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Creative possessions: spirit mediumship and millennial economy among Gebusi of Papua New Guinea

Bruce M. Knauft

In recent years, notions of power and resistance have often informed anthropological understandings of spiritual experience and embodiment. The entranced individual can be viewed as pushing against inequities bequeathed by political domination, gender, race, or age. Providing a voice for the disempowered, the possessed persona can be considered the colonial subject crying out against colonialism, the woman resisting patriarchy, the youthful agent protesting gerontocracy, the heathen subverting Christianity or Islam, or the spiritual gift economy resisting the market. In various permutations, such views are common in works on spirit possession and millenarianism in Africa and Melanesia, including classic studies such as Lanternari's *Religions of the Oppressed* (1963), Worsley's *The Trumpet Shall Sound* (1968), and Lewis's *Ecstatic Religion* (1971). More recently, local expressions and idioms of spirituality have been seen to contradict and destabilize the assumptions upon which state or Western logics of control are founded. This point has been elaborated by Michael Taussig (1987, 1993), Anna Tsing (1993), Mary Steedly (1993), and Smadar Lavie (1990), among others. As Boddy (1994:419) notes in a recent review, "most would agree that possession cults are or have become historically sensitive modes of cultural resistance."

Amid signal contributions, however, such portrayals easily partake of what Abu-Lughod (1990) calls the romance of resistance. And as Ortner (1995) has recently noted, there is a tendency for studies of resistance to be ethnographically thin rather than rich. Analogously, treatments of spiritual imagination and mimesis can be frustratingly vague at the same time that they can be suggestive and stimulating.

Viewed more phenomenologically and taken on their own terms, the aesthetics and experience of spirituality come to center stage, not as resistance or counter-hegemonic agency but as the expression of cultural meaning and sociality. Presaged by Marcel Mauss, transactional and phenomenological understandings of spirituality have proliferated in recent decades. In the Melanesian context, such perspectives resonate with the important work of Roy Wagner (1967, 1972, 1978), Edward Schieffelin (1976), Nancy Munn (1986), and, more recently, Marilyn Strathern (1988), Debbora Battaglia (1990, 1995a), Aletta Biersack (1995), and Andrew Strathern (1996), among others. In the main, these analyses tread but lightly on the consideration of power, hegemony, and resistance. Analogues from Africa cover a similarly wide ambit, including figures such as Godfrey Lienhardt, Victor Turner, James Fernandez, Michael Jackson, and Michael Lambek.

Vis-à-vis Melanesianist renderings, however, Africanist counterparts more frequently combine phenomenological or symbolic perspectives with ones that draw on critical theory and political economy. There is arguably a longer and more developed tradition of Marxist scholarship in African than in Melanesian studies, including resonance with anticolonial sentiments in African histories and politics (contrast for Melanesia, A. Strathern 1982a). The critical edge of resistance to power in embodied spirituality echoes prominently in Africanist works such as Jean Comaroff's *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (1985), Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991), Peter Fry's *Spirits of Protest* (1976), David Lan's *Guns and Rain* (1985), as well as, more diversely, in Fritz Kramer's *The Red Fez* (1993), Paul Stoller's *Embodying Colonial Memories* (1995; cf. also 1989), and Janice Boddy's *Wombs and Alien Spirits* (1989), among others (see more recently, Graybill 1996; Weigert 1996).

The goal of the present chapter is not to reify differences of analytic perspective or ethnographic area so much as to articulate them. In particular, I draw on sensibilities developed in some Africanist contexts to consider innovative developments in a local genre of Melanesian spirit mediumship.[1] Melanesian spiritual and millenarian innovations commonly engage political, ethnic, or gendered inequality in the context of emergent Christianity, political rivalry, and economic aspiration. The articulation of materiality and religion through "possession" (in both its economic and its spiritual sense) is ripe for interpretation and analysis well beyond what used to be called Melanesian "cargo cults."[2] How to understand the embodiment of spirituality amid poignant inequities of post-colonial circumstance is a key issue. In the present case, I consider a new genre of spirit seance developed by a spirit medium named Wahiaw in a remote Gebusi settlement.

Spiritual context

Innovations in Gebusi spirit mediumship are thrown into relief by more general beliefs and practices.[3] In the early 1980s, the roughly 450 Gebusi were scattered in some seventeen longhouse settlements clustered in a remote corner of Papua New Guinea's Western Province. Located at the northern edge of the extensive lowland rainforest that extends from the New Guinea south coast to the foothills of the New Guinea Highlands, Gebusi life at this time was uninfluenced by Christian or missionary influence and was at the remote fringes of outside economic or administrative impact. Spirit seances occurred about once every eleven days and lasted all night.

Gebusi seances each entail up to a hundred songs sung spontaneously by the spirit familiars of an entranced spirit medium (Knauft 1985a, 1989). At the beginning of the seance, the medium relaxes in the longhouse, smokes, and induces his own spirit to leave, thus allowing spirit persons to come into his body and speak through it. The song lines of the spirits – their primary means of communication with Gebusi – are immediately chorused in resonant harmony by the assembled men of the settlement.

To ride Gebusi seance songs is to take a train of radically fragmented images: arcane, evocative, and erotic. They telescope the past, present, and future, as well as the spaces of the spirit world and those of the Gebusi landscape. Song lines do not form a connect-the-dots picture so much as a poetic collage of overlapping and resonating flashes. Subsequent images recontextualize, ironize, or eroticize previous ones. As if to collapse the Melanesian pre-modern with the academic post-modern, Gebusi seances have that license that merges obscure and arcane vocabulary with larger general themes that are ultimately predictable if not taken-for-granted by the audience.

Gebusi spirit seances foreground the lewd adventures of the medium's spirit women, who cavort in the spirit world and joke sexually with Gebusi men present. These voicings, and their chorused echo among the men, prompt banter and infectious repartee. As well as teasing each other, men joke directly back to the spirit women, who can respond with further provocations in subsequent song lines. Dialogic as well as multi-voiced, Gebusi seances are shot through with humor, play, and aesthetic creativity. As the "second voice of discourse," they are at once melodic, profoundly meaningful, funny, and arousing (cf. Bakhtin 1986:110).

In terms of gender, this deep aestheticism is dominant if not hegemonic. While women themselves are excluded from participating in the seance, the agency of the spirit woman, who forms the ideal image of female beauty and sexuality, is controlled by men; she is voiced by a male medium, echoed by the male chorus, and responded to in autocommunication between the men's chorus and their own banter. Spirit women are bold and sexy; they not only flirt with seduction, they consummate it. The fantasy ends abruptly, however, in the lives of real Gebusi women. Like their spiritual counterparts, young women are encouraged by cultural ideals to be attractive, coy, and flirtatious. These same themes are reinforced by the lascivious idioms of the spirit seance itself, which women listen to from the other side of the thin sago-leaf wall that separates their collective sleeping quarters from those of the men.[4] But Gebusi women can be beaten by brothers and with impunity by husbands if they are suspected of flirting or, especially, adultery (Cantrell n.d.). The spirit woman, in contrast, flirts and fornicates at will even as she remains the medium's spirit wife and the center of universal acclaim. Her excesses fuel men's sexual impetuousness: "I'm too horny to wait for a woman." In day to day experience, a Gebusi woman alone is considered an invitation to rape.[5]

In addition to heavy joking and homoerotic horseplay, men aroused by the spirit women may seek sexual release with a younger man or boy, who sucks him to orgasm outside the longhouse. Though most seances are not accompanied by homosexual trysts *per se*, men's homoerotic joking pervades virtually all of them. This action appropriates and redirects what Gebusi typically suggest is heterosexual desire. This move parallels in a sexual arena men's structural appropriation of female reproduction, for instance their belief that boys need to receive masculine life-force through insemination in order to achieve adult masculinity (see Knauft 1986, 1987a, 1989; cf. 1993).

Despite and indeed because of the charged context, Gebusi spirit seances also provide the fluid context – and often the sugar-coating – for serious and potentially grave spirit pronouncements that galvanize anger against sorcery suspects. Between about 1940 and 1981, virtually one-third of all adult Gebusi deaths were homicides, and the bulk of these were the execution of persons within the community suspected of sorcery.[6] These killings are legitimated and typically instigated by the pronouncements of the medium's spirits during seance inquests, including those that entail a high degree of sexual joking and repartee. In the eroticized aura of the seance, the structural tensions of sexual frustration that accompany unreciprocated marriage or other marital disputes easily inform men's collective acceptance of the sorcery target – male or female – that the medium's spirits have scapegoated for aggression. These accusations draw on gender hegemonies and appropriations; just as men appropriate the voice of the spirit woman in their singing, and just as they appropriate the spirit woman's desire in their sexual joking, so too they maintain a gendered monopoly on violence that can draw upon the energy of sexual frustration and direct it as aggression against the sorcery suspect. In short, the multivocal dialogue of the Gebusi spirit seance combines rich aestheticism with the cultural hegemony of gender domination and violent scapegoating.

Though the killing of sorcery suspects is in no sense reducible to spiritual imagery alone, this violence is effectively instigated by the sexual and social imagery of the seance (Knauft 1985a:ch.8; 1989). The structural tensions of Gebusi society revolve around the mandate for sister-exchange in marriage despite practices of kinship and social affiliation that reduce both the practical possibilities for completing such marital exchanges and the means to acknowledge or ameliorate animosity in cases of nonreciprocity. The projection of anger and the justification of aggression against a sorcery suspect are the prominent result. In the context of the spirit seance, male license becomes men's habitus. A definitive spiritual verdict, if there is one, typically appears self-evident if not taken-for-granted. This reception is predisposed by the heightened arousal and sexual tension that accompanies the event. Gebusi audiences are not dupes; to push this issue is to miss the point. Rather, there is a deep and mutual resonance between the super-conscious associations of the entranced spirit medium, the deepest and most unstated fault lines of Gebusi marital and sexual practice, and the unexpressed or inexpressible sensibilities of audience members that come out as bawdiness and aggressive displays of sexual humor. As if to hybridize Bakhtin (1986) with Gramsci (1971), the chronotope that bridges these domains is hegemonic. It is the application of this spiritual ontology to the situation at hand that the spirit medium makes explicit.

The sociological side of this shared larger reality is prominent; the seance is a public event attended by the men of the various clans in the settlement, if not the larger community. During the seance itself, they typically accept and unify around the spirits' identification and indictment of the sorcerer. Indeed, men find it difficult to discuss or confront these most serious issues in the absence of spiritual guidance; the mandate for accusing or executing a sorcery suspect almost invariably comes from the omniscient voice of the medium's spirits in seances. This voice seems obviously true in retrospect, even if it is often not predictable ahead of time.

Innovation

Gebusi seance format was altered by Wahiaw. At one level, he elaborated the festivity and entertainment of the seance while negating its divinatory and accusatory dimensions. Indeed, some of Wahiaw's most important innovations were sung spontaneously in lieu of an anticipated sorcery inquest. Instead of sorcery and revenge, Wahiaw engaged a new set of tensions that seethed just beyond the Gebusi horizon: the proliferation of trade goods, wage labor, and their conflict with Gebusi notions of kinship and exchange. These developments were poised to complicate Gebusi men's control over violence and sexuality. Among other things, they glimpse the possibility of a shift from direct male violence as a means of settling disputes over sorcery and marriage to the possibility of paying goods or money to compensate aggrieved parties. Though material compensation has been quite developed in the New Guinea Highlands and other areas of Melanesia, Gebusi have favored a person-for-person model of exchange in violence as well as marriage (Knauft 1985b; cf. A. Strathern 1971, 1982b; Godelier 1986).

Wahiaw's seances were innovative in form as well as content. Like standard seances, his new songs were sung spontaneously by his spirits and chorused line by line by the assembled men. But unlike regular seances, his story lines and characters formed a coherently evolving mythic drama. Gebusi mythic narratives (*gisagum*) are not normally "invented"; they are a stock set of stories handed down from elders to juniors in public tellings. Wahiaw created new *gisagum*, however, as spontaneously sung to him by his spirits. In effect, he altered the aesthetic genre of the seance to imbue transient spirit world images with unprecedented coherence and permanence. That these stories were not just told but were physically *embodied* by Wahiaw's spirits gave them illocutionary force and legitimacy. Wahiaw's stories were not just remembered; they were retold by audience members to others afterwards in the form of standard *gisagum*. Transformed from transient song to lasting myth, they became an enduring part of Gebusi narrative corpus.

Wahiaw's innovations are illustrated in two contrasting *gisagum* that he sung over a short period of time. In the first, Wahiaw's songs developed standard mythic themes of a handsome and upright male hero whose propriety ultimately rewards him with marriage to a beautiful young woman. Wahiaw put a poignant twist on this tale by introducing a trade-store gift between the man and his hopeful partner as a pivotal thematic element. Indigenous gifts are common between Gebusi friends and need not normally be returned. But because the trade-store good also qualifies as a new kind of personal property that is ultimately inalienable, the young woman in Wahiaw's story feels obligated to come back to the hero and give his gift back once she has been promised away in sister-exchange marriage to an ugly suitor. Her reappearance gives the hero the chance to break off her onerous marital commitment (which was never consummated), and draw her back to himself. The narrative ends with the happy reunion of the original couple.

In this *gisagum*, the anomalous status of the trade-store good as both gift and commodity provides the ambiguity of an elastic band that allows the actors to stretch their relationship apart and yet be pulled back together again. In point of fact, the hero's trade-store gift *is* an elastic – a band of stretch cord sewn into the woman's bark cape. The trick of the story is the creative use of the trade item, not as bald foreign intrusion, but as a good that can be selectively manipulated to play upon *both* the affective connection of gift-giving and the impersonal nature of commodity ownership. The narrative thus hybridizes an autonomous Western individual, who abides by the commodity contract, with what Marilyn Strathern (1988) describes as the indigenous Melanesian "dividual" – a transacted or trans-individual identity based on gifts and exchange.[7] In the process, the woman and her lover are able to subvert the rules of sister-exchange marriage and assert their nonreciprocal union without negative consequence.

Wahiaw's second *gisagum*, by contrast, marks a more radical transformation of mythic themes. The story begins with four young cousins (two boys and two girls) who are enticed down a hole by an old woman; they are kidnaped and disappear. Their parents search at length for the lost children but cannot find them; ultimately, they all give up except for the mother of the youngest girl. Eventually, she finds the hole the children have gone through. Climbing into it, she descends a cavernous underground waterfall and emerges, like Alice in Wonderland, on the other side of the millennial looking glass.

Much of the narrative takes place in this lower world – a Gebusi place of danger and notoriety. But the lower world in the narrative is a revelation of cargo. The woman finds a huge Western-style house, fully furnished, where she is welcomed by another woman. (The audience is amazed and exclaims their desire to live there, too.) After digging a few net bags of sweet potatoes,[8] the women get into the resident woman's new truck (!) and drive to the patrol post. (More exclamations by the audience.) Shaking with fear, they are admitted through a long series of rooms and doors until they enter the office of the chief Patrol Officer, who is surprisingly termed *kogway wi*, or "culture mother." The Officer is a gruff, fearsome, and yet generous benefactor with a nose as big as a house post; he swivels in his office chair all day and alternately gives orders and grants favors. To the young woman's amazement, he gives them metal patrol boxes full of clothes and money in exchange for their mere bags of sweet potatoes. (The Gebusi audience exclaims in awe.) The primordial giver of Gebusi culture has become the giver of commodities.

The women drive back to their Western house, where they count their money and try on their clothes under the light of their pressure lamp before washing with soap, eating a full meal of store-bought goods, and going to bed on a mattress with sheets under the cover of a mosquito net. (Such stuff is high fantasy for Gebusi; the audience goes wild.)

The women continue to supply the Patrol Officer with bags of sweet potatoes in return for trunks of clothes and money. When the young woman asks for her missing children, however, the Officer becomes angry; the children are under contract to work at the patrol post, and their absence is the price of the goods the woman receives in trade. The children are indentured, and the very process of earning them back ensconces their mother in the same material seductions that separate them from her. Michael Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* (1980) could hardly have found a better model.

Over time, the loss of familial separation works its toll on the young woman, despite her ever-increasing wealth. The Patrol Officer keeps putting her off, taking her sweet potatoes, giving her trunks of money and clothes, and writing letters that say the children's employment is not yet up. The Gebusi audience gets provoked: one man yells he would rip up the letters; another proclaims that the woman was living like in jail, even if she *did* receive clothes and money.

After years of waiting, the Patrol Officer gives the woman a letter telling her that her former husband has given her up for lost, married another woman, and started another family. As the woman reads (she has learned to read), her tears cover the letter until it disintegrates in her hands. She has lost not only her children but her upper-world husband as well. The Gebusi audience loudly laments her plight.

The next day, however, the four years of the children's contracts are up and they are returned to her. Moreover, she is given the patrol boxes full of goods and money that each of the children has received; as their faithful parent, she becomes the mother of them all. In their new truck, the four young adults and their de facto mother drive back up to the upper world. Finding their old house fallen down and the clearing covered with weeds, they set up their lawn chairs, relax, and wait for the woman's ex-husband to emerge from the bush. His former wife berates him for his unfaithfulness: How could he have given up on his wife and child? Unlike the standard narrative hero who bears privation to maintain romance (as in the first narrative), the upper-world husband has been unfaithful and must suffer the consequences. The woman then opens a final letter the Patrol Officer had given her; it invites her back down to the lower world to live. The woman and her children thus leave their natal kin and drive back down to the patrol post with all their possessions, leaving the traditional village, still impoverished, behind forever. Down below, the Patrol Officer welcomes the family back and gives them all big houses full of Western amenities. The woman's sons and daughters all marry outsiders in balanced exchange. In addition, her new sons-in-law give her huge bridewealth gifts – a practice Gebusi themselves have strongly avoided. The tale ends with a Gebusi heaven-on-earth at the patrol post, and the audience exclaims what a fine way to live that would be.

As a new kind of morality tale, Wahiaw's second narrative portrays the tension between indigenous and wage economies. What starts as kidnapping proceeds through loss, the dark alienation of wage labor, and spousal abandonment. One plumbs the deep sorrow that is pervasive in Papua New Guinea as the schism of separation between relatives in town and those in the village. This pathos is perhaps now the new "Sorrow of the Lonely" in a Papua New Guinea that is now post-colonial (cf. Schieffelin 1976). Nevertheless, all doubts are resolved and washed away as the wage economy persists in its largeness. What starts as pain ends up in millenarian luxury. By the narrative's conclusion, new families have been reconstituted, wealth abounds, and morality has been maintained. By contrast, the indigenous village has faltered in its commitments; poor and disparaged, it is left behind in the bush.

Variations on a dream

Wahiaw's two narratives of spiritual embodiment are complements – two sides of an ambiguous currency. Each recognizes the moral tension that pits the desire for Western goods against the demand for social and moral affiliation. But in the first narrative, the trade good *resolves* indigenous romance and brings it to fruition as traditional marriage within the village. It uses the propriety of the material contract to cement rather than explode this local world. In the second narrative, by contrast, wealth, contract, and family are clearly bought at the *expense* of village life.

Wahiaw's two myths embrace highly contrastive outcomes. Yet both are viable, not only aesthetically but practically, to Gebusi as they contemplate their future. As Michael Lambek (1993a:14) puts it in an African spiritual context: "varying views of the world, even different senses of what knowledge is can be held concurrently. People's attitudes to knowledge cannot be reduced to ideological formulae."[9] As Lambek (this volume) suggests, local notions that are incommensurable need not entail logical contradiction or antinomy; to the contrary, they can enrich human experience by diversifying understandings and horizons of expectation.

The logical strictures of our own theories, categories, and standards of interpretation should expand to comprehend this rich and supple complexity. These complications are not just idiomatic or significatory; they can provide the spark for importantly different courses of action. In the present case, Wahiaw's *gisagum* provide a mandate either to encompass Western goods within an indigenous morality or, as in the second narrative, radically to transform economic and social relations.

The tension between these competing desires – for communal morality and for individual wealth – is at the heart of cultural dynamics in contemporary Melanesia. This tension also informs more radical attempts at millenarian or politicospiritual transformation. In various guises, for well over a century, such poignant initiatives have bubbled and erupted in Melanesia, and they show no sign of abating. The changing cultural and economic dimensions of possession – possession in both its spiritual and its material sense – are central to such movements.

Wahiaw's second narrative goes against many dominant – some might say hegemonic – assumptions in Gebusi culture. It proposes a female hero rather than a man to triumph in the world of trade goods and wage labor (cf. Knauft in press). Western wealth is engaged not out of greed, but out of devotion to children and cousins. In addition, the exchange of persons for wealth – both the children laboring for the Patrol Officer and the grown children marrying for bridewealth – suggests change in Gebusi notions of person-for-person reciprocity. In contrast to an indigenous world that legitimates control over women in sister-exchange marriage and male violence in sorcery accusation, material exchange in Wahiaw's *gisagum* forestalls and overcomes both these negative possibilities. Tensions are resolved without recourse to either violence or male control.[10] Ultimately, then, Wahiaw mediates opposed logics of exchange while transcending the limitations of each; moral propriety and equivalence are made consistent with material wealth rather than being at odds with it.

Wahiaw's innovative challenge to both indigenous and intruding forms of power is especially remarkable given his personal circumstances. His village was extremely remote; its population had used stone axes into the mid-1960s.[11] Even by the early 1980s, out-migration and development were very slight, trade stores or schools were generally inaccessible, and no one from Wahiaw's area spoke pidgin or any other contact language. As if to cap this marginality, Wahiaw himself had long been crippled. He had to be carried laboriously to give seances in neighboring hamlets, and it is likely that he had never even seen the Nomad patrol post. Though there was an incipient development project north of Nomad in late 1981, Wahiaw's own settlement was too distant to benefit from it.[12] His extraordinary vision of wage labor, commodities, and accompanying social relations emerged from tranced visions that drew on others' fleeting accounts but had no basis in personal observation or experience.

Implications

Wahiaw's prescient awareness expands upon views of spirituality that either ignore or overweight the relevance of colonial and other hegemonies. Change is not imposed like Captain Cook, arriving like Leviathan on a self-contained island of culture. Not only is change desired poignantly, sometimes achingly, it is generated actively, sometimes almost *de novo*, from the heart of most distant cultures.

Wahiaw's *gisagum* illustrate the special potentials of embodied spiritual innovation. While divergent scenarios of social and cultural change may be talked about or fantasized, their embodiment in tranced experience gives them special performative force as well as aesthetic freedom and diversity. In this respect, spiritual embodiment provides an "intermediate zone" between projective rumination and committed social action; it mediates the creative possibilities of spiritual transformation with potentials for agency and practice.[13]

Wahiaw's spiritual expressions reveal how indigenous views of change are often more multilayered and nuanced than those of our own analyses. They articulate different voices and different opinions, not only between individuals, but within a single individual like Wahiaw over a short period of time. They illustrate the ambiguity, tension, and what Gramsci (1971:333) called the contradictory consciousness of embodying *both* sides of a material and moral problem. The implications of alternative possibilities are brought into focus and imbued with cultural force and value.

If these characterizations are basic, it remains true that many of our own perspectives on culture and hegemony fail to penetrate *the deep ambiguity and profound tension of living agents as they wrestle morally and socially with the inequities of change.* A more focused and nuanced attention to these rocky realities can encourage both an appreciation of spiritual experience and a critique of domination. It is important to retain the relativist moment that appreciates idioms without reducing them into resistance. But if we are to expose and understand inequalities, this moment needs to be matched by others that view spiritual assertions through the critical edge of cultural contestation and bodily constraint. One of our more important tasks is to climb inside these tensions to appreciate and critique alternately the richness of spiritual experience that engages inequity in the absence of easy answers.

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NOTES

1 The theoretical positions at issue are discussed more generally in Knauft (1996).

2 See Worsley 1968; Lawrence 1964; Schwartz 1962; Burridge 1960. Lamont Lindstrom's scintillating *Cargo Cult* (1993) critiques the genealogy of Occidental motives that surround the notion of cargo cult as a projective Western category. As a historically material complement, Nicholas Thomas (1991) considers the Western imposition of material possessions into lives that were ostensibly Pacific. As Annette Weiner (1992) re-reminds us, it is important not just to critique our own categories of possession but to understand the potentials of theirs more fully (see also Bercovitch 1994; Robbins 1994a, 1995).

Excepting Fortune's early *Manus Religion* (1935), surprisingly, few if any full-scale monographs on Melanesian religious possession or mediumship have been published, though the increasing syncretism between indigenous and Christian beliefs makes this possibility ever more intriguing. Stephens's (1995) major recent study richly considers the internalization of spirituality in the context of Mekeo magic and sorcery.

3 Concerning Gebusi spirit mediumship, see Knauft (1985a:chs. 2, 4, 11; 1989).

4 In a sense, women are the ultimate audience of the spirit seance – its superaddressee.

5 Though Gebusi women may go off alone to attract a lover, this non-binding sexuality carries no obligation for the man and high cost to the woman. Except when they are eminently marriageable, women fear this option and guard against it. Men justify non-consensual sex by arguing that if the woman was not willing, she would not let herself be accosted while alone.

6 See Knauft 1985a:ch.5, 1987b; cf. Kelly 1993.

7 The notion of "dividuality" in intersubjective personhood first emerged in South Asian contexts (e.g. Marriott 1976; Daniel 1984).

8 Sweet potatoes are not frequently raised by Gebusi but are known to be desired by government workers.

9 Ellipses in this statement are not shown.

10 It is notable that the Patrol Officer does not attempt to engage the lone young woman sexually or make her his wife. During her long absence from her husband, the female hero in Wahiaw's second narrative is neither subject to nor solicitous of sexual advances. Even at the end of the narrative, the implicit connection between herself and the Patrol Officer is left as a platonic comradeship.

11 In 1962, Patrol Officer Hoad (1962–3) reported that large trees were still felled by stone axes in the area of Wahiaw's hamlet.

12 In late 1981, an advance exploration team for the Chevron Oil Corporation established a base camp north of Gebusi territory. The team conducted a seismic survey for oil reserves; for this purpose, they needed transects cut across rainforest areas two days' walk north of Gebusi settlements. Much of the timber was cut with chain saws by immigrant Southeast Asian laborers, but some – perhaps for public relations reasons – was hand cut by men hired from the local area. These included some Gebusi men (as well as Bedamini, Samo, and Kubor) who were willing to walk to the base camp and work for several weeks or months away from their villages. A few Gebusi men departed for this labor and were paid about 20 kina a week; most returned home either sick or homesick within a few weeks. Wahiaw's new seance genre developed about the same time that some of these men were returning to their Gebusi settlements. His spirit innovations do not refer to these events directly, but they do resonate with its context as projected by Wahiaw, as well as with the working conditions of paid officials and their retinue at the Nomad patrol post more generally. I do not believe any of the Gebusi laborers in 1981 departed from or returned to Wahiaw's own settlement, but he knew of these developments from stories and hearsay. The actual economic impact of these developments was not particularly great, as the goods available for cash were few and the prices very high. The Chevron seismic team departed shortly thereafter, and the possibility of further work departed with them. Though similar explorations had been conducted in the early 1970s with no positive result, in the present case a large oil well was ultimately dug several years later further to the northeast. This project is separate from that described here, but news of such projects travels widely and can have significant cultural impact outside the area that is impacted most directly (e.g., Stürzenhofecker 1994).

13 This point draws on the trenchant remarks of Andrew Strathern in the conclusions to his important recent book, *Body Thoughts* (1996). Strathern (pp. 202–3) suggests that embodiment as an analytic concept is crucial for articulating and mediating our Western distinctions between self and enactment, person and practice, individual and experience, and society and action.

Bodies and persons

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