Gebusi and Bedamini share only 32 percent basic cognates, less than half the percentage Gebusi share with neighboring groups to their west (Knauft in press a:ch. 1; cf. Shaw 1973). Less easy to document, but nonetheless real, is the contrast between a placatory and nonconfrontational ethos among the Gebusi and a sterner and more aggressive aura projected by the Bedamini. By the 1960s, it appears that the Bedamini had already expanded through the raiding and absorption of groups that were once intermediate between the Gebusi and themselves—thus accounting for the present linguistic break that exists in their present location.¹⁶ Given this socio-historical context, it is striking that variation in ritual performance did not create polar opposition in Gebusi-Bedamini border areas. Instead, the rituals gave rise to joint association and political alliance. The dynamics of this process—in which Gebusi in border settlements were progressively “Bedaminized”—can be considered more closely. It can be noted at the outset that Gebusi and Bedamini share the same customs of oral insemination, despite the other cultural differences between them.

The first social context in which Gebusi and Bedamini were likely to meet—apart from the surprise of a long-distance Bedamini raid—was a ritual feast and dance sponsored by a settlement midway between them. At such an event, ritual fighting between the opposed visiting groups is apt to take place, and was observed in the field. Such fighting, however, does not reach lethal proportions, as the men from the host settlement want the feast and dance to proceed. Hence, they act as intermediaries, intervening actively between the two groups and entreating those on each side to desist from attack. Fighting is effectively quelled, and the participants eventually snap fingers (“shake hands”), and commingle as visitors at the feast. The success of this measure in the precontact era is attested by the fact that of 163 Gebusi homicides which came to light in a mortality survey, only one occurred pursuant to a ritual fight. (Most homicides were internal executions of Gebusi suspected of sorcery.) Apart from this one instance, no cases are known where antagonism prevented the all-night feast and dance from being held.

While ritual antagonism effects some genuine catharsis between enemies, it also serves as a display of numbers and force, particularly by the fierce Bedamini. In the controlled context of the ritual, however, the impressive force of the Bedamini is transformed for the Gebusi from a negative attribute to a positively valued trait; there is a strong notion in both Gebusi and Bedamini culture that collective attendance at ritual (and séance) activities is the epitome of cultural vitality, camaraderie, and good health (Knauft in press a; Sørum 1980). Bedamini presence at rituals also has an aesthetic impact upon Gebusi: Gebusi are enamored of Bedamini songs and dances. They yell loud encouragement to visiting Bedamini singers and dancers and were quite eager for me to play tape recordings of Bedamini songs. This is particularly striking since at the rituals I attended, few Gebusi listeners were fluent in Bedamini, much less comprehending of the arcane imagery used in Bedamini songs. (Most Gebusi informants did not understand the song references at all.) The reaction of many Gebusi men was thus to the visual and raw auditory sensation of Bedamini performance, rather than to its discursive meaning.¹⁷

The strength of Gebusi response to Bedamini ritual performance has several aspects. First, Bedamini songs are enjoyed for their complex harmony and melancholy tone, being more developed in these respects than Gebusi songs. (One might speculate that Bedamini singing is intermediate—aesthetically as well as geographically—between the Gebusi and the Kaluli—[cf. Feld 1982].) Second, unlike Gebusi women’s dance singing, the primary Bedamini singers

are often a pair of costumed male dancers, who bounce rhythmically as they face each other in alternating song. In the context of this display, the haunting Bedamini melodies not only evoke a deep sense of longing (*fafadagim-da*) in Gebusi, they cannot help but strike them as a more overt and seductive homosexual overture than their own ritual performance permits. Audience arousal can be directly expressed in verbal and behavioral enactments, since ceremonial gatherings in both societies permit exuberant audience display of "longing" and derivative homosexual desire (see Sørum 1980, 1984). Viewed analytically, the ritual gathering that started with an agonistic display of force and numbers is thus transformed into an epigamic display of special homosexual attraction. Despite major gaps in communication and possibly in interpretation, then, Gebusi are imbued with admiration and strong affection for Bedamini participants. Given that dance rituals are a primary forum for peaceful intercommunity contact, this diffuse positive attitude has important practical consequences in facilitating further kinds of interaction and alliance. Many of these contacts, discussed below, are planned or agreed to during the all-night camaraderie of the ritual dance itself. Perhaps the most important of these is the holding of joint spirit séances.

Like other groups in the Strickland-Bosavi area, Gebusi and Bedamini both practice all-night spirit séances. While all spirit séances carry a large component of pure entertainment and audience camaraderie, the spirit medium in both cultures has a great deal of latitude in rendering spiritual advice about matters of sickness, hunting, and various forms of collective action. In particular, séances are a primary forum in which sorcery attributions are made and legitimated following a sickness death. The spirit medium's own pronouncements are extremely influential in this respect, as these are said to be informed by the omnipotent perception of his spirit familiars.

In Gebusi areas proximate to border settlements, Bedamini mediums are commonly solicited to conduct inquest séances following Gebusi sickness deaths to divine the identity of the responsible sorcerer.¹⁸ Bedamini séance songs, like their dance songs, are much admired by Gebusi for their tonal quality and harmony. Moreover, because they are perceived to be outside the context of the Gebusi's own personal interests, Bedamini mediums can have special influence on Gebusi audiences, who often believe the dicta of an outsider to be particularly "objective." Regardless of who leads the séance, the Gebusi take the resultant sorcery attribution very seriously. In contrast to the Bedamini (Sørum 1980:288), Gebusi do not have a custom of making compensation payments to forestall retribution; the sorcery suspect is with surprising frequency killed outright in reciprocity for the prior death of the sickness victim. A systematic mortality survey revealed that the likelihood of a sorcery execution ranges from 18.6 percent following the sickness deaths of Gebusi widows to 62.5 percent following the sickness deaths of young adult men.¹⁹

Bedamini themselves are relatively immune from the violence of Gebusi sorcery attributions. The Gebusi's most severe attributions tend to be for parcel sorcery (*bogay*), which is believed to be practiced predominantly within the settlement or community, that is, by other Gebusi. In contrast, the type of sorcery Gebusi associate with the Bedamini, that is, long-distance assault sorcery (*ogowili*), provokes little retribution. Gebusi believe that such a distant sorcery attack is made possible by the failure of the deceased person's own closest kin to adequately protect him or her from spiritual malevolence.

While the majority of Gebusi homicides are internal matters uninfluenced by Bedamini, the holding of Bedamini-Gebusi sorcery inquests presents the outsiders a unique opportunity to exploit and exacerbate divisions among Gebusi themselves. This is particularly the case when a Bedamini takes the all-important role of spirit medium in order to ascertain the sorcerer's identity. On some occasions, the cooperation of Gebusi and Bedamini in séance inquests has led to alliance between them for the purpose of killing alleged Gebusi sorcerers. On other oc-

casions, Gebusi arranged for Bedamini to go unaccompanied to kill Gebusi sorcery suspects—according to the Gebusi custom of death contracting (*to map*). Contract killing normally occurred in cases where the Gebusi sickness victim's close kinsmen did not themselves wish to take vengeance against the Gebusi sorcery suspect (or were unable to safely do so). In most cases the contracted executioners were other Gebusi from a nearby community. With the advent of Bedamini incursion, however, it was tempting for Gebusi who had relatives in border areas to contract with the *Bedamini*—renowned for their numbers and fighting ability—to carry out the ambush. The contractor or his emissary secretly advised the Bedamini contingent when and how the settlement of the Gebusi suspect could be best attacked. In payment, the Bedamini received the right to take the bodies of persons killed, these being considered major prizes for cannibalistic consumption.

These death contracts provided a special impetus for Bedamini raiding—the Bedamini attack shifting easily from the Gebusi custom of killing only the sorcery suspect to a general massacre of all those in the targeted settlement. In fact, all known cases of long-distance Bedamini raids into Gebusi territory were prompted by death contracts made by Gebusi themselves. Thirty-four of 163 (20.9 percent) known Gebusi homicides occurred in this manner. In short, the tacit and/or active association of Gebusi with Bedamini in séance inquests and sorcery retributions inflated an already high rate of intra-Gebusi homicide. The increase in Bedamini incursions also weakened the integrity of the Gebusi communities themselves.

The deepening association of Gebusi and Bedamini at border villages in ritual feasting, séances, and sorcery vengeance occurred along with an increase in intermarriage. Sometimes Gebusi gave a woman to a Bedamini patriline in appreciation of their role in the alliance. Often the marriage was arranged privately during a ritual feast or visitation and was carried out the morning after a subsequent ritual gathering. The visiting bride was symbolically “captured” by the groom and his kin, with the tacit consent but public disapproval of the visiting woman's agnates. The prevalence of intermarriage across the Gebusi-Bedamini border has not only increased social contact, but, given the desirability of affinal co-residence in both societies, prompted in-migration into Gebusi territory by the more populous Bedamini. Co-residence as well as political and kinship alliance has thus given Bedamini a foothold in establishing further social associations and alliances with Gebusi in erstwhile nonborder areas. The custom that settlements attend ritual feasts as units fosters this tendency, since persons from more remote Gebusi settlements come into social contact with Bedamini when they host or visit Gebusi living in border settlements. The progression from antagonism to ritual association, séance alliance, political alliance, intermarriage, and co-residence thus begins again, more deeply in Gebusi territory. The end result is Bedamini expansion at Gebusi expense.

This expansion was cultural as well as territorial, with Gebusi in border areas becoming amalgamated into the parent Bedamini population. Evidence from patrol reports suggests that Gebusi in border villages were becoming culturally and linguistically Bedamini in the early and mid-1960s. Several Gebusi clans have subclans that have been assimilated as wholes to advancing Bedamini language, culture, and territory (cf. Barth 1969). Ritual identification is particularly striking in this regard, as Gebusi consider the performance of ritual feasts and spirit séances to be preeminent markers of cultural identity (*kogwayay*).

The Gebusi experience of Bedamini domination is revealed strikingly—if ironically—in Gebusi fish poisoning beliefs and ritual practices. After the derris root poison is leached into the water, Gebusi men kindle a small raft of bundled sticks, which floats downstream along with the dispersing toxin. The burning raft is said to ignite the roofs of the underwater longhouses where the fish people live, forcing them up from the bottom of the river and making them vulnerable en masse to bow and arrow attack by spirits said to inhabit the poison. However, the tactic of firing the longhouse and killing fleeing inhabitants was a Bedamini custom never prac-

ticed by the Gebusi. Though not explicitly stated by Gebusi, the symbolism of the fish poisoning is an analogue of the attack upon Gebusi by Bedamini raiders. Thus, fish poisoning:fish::Bedamini raiding:Gebusi. During real fish poisonings, the notion of indiscriminate attack is taken quite literally. A spirit medium narrates the underwater battle in vivid detail, "seeing" into the muddy water and telling when and where fish have been wounded and driven off by the "derris root poison people" (*ti os*). These fierce and numerous "poison people" have been solicited during a preceding séance to help their Gebusi allies kill fish—much as the Gebusi approach Bedamini for contract killings. The analogy is evidenced also in the clear above/below and upstream/downstream distinction (*helo/hemo*) Gebusi consistently use to characterize their relation to the fish as well as the Bedamini's position vis-à-vis themselves.

Finally and most importantly, it may be noted that major Gebusi fish poisonings are believed ineffective unless a Gebusi man dances in full ritual costume (as delineated in Table 1) along the river bank. The splendor of the male dancer is thought to attract the fish to the surface of the water, where they are said to be physically struck (*fap*) by the dancer's seductive beauty. Thus mesmerized, they are easy prey for Gebusi men, who use woven weirs to scoop them up in large numbers. As in real life, while force is used (or contracted) to instill fear and panic, the aesthetics of ritual seduction lure the victim placidly back to his host.

Just as the fish-poisoning metaphor melds aesthetic beauty and physical force, it cannot be argued that Bedamini expansion was in any simple sense caused by ritual contact alone. A myriad of social-structural and economic as well as symbolic processes were involved. Nevertheless, rituals and spirit séances were important vehicles for extending and consolidating Bedamini expansion. Moreover, the particular character of Bedamini impingement and Gebusi acquiescence were to a significant degree shaped by ritual and other dimensions of religious belief and symbolic orientation.

religion and socio-political evolution

Religion has played a key role in the social and political evolution of many Melanesian societies. The influence of symbolic orientation in this respect has been aptly documented in the colonial era by cargo cults and other postcontact religious movements (Worsley 1968; Lawrence 1964; Schwartz 1962; Knauff 1978). The active role of ritual practices in precolonial Melanesian political organization has been documented in a number of specific ethnographic studies, but is just beginning to be evaluated in a comparative perspective (Allen 1984a; Lindstrom 1984). In many parts of historical Melanesia, certain societies were socially and culturally dominant over their neighbors. Such relationships of complementary schismogenesis on a cultural scale have often been concomitant with, but in no sense wholly reducible to, a relationship of economic or military preeminence (Bateson 1958[1936]). Ritual and myth have been particularly important in the expansion of Marind-Anim society along the central south New Guinea coast (Baal 1966; Ernst 1979), the dominance of the Iatmul in the Middle Sepik (Bateson 1958[1936]), the centrality of the Telefolmin in the Mountain Ok area (Strathern 1981; Jorgensen 1980, personal communication), the aggregation of diverse groups to the Ilahita Arapesh in the Torricelli Mountains (Tuzin 1976, 1980), and in the large cultural influence of the Sukei on societies in the Middle Fly. To this list could be added the preeminence in the Strickland-Bosavi area of the Bedamini, who were more than three times the size of the other societies in the region, and who were expanding in several directions at contact.

How do symbolic structures facilitate and intensify this kind of diffuse political and areal integration (cf. Schwartz 1963)? The present paper suggests that one factor may be a pre-existing pattern of ritual permutation among erstwhile autonomous social groups. Incremental cultural and religious gradations were probably in existence across many regions of precontact

Melanesia—as Wagner (1972) has documented for myth across south New Guinea. Peaceful associations between neighboring groups, based on shared ritual forms, are a ready point of departure for cultural integration or political expansion. Symbolic factors are particularly important in facilitating the amalgamation of neighboring peoples into the parent population, allowing for an expansion much more rapid than that achieved by the decimation of neighboring groups or usurpation of deserted territory alone (see Kelly in press). In addition, respect for or identification with the dominant society sows seeds of divisiveness within the group undergoing assimilation.

In some cases, the potential for socio-political expansion afforded by ritual association leads not simply to increased societal size or cultural influence—as among the Bedamini—but to increased centralization as well. Cult organization entailing aggregation of people into very large villages occurred, for instance, among the Purari (Williams 1923, 1924; Maher 1961, 1974), the Elema (Williams 1940), the Kiwai (Landtman 1927), the Iatmul (Bateson 1932, 1958[1936]), and the Ilahita (Tuzin 1974, 1976, 1980). In these cases cult organization also provided a crucial means of exercising internal social control. Commonly, it also promoted solidarity against outsiders, or gave rise to religiously motivated warfare. Among the Marind-Anim (Baal 1966; Ernst 1979), progressive cult elaboration and ritual interdependence were primary factors welding some 15,000 people belonging to disparate groups into a militarily expansionist and yet internally peaceful society.

Finally, ritual and symbolic motivations can be crucial in the emergence of stratification, as evidenced in incipient form among the Purari, in the *tubuan* and *dukduk* cults of New Britain and New Ireland, in the initiation and hereditary chieftainship cults of the Big Nambas, and in various other ritual hierarchies in Vanuatu (Maher 1974; Errington 1974; Chowning and Goodenough 1971; Allen, ed. 1982; Allen 1984a, 1984b). The importance of myth and religion in the emergence of chiefdoms and kingdoms has been emphasized by Sahlins (1983), who has suggested that these institutions cannot be adequately understood apart from guiding symbolic orientations. The preeminence of secular political institutions and economic interests, in contrast, may be associated with endemic local conflict or internal warfare, which limit socio-political development under certain conditions (Sahlins 1963; cf. Leach 1965 [1954]). It may be, for instance, that highly secular Big-Man systems have not been the most direct precursors or stepping stones to ranked hierarchy in Melanesia.²⁰ Greater political stratification was exhibited in many Melanesian societies that articulated exchange and leadership with ritual control and supernaturally ordained authority (Allen 1984a; Douglas 1979). These symbolic concerns were not simply reflections or mystifications of socio-political developments; they were important motive forces for status differentiation in their own right.

The motivating force of religious factors has been crucial in the development of rank and stratification in many world areas, for example, in the Andes and Mesoamerica (Conrad and Demarest 1984; Pasztory 1978), Mesopotamia (Oates 1978:481), Polynesia (I. Goldman 1970), South and Eastern Asia (see Dumont 1970; Bellah 1970 [1957]; Weber 1978 [1956]), Africa (Bloch 1978; cf. Kuper 1947; Evans-Pritchard 1948), and more generally (Flannery 1972).

Of course, symbolic orientations and religious practices are in no sense the sole cause of cultural integration, political expansion, or stratification. In Melanesia, warfare, social structure, subsistence patterns, and trade and exchange emerge as significant factors in the cases studied most intensively. In comparative socio-cultural analysis, however, symbolic factors have too often been left out of the discussion or have themselves been purportedly “explained” as a function (or mystification) of social structural, economic, or ecological/demographic processes. This results in a one-sided view that reduces symbolic orientations to an epiphenomenon of something else (e.g., Brunton 1980). As Conrad and Demarest have recently stated

(1984:221): "It has been difficult for many anthropologists to see beyond ideology's legitimizing function to its broader effects on the actual dynamics of cultural evolution." Trade, warfare, social grouping, and prestige distinctions can themselves be influenced or even caused by symbolic and religious concerns—as Weber (1958 [1904–05], 1978 [1956]) so clearly documents. Ultimately, what is needed to account for variation in socio-political scale and complexity are systemic models that view symbolic dynamics in genuine reciprocal causality with social structural and economic/ecological processes. If the independent importance of ritual and religion has been emphasized in the present essay, it is because their role has often been subordinated to other factors in accounting for socio-cultural variation and evolution in Melanesia.

notes

Acknowledgments. The present paper was written during a postdoctoral fellowship funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and carried out at the Department of Anthropology, The University of California, San Diego. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the American Anthropological Association meetings, Denver, 1984. Comments and suggestions of the following people are gratefully acknowledged: Eileen Cantrell, Terence Hays, Raymond Kelly, Laurence Goldman, Fitz John Porter Poole, Theodore Schwartz, Donald Tuzin, Edward Schieffelin, and Robert Welsch. Insightful suggestions were also made by the journal editor and reviewers. The shortcomings are, of course, my own.

Information concerning the Gebusi was obtained during 22 months of predoctoral fieldwork conducted in 1980–82. This research was funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the Rackham School of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan.

¹Ethnographic sources for these ritual associations include Baal 1966, 1982, Crawford 1981, Ernst 1979, Landtman 1927, Maher 1961, 1974, and Williams 1923, 1924, 1936, 1940 for the New Guinea south coast; Bateson 1958 [1936], Gell 1975, Hogbin 1970, Mead 1934, 1938–40, Thurnwald 1916, and Tuzin 1976, 1980 for the Sepik/north coast; Barth 1971, 1975, Poole 1982, Jorgensen 1980, and Strathern 1981 for the Mountain Ok; and Allen, ed. 1981, Allen 1984a, 1984b, Codrington 1891, Errington 1974, Chowning and Goodenough 1971, Keesing 1982, Layard 1942, and Parkinson 1907 for insular Melanesia.

²The relationship between symbolic orientation and socio-political structure among the Gebusi of the Strickland-Bosavi area is a focus of Knauff (in press a).

³The eastern part of this area has been termed the Great Papuan Plateau, though terrain in this sector is quite rugged and cannot be considered a table land.

⁴Concerning the Strickland-Bosavi societies see also Dwyer (1982, 1983), Ernst (1972), Feld (1981, 1983, in press a, in press b), Feld and B. Schieffelin (1982), Knauff (in press b, n.d.), B. Schieffelin (1979), E. Schieffelin (1975, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983), Shaw (1974a, 1974b, 1981a, 1981b, 1982), and Sørum (1982).

⁵A notable exception to this generalization is the existence of community fight leaders among the Bedamini (Sørum 1984:320).

⁶This region was contacted by trade expeditions undertaken by the Huli from the Southern Highlands, who traded vegetable salt, mother of pearl shell, tobacco, stone adzes, and netted pubic aprons for bird plumes, cowrie shells, hornbill beaks, tree oil, black palm bows, and string bags (Ernst 1978, 1984:79–94; Kelly 1977:ch. 1; E. Schieffelin 1976:13ff., personal communication).

⁷Many of the Strickland-Bosavi societies perform minor ritual variants of their own. These modifications often correspond to different ritual occasions, for example, sickness curing, harvest celebration, pig kill, or funeral feast. The present account emphasizes the more general and distinctive ritual similarities and differences between the groups. For a more complete account of ritual in the cultures considered see E. Schieffelin 1976, 1979; Feld 1981, 1982, in press b; Shaw 1975, 1979, 1981b; Knauff in press a, in press b.

⁸For the sake of consistency, the present tense is used to describe the rituals practiced by all Strickland-Bosavi societies. The Kaluli *gisaro*, however, is no longer performed (E. Schieffelin 1978).

⁹Gebusi ritual may in this respect be compared with several other lowland south New Guinea societies, in which wife sharing, heterosexual license, or serial heterosexual intercourse could in fact take place in particular ritual contexts (see Williams 1936; Landtman 1927; Baal 1966, 1984; Serpenti 1984).

¹⁰Sexual joking partners in fact rarely engage each other in homosexual trysts. Joking partners tend to be middle-aged or older men who are affines or matrikin. Given their kin relationship, they are formally prohibited from homosexual relations—these generally occurring between initiate novices and young adult men who are unrelated to each other. Joking about homosexuality and its actual practice thus tend to be complementary, that is, practiced by different segments of the male ritual audience. In a sense, joking partners are reliving in verbal enjoyment the bisexual vitality believed so characteristic of young adult men.

¹¹In statistical terms, violent sorcery retribution is most common by far between Gesubi affines in unbalanced marital relations.

¹²These contrasts between Samo and Gebusi ritual emphasis are well documented and are independent of whether Samo men on some occasions have indulged secretly in homosexuality.

¹³The Gebusi say that *burning the dancers* has never been a prominent part of their dances, and that it has not been subject to suppression by government officers (cf. E. Schieffelin 1976, 1978 concerning the Kaluli).

¹⁴The structural basis for Gebusi affinal tensions, that is, lack of compensation and a high rate of unreciprocated marriage, are also largely absent or attenuated among Kaluli and other eastern Strickland-Bosavi groups (E. Schieffelin 1976; Kelly 1977; Ernst 1978, 1984). The present synoptic characterizations do not mean, however, that Gebusi ritual can be explained as a palliative response to socio-economic strains; as I discuss elsewhere (in press a) these strains are in important respects themselves a function of key Gebusi symbolic orientations which preclude open demands for reciprocity.

¹⁵Unmitigated hostility was indeed endemic between Kaluli and Etoro—the latter withdrawing until a wide uninhabited buffer zone separated the two groups (Kelly 1977:ch. 1). Of course, ritual differences alone do not cause such socio-cultural enmity and divergence. However, religious divergence can constitute a major link in a chain of mutually reinforcing symbolic and socio-political factors that do cause such fragmentation. Once effectively established, such differences may maintain group polarization even when subsequent changes (such as pacification) might otherwise foster social integration.

¹⁶This point was initially suggested to me by Raymond Kelly.

¹⁷Even when Gebusi view their own ritual performances, it tends to be the general aura of visual/sonic impact that evokes response (cf. Rappaport 1979; Knauff 1979). Thus, Gebusi men often yell out during long and loud nonsense refrain lines, or during songs employing Gebusi imagery that is largely obscure to them. This is a pattern common to ritual in many religions, i.e., the use of obscure language or liturgy to create a diffuse aura of mysticism or non-discursive awe (Rappaport 1971).

¹⁸In one sorcery inquest séance I attended, the father of the deceased (Gebusi) sickness victim could not understand or extract the pronouncements made during the event by a Bedamini spirit medium who had been called in for the occasion (with an accompanying chorus of Bedamini singers). The bilingual spirit medium told the man the results privately after the séance was over.

¹⁹Actual homicides have been clearly distinguished from killings related to sorcery.

²⁰The general lack of supernatural authority in New Guinea Highlands societies may help explain why this area did not formalize hereditary rank distinctions despite a highly developed socio-economic system. Significantly, there appears to have been a greater degree of formalized status differentiation in some densely populated Highlands areas prior to Western contact, when male cult institutions in these areas were quite extensive and elaborate (Vicedom and Tischner 1943–48; cf. Strathern 1971; Meggitt 1971). The decline of ritual practices and religious beliefs may thus have accelerated a trend toward democratization that began with the introduction of the sweet potato (Golson 1982) and was further intensified by the introduction of Western-produced valuables in large numbers.

references cited

- Allen, Michael R.
1984a Elders, Chiefs, and Big Men: Authority Legitimation and Political Evolution in Melanesia. *American Ethnologist* 11:20–41.
1984b Homosexuality, Male Power, and Political Organization in North Vanuatu: A Comparative Analysis. In *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*. Gilbert H. Herdt, ed. pp. 83–127. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Allen, Michael R., ed.
1981 Vanuatu: Politics, Economics and Ritual in Island Melanesia. New York: Academic Press.
- Baal, Jan van
1966 Dema: Description and Analysis of Marind-Anim Culture (South New Guinea). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
1982 Jan Verschueren's Description of Yei-Nan Culture. *Verhandelingen van Het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
1984 The Dialectics of Sex in Marind-anim Culture. In *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*. Gilbert H. Herdt, ed. pp. 128–166. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barth, Fredrik
1971 Tribes and Intertribal Relations in the Fly Headwaters. *Oceania* 41:171–191.
1975 Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman of New Guinea. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Barth, Fredrik, ed.
1969 Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. Boston: Little, Brown.

- Bateson, Gregory
 1932 Social Structure of the Iatmul People of the Sepik River. *Oceania* 2:245–291, 401–453.
 1958[1936] Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe Drawn from Three Points of View. 2nd edition. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bellah, Robert N.
 1970[1957] Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan. Boston: Beacon.
- Biersack, Aletta
 1982 Ginger Gardens for the Ginger Woman: Rites of Passage in a Melanesian Society. *Man* (NS) 17:239–258.
- Bloch, Maurice
 1973 Symbols, Song and Dance, and Features of Articulation. *European Journal of Sociology* 15:55–81.
 1978 The Disconnection between Power and Rank as a Process. In *The Evolution of Social Systems*. J. Friedman and M. J. Rowlands, eds. pp. 303–340. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
 1977 Outline of a Theory of Practice. Richard Nice, transl. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brunton, Ron
 1980 Misconstrued Order in Melanesian Religion. *Man* (NS) 15:112–128.
- Chowning, Ann
 1978 An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Melanesia. 2nd edition. Palo Alto, CA: Cummings.
- Chowning, Ann, and Ward H. Goodenough
 1971 Lakalai Political Organization. In *Politics in New Guinea*. R. M. Berndt and M. J. Meggitt, eds. pp. 113–174. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.
- Codrington, R. H.
 1891 The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-lore. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Collier, Jane F., and Michelle Z. Rosaldo
 1981 Politics and Gender in Simple Societies. In *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, eds. pp. 275–329. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Conrad, Geoffrey W., and Arthur A. Demarest
 1984 Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Expansionism. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Crawford, Anthony L.
 1981 Aida: Life and Ceremony of the Gogodala. National Cultural Council of Papua New Guinea. Bathurst, Australia: Robert Brown.
- Douglas, Brownwen
 1979 Rank, Power, Authority: A Reassessment of Traditional Leadership in South Pacific Societies. *Journal of Pacific History* 14:2–27.
- Dumont, Louis
 1970 Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications. Mark Sainsbury, transl. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Durkheim, Emile
 1965[1915] Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Joseph Ward Swain, transl. New York: Free Press.
- Dwyer, Peter D.
 1982 Prey Switching: A Case Study from New Guinea. *Journal of Animal Ecology* 51:529–542.
 1983 Etolo Hunting Performance and Energetics. *Human Ecology* 11:145–174.
- Eco, Umberto
 1979 The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Ernst, Thomas M.
 1972 Stealing another Man's Wife among the Onabasulu of the Great Papuan Plateau. Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association.
 1978 Aspects of Meaning of Exchange Items among the Onabasulu of the Great Papuan Plateau. In *Trade and Exchange in Oceania and Australia*. J. Specht and J. P. White, eds. *Mankind* 11:187–197.
 1979 Myth, Ritual and Population among the Marind-Anim. In *The Power of Ritual: Transition, Transformation and Transcendence in Ritual Practice*. Bruce Kapferer, ed. *Social Analysis* 1:34–53.
 1984 Onabasulu Local Organization. Ph.D. dissertation. Anthropology Department, University of Michigan.
- Errington, Frederick Karl
 1974 Karavar: Masks and Power in a Melanesian Ritual. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E.
 1948 The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feld, Steven
 1981 "Flow Like a Waterfall": The Metaphors of Kaluli Musical Theory. *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 13:22–47.

- 1982 Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- 1983 Sound as a Symbolic System: The Kaluli Drum. *Bikmaus* 4:78–89.
- in press a Sound Structure as Social Structure. *Ethnomusicology*.
- in press b Kaluli Weeping and Song. (12" stereo disk with notes in English and German.) Kassel: Bar-enreiter-Musicaphon.
- Feld, Steven, and Bambi B. Schieffelin
- 1982 Hard Talk: The Functional Basis for Kaluli Discourse. In *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*. D. Tannen, ed. pp. 351–371. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Fernandez, James W.
- 1965 Symbolic Consensus in a Fang Reformatory Cult. *American Anthropologist* 67:902–929.
- Flannery, Kent V.
- 1972 The Cultural Evolution of Civilizations. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 3:399–426.
- Franklin, Karl J., and Clemens L. Voorhoeve
- 1973 Languages Near the Intersection of the Gulf, Southern Highlands and Western Districts. In *The Linguistic Situation in the Gulf District and Adjacent Areas, Papua New Guinea*. Series C, no. 26. Karl Franklin, ed. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Gell, Alfred
- 1975 Metamorphosis of the Cassowaries: Umeda Society, Language and Ritual. London: Althone Press.
- Goldman, Irving
- 1970 Ancient Polynesian Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goldman, Laurence
- 1984 Talk Never Dies: The Language of Huli Disputes. London: Tavistock.
- Golson, Jack
- 1982 The Ipomoean Revolution Revisited: Society and the Sweet Potato in the Upper Wahgi Valley. In *Inequality in the New Guinea Highlands*. Andrew J. Strathern, ed. pp. 109–136. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herd, Gilbert H., ed.
- 1982 Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hogbin, Ian
- 1970 The Island of Menstruating Men: Religion in Wogeo, New Guinea. Scranton: Chandler.
- Hugh-Jones, Stephen
- 1979 The Palm and the Pleiades: Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jorgensen, Dan
- 1980 What's in a Name: The Meaning of Meaninglessness in Telefolmin. *Ethos* 8:349–366.
- Keesing, Roger M.
- 1982 Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kelly, Raymond C.
- 1976 Witchcraft and Sexual Relations: An Exploration in the Social and Semantic Implications of the Structure of Belief. In *Man and Woman in the New Guinea Highlands*. Paula Brown and Georgeda Buchbinder, eds. pp. 36–53. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association. Special Publication no. 8.
- 1977 Etoro Social Structure: A Study in Structural Contradiction. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- in press The Nuer Conquest: A Case Study in the Structure of Non-Equilibrium Systems. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Knauft, Bruce M.
- 1978 Cargo Cults and Relational Separation. *Behavior Science Research* 13:185–240.
- 1979 On Percussion and Metaphor. *Current Anthropology* 20:189–191.
- in press a Good Company and Violence: Sorcery and Social Action in a Lowland New Guinea Society. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- in press b Managing Sex and Anger: Kava and Tobacco Use among the Gebusi of Papua New Guinea. In *Drugs and Interpersonal Relations in the Western Pacific*. Lamont Lindstrom, ed. A.S.A.O Monograph.
- n.d. Sexual Desire and "Longing" in Gebusi Narrative Performance.
- Kuper, Hilda
- 1947 An African Aristocracy: Rank among the Swazi. London: Oxford University Press.
- Landtman, Gunnar
- 1927 The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea. London: Macmillan.
- Lawrence, Peter
- 1964 Road Belong Cargo: A Study of the Cargo Cult in the Southern Madang District, New Guinea. New York: Humanities Press.

- Layard, John
1942 *Stone Men of Malekula*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Leach, Edmund R.
1965[1954] *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. Boston: Beacon.
1976 *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude
1964–1971 *Mythologiques I–IV*. Paris: Plon.
- Lewis, Gilbert
1980 *Day of Shining Red: An Essay on Understanding Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindstrom, Lamont
1984 Doctor, Lawyer, Wise Man, Priest: Big-Men and Knowledge in Melanesia. *Man (NS)* 19:291–309.
- Maher, Robert F.
1961 *New Men of Papua: A Study in Culture Change*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
1974 Koriki Chieftainship: Hereditary Status and Mana in Papua. *Ethnology* 13:239–246.
- Mead, Margaret
1934 Tamberans and Tumbuan in New Guinea. *Natural History* 34:234–246.
1938–40 The Mountain Arapesh. *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 36:139–349; 37:319–451.
- Meggitt, Mervyn J.
1971 The Pattern of Leadership among the Mae-Enga of New Guinea. In *Politics in New Guinea*. Ronald M. Berndt and Peter Lawrence, eds. pp. 191–206. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.
1976 A Duplicity of Demons: Sexual and Familial Roles Expressed in Enga Stories. In *Man and Woman in the New Guinea Highlands*. Paula Brown and Georgeda Buchbinder, eds. pp. 63–85. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association. Special Publication no. 8.
- Modjeska, Nicholas
1982 Production and Inequality: Perspectives from Central New Guinea. In *Inequality in New Guinea Highlands Societies*. Andrew J. Strathern, ed. pp. 50–108. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Oates, Joan
1978 Mesopotamian Social Organisation: Archaeological and Philological Evidence. In *The Evolution of Social Systems*. Jonathan Friedman and M. J. Rowlands, eds. pp. 457–486. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Parkinson, R.
1907 *Dreissig Jahre in der Sudsee*. Stuttgart: Strecker und Schroder.
- Pasztory, Esther
1978 Artistic Traditions of the Middle Classic Period. In *Middle Classic Meso-America: A.D. 400–700*. E. Paszatory, ed. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Poole, Fitz John Porter
1982 The Ritual Forging of Identity: Aspects of Person and Self in Bimin-Kuskusmin Male Initiation. In *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*. Gilbert H. Herdt, ed. pp. 99–154. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rappaport, Roy A.
1971 Ritual, Sanctity, and Cybernetics. *American Anthropologist* 73:59–76.
1979 *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books.
1984 *Pigs for the Ancestors*. 2nd, enlarged edition. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ryan, John
1969 *The Hot Land: Focus on New Guinea*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Sahlins, Marshall D.
1963 Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5:285–303.
1983 Other Times, Other Customs: The Anthropology of History. *American Anthropologist* 85:517–544.
- Schieffelin, Bambi B.
1979 How Kaluli Children Learn What to Say, What to Do, and How to Feel: An Ethnographic Approach to the Development of Communicative Competence. Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Anthropology, Columbia University.
- Schieffelin, Edward L.
1975 Felling the Trees on Top of the Crop. *Oceania* 46:168–178.
1976 The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers. New York: St. Martin's.
1977 The Unseen Influence: Tranced Mediums as Historical Innovators. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 33:168–178. Special Issue edited by Bernard Juillerat.
1978 The End of Traditional Music, Dance, and Body Decoration in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea. *Boroko: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies. Discussion papers* 30–32.
1979 Mediators as Metaphors: Moving a Man to Tears in Papua New Guinea. In *The Imagination of*

- Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems. Alton L. Becker and Aram A. Yengoyan, eds. pp. 127–144. Norwood, NJ: ABLEX.
- 1980 Reciprocity and the Construction of Reality. *Man* (NS) 15:502–517.
- 1982 The *Bau* a Ceremonial Hunting Lodge: An Alternative to Initiation. In *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*. Gilbert H. Herdt, ed. pp. 155–200. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1983 Anger and Shame in the Tropical Forest: On Affect as a Cultural System in Papua New Guinea. *Ethos* 11:181–191.
- Schwartz, Theodore
- 1962 The Paliau Movement in the Admiralties Islands, 1946–1954. *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 49, pt. 2. New York.
- 1963 Systems of Areal Integration: Some Considerations Based on the Admiralty Islands of Northern Melanesia. *Anthropological Forum* 1:56–97.
- 1975 Cultural Totemism: Ethnic Identity, Primitive and Modern. In *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change*. George DeVos and Lola Romanucci-Ross, eds. pp. 106–131. Palo Alto: Mayfield.
- Serpenti, Laurent
- 1984 The Ritual Meaning of Homosexuality and Pedophilia among the Kimam-Papuans of South Irian Jaya. In *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*. Gilbert H. Herdt, ed. pp. 292–317. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shaw, R. Daniel
- 1973 A Tentative Classification of the Languages of the Mount Bosavi Region. In *Pacific Linguistics. Series C.*, no. 26. The Linguistic Situation in the Gulf District and Adjacent Areas. Karl Franklin, ed. pp. 189–203. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- 1974a Samo Sibling Terminology. *Oceania* 44:189–215.
- 1974b The Geographical Distribution of Samo Relationship Terms. In *Kinship Studies in Papua New Guinea*. R. D. Shaw, ed. pp. 223–246. Ukarumpa, P.N.G.: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- 1975 Samo Social Structure: A Socio-linguistic Approach to Understanding Interpersonal Relationships. Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Papua New Guinea.
- 1979 Every Man a Shaman. Paper delivered at Religion and Culture Conference, University of Sydney.
- 1981a The Bosavi Language Family: An Interim Report. Paper presented at the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea Meetings.
- 1981b Narcotics, Vitality and Honor: The Use of Narcotic Drink among the Samo of Papua New Guinea. Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association meetings, Los Angeles.
- 1982 Samo Initiation: Its Context and its Meaning. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 91:417–434.
- Silverstein, Michael
- 1976 Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description. In *Meaning in Anthropology*. Keith H. Basso and Henry A. Selby, eds. pp. 11–56. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Sørum, Arve
- 1980 In Search of the Lost Soul: Bedamini Spirit Seances and Curing Rites. *Oceania* 50:273–296.
- 1982 The Seeds of Power: Patterns of Bedamini Male Initiation. *Social Analysis* 10:42–62.
- 1984 Growth and Decay: Bedamini Notions of Sexuality. In *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*. Gilbert H. Herdt, ed. pp. 318–336. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Strathern, Andrew J.
- 1971 Rope of Moka. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1981 Introduction. In *Aida: Life and Ceremony of the Gogodala*. Anthony L. Crawford. pp. 11–13. National Cultural Council of Papua New Guinea. Bathurst, Australia: Robert Brown.
- 1982 Witchcraft, Greed, Cannibalism and Death: Some Related Themes From the New Guinea Highlands. In *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, eds. pp. 111–133. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thurnwald, Richard
- 1916 Banaro Society: Social Organisation and Kinship System of a Tribe in the Interior of New Guinea. *American Anthropological Association Monographs* 3:253–391.
- Tuzin, Donald F.
- 1974 Social Control and the *Tambaran* in the Sepik. In *Contention and Dispute: Aspects of Law and Social Control in Melanesia*. A. L. Epstein, ed. pp. 317–344. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- 1976 The Ilahita Arapesh: Dimensions of Unity. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1980 The Voice of the Tambaran: Truth and Illusion in Ilahita Arapesh Religion. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Vicedom, G. F., and H. Tischner
- 1943–48 Die Mbowamb: die Kultur der Hagen-Stämme im Ostlichen Zentral-Neuguinea. 3 vols. (Monographien zur Volkenkunde 1.) Hamburg.
- Voorhoeve, C. L.
- 1968 The Central and South New Guinea Phylum: A Report on the Language Situation in South New

- Guinea. Pacific Linguistics. Series A. Occasional Paper no. 16. Papers in New Guinea Linguistics 8. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Wagner, Roy
 1972 *Habu: The Innovation of Meaning in Daribi Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weber, Max
 1958[1904–05] *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Talcott Parsons, transl. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
 1978[1956] *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Complete German edition 1956.)
- Williams, Francis E.
 1923 The Pairama Ceremony in the Purari Delta, Papua. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 53:361–387.
 1924 The Natives of the Purari Delta. Territory of Papua, Anthropology Report no. 5. Port Moresby: Government Printer.
 1936 *Papuans of the Trans-Fly*. Oxford: Clarendon.
 1940 *Drama of Orolo: The Social and Ceremonial Life of the Elema*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Worsley, Peter
 1968 *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia*. 2nd edition. New York: Schocken.

Submitted 14 June 1984

Revised version received 15 October 1984

Accepted 26 December 1984

Final version received 21 January 1985