



Kent Academic Repository

Demian, Melissa (2006) *Reflecting on loss in Papua New Guinea*. *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, 71 (4). pp. 507-532. ISSN 0014-1844.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/676/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840601050692>

This document version

UNSPECIFIED

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

Reflecting on Loss in Papua New Guinea

Melissa Demian

Department of Anthropology
Marlowe Building
University of Kent
Canterbury CT2 7NR
United Kingdom

M.Demian@kent.ac.uk

Draft only: not for citation or circulation without prior permission of author

When anthropologists of Melanesian societies turn to the themes of reflexivity and cultural loss, they characteristically do so in order to demonstrate that contemporary local cultural politics stem from the introduction of translocal relationships during the colonial era and its aftermath (e.g. Foster 1992, Jolly 1994, Keesing 1989, Schwartz 1993, Tonkinson 1982). In these interpretations, Melanesian modernity is fundamentally reflexive in the way that it reconstructs nostalgically a past that is always on the brink of vanishing from living memory. In addition, this putatively reflexive Melanesian modernity construes its past as containing or delimiting an epoch of authentic cultural expression. What makes this Melanesian modernity a form of reflexivity is its constitution in the very 'moment' of the colonial encounter, that is, a consciousness of one's own practices as seen by another. There is much to be gained from these analyses, in particular the ways in which they demonstrate that reflexivity does not always imply the 'self-reflexivity' of anthropological auto-critique (see Song, this issue). Indeed it may not imply anthropological self-reflexivity at all under the conditions of colonialism, which requires, among other things, that colonial subjects

reconfigure their worlds according to relationships characterized not only by difference but by particular forms of inequality. I propose here a somewhat different set of connections. Rather than linking reflexivity to the emergence of a modernist self-consciousness among Melanesians, I want to suggest that reflexivity is in some cases an old cultural technology applied to new social and economic conditions. The technology in question is forgetting, that is, forgetting '*acknowledged*' as a collective goal...an official reorientation, demanding encounter with something (like memory) to be collectively dealt with' (Battaglia 1993:440, emphasis in original). And the new social and economic conditions were those brought by missionaries, who were in turn followed closely by planters, colonial officers and, later, soldiers. Forgetting-as-purposive-action, a phenomenon which has long been documented in societies of the Massim culture area, is precisely the kind of social technique that enables a sense of movement between temporal dispensations. Forgetting requires of practitioners that they remove old relations from view in order to recognize new ones; it is in this moment of suppressing one set of relations in favor of another that a reflexive intent is revealed.

My purpose here is to ask what reflexivity might look like as an ethnographic subject, rather than an anthropological method. I am required by the terms of this project to perform something like the reverse operation on the notion of 'culture loss,' which still haunts American anthropology classrooms as the process anthropology is supposed to document, critique, and according to some lights, forestall. In other words, to view the relationship between reflexivity and 'culture loss' as one between method and subject, respectively, may hinder anthropologists from considering the possibility that their positions can be reversed according to the particularity of an ethnographic

setting. This seemed especially apparent to me on the Suau Coast of southeastern Papua New Guinea, where talk about loss and forgetting calls attention not to the loss of identity,ⁱ but to concerns about relationships left 'unfinished'. The finishing of relations with the dead abounds in Melanesian ethnography, especially that concerned with Austronesian-speaking peoples. I am interested here in demonstrating that what Suau people feel they must finish are not only their ancestral connections, but also connections in the more recent past to missionaries, colonial administrators and the infrastructure they brought with them. Because Suau lies on the western mainland limit of the Massim, I feel that the homology between the loss of relations, either through death or through the introduction of an entirely new category of persons, cannot be ignored. The strategies of Massim peoples for transforming relations with the dead into relations with the living are both what enabled Suau to negotiate successfully with the newcomers in their midst, and what has run them into trouble now that those newcomers are gone, and no one has yet appeared to take their place.

After kula and its subsidiary exchange networks, Massim societies are anthropologically most renowned for their emphasis on the replacement of persons through mortuary rituals (Damon & Wagner 1989, Battaglia 1992, Mallett 1998). Like their neighbors in the island Massim, Suau emphasize death rather than birth as the defining moment of human reproduction, and reconstitute or redirect the relations thwarted by death through mortuary exchanges. Unlike the islands, the Suau Coast experienced a very intensive and localized period of missionization coupled with a physical proximity to the seat of colonial government. While societies of the island Massim certainly also encountered the influence of missionaries and the Australian

administration, these relationships either were not sustained enough to have the effects they had on the Suau Coast, or anthropologists have chosen not to treat critically the implications of colonial history for this region.ⁱⁱ Yet I do not suggest simply that Suau themes of culture loss are the product of having been more heavily missionized or influenced by colonial agents than their island neighbors. Rather, I want to explore how Suau negotiated the translocal relations of mission, plantation and government patrol from 1877ⁱⁱⁱ onward by means of a local strategy which ought to have benefited them in the long run, but did not. The reason it failed them was because the new persons to whom they committed themselves ultimately abandoned the Suau Coast, and more crucially, left no successors. Contemporary Suau are now required to clear a new space on their social horizon without actually knowing who will fill it. They are left in the parlous position of mourning for an image of themselves generated through their relations with a body of others who have departed, while still not knowing with what image it is to be replaced. This position is the one from which I want to consider my themes of reflexivity and loss.

In order to do so, it is necessary to speak in the same breath of certain ethnographic subjects – namely the loss of persons through death and the loss of practices deemed indexical to a culture – which have been kept separate in anthropological discourse. To think about loss in this way is to examine the relationship between ethnographic themes that are not ordinarily linked, or rather, whose linkages have gone unrecognized by particular analytical turns. Suau people would often tell me and each other: ‘We’ve forgotten our culture.’ Other mourning discourses in contemporary Melanesian societies focus on the changes wrought by inequitable

economic relations with outsiders. My argument is that when Suau people say they have lost their culture, they are not accusing others of having taken it away from them.^{iv} They are remarking on the fact that they themselves saw the necessity of changing the configuration of their relations to accommodate new others, with the consequence that when these others went away, people in Suau were left with connections to absent people, defunct practices. It is not the past they have lost, but the future, and they have lost it due to their own expertise at anticipating the regard of others. If Suau are nostalgic, the sentiment is not a modernist longing for an unrecoverable past. Significantly for a people with a complex colonial history, it also does not appear to transpire from a sense of dispossession. Their nostalgia is instead a 'nostalgia for a sense of future – for an experience, however imaginary, of possessing the means of controlling the future' (Battaglia 1995:78). Loss is one such means. The desire in loss here is not a desire to claim redress, but rather a way of imagining the possibility of new relationships to replace those left behind.

In certain respects these observations are not new. The theme of loss appears to have dogged the Suau Coast for much of the 20th century. In the 1930s a government anthropologist for the Australian Mandated Territory of Papua and New Guinea submitted the following opinion in his report on the hypothetical causes of a population decline among Suau:

In another important respect are former interests seen to suffer, viz. by the decay or sometimes the suppression of customs and ceremonies. Although Government and Mission may endeavour to preserve neutrality, the customs are nevertheless subjected to adverse influences under which they languish and

sometimes die outright. Too often they are not adequately replaced and the result is an unwholesome dullness and apathy in village life...I may say, upon a general impression, that village life in the Suau district seemed somewhat more dull and apathetic than I have seen it in other parts of the Territory (Williams 1933:44).

The anthropologist, F.E. Williams, went on to observe that while Christianity was generally assumed to be the natural 'replacement' for local custom, the abandonment of custom among Suau people appeared to be outstripping in pace the adoption of Christianity. He furthermore suggested that beyond the immediate proximity of mission stations, Christianity could never actually hope to provide the kind of all-pervasive social interest that custom did.

Sixty years after Williams submitted his report, I was informed by the president of the Suau Local Government Council that 'our custom is Christian.' When I asked what he meant by this, he said, 'Before, when a stranger came by the house, we would kill him and eat him. Now when a stranger comes by, we invite him inside and feed him.' The form in which he presented his explanation is noteworthy. He employed a pervasive Papua New Guinean rhetoric of present conditions being an exact inversion of past conditions. The present is not an outgrowth of the past: it is the past turned upside-down (McDowell 1985, Rohatynskyj 1997). One of the contributing factors to this temporal image in the Suau context is, I will suggest, the kind of reflexivity that Suau people felt was required of them during the colonial period. I want also to call attention to the difference between saying that reflexivity was a *product* of colonial relations, and saying that colonial relations were cast by the reflexive effect in a

particular form.

The nature of Suau reflexivity requires in particular a consideration of the difference between dispossession and bereavement as distinctive forms of loss. Discourses of loss or of temporal rupture in Melanesia can operate in either or both of these registers; of interest here is why loss in Suau is construed almost exclusively as a process of bereavement and not dispossession. What distinguishes the two is the response each demands; for the former, it is mourning, and for the latter, it is reparation.^v Unlike other Papua New Guinean peoples, Suau do not seem interested in claiming redress for what they say they have lost; instead the Suau imagination is exercised by the idea and the process of grieving for it. Among Massim societies, grieving techniques are marked by a very specific aim.

Forgetting persons

It may be helpful here to bring in an analogous distinction between knowledge which is *held* and knowledge which is *practiced*. In concrete terms I might refer to knowing the technique for building a canoe versus actually building one, or to bring the distinction closer to home, teaching a field methods class versus doing fieldwork. The distinction looks minor on paper, when in lived experience it can constitute a taxonomic limit – one is knowledge, the other is not – or the point at which one sort of life turns into another, for better or worse. A shift from one kind of knowledge to the other can be, and in fact has been, indicated in cases where loss is understood as dispossession. In these contexts, where the ‘deactivation’ or enforced dormancy of knowledge has been invoked as grounds for compensation claims (Kirsch 2001a), the difference between

practiced knowledge and held knowledge is transformed into one of possession versus dispossession (we 'have' our culture, we 'don't have' our culture) by the constraints of the legal arenas in which such claims are made. But for Suau, who do not hold exogenous agents directly responsible for culture loss, the analogy I wish to draw is one with bereavement rather than with dispossession. To claim that one holds but no longer practices one's cultural knowledge because it is dead or forgotten is a very different move to make from claiming that the capacity to practice one's knowledge has been taken away. Knowledge then becomes a matter of intergenerational relations rather than possession. Suau memories or ghosts or culture heroes safely confined to one place, and indeed confined to a period in history, cannot complicate the lives of those who must dwell in the present. This is, I believe, why Suau have framed culture loss as a process of death and bereavement rather than dispossession and restitution. In so doing, they conceive a space in which new relations can replace those that have been lost or forgotten. Forgetting in this sense does not imply that the memory of persons or practices has been obliterated, but has instead been confined to a temporally unrecoverable position. Their anchoring in a past which has wholly broken from the present is precisely what enables the present to be dwelt in and a future to be imagined. Were the dead to remain present in the minds of the living, life simply could not proceed, due to the potentially destructive burden of relations 'pointing to' absent persons. The reconfiguration of these relations is in fact one of the desired effects of mortuary ritual in most if not all Massim societies. To illustrate this point I will briefly sketch the funeral sequence in Suau, as it would occur if a married woman had died.

As in other parts of the Massim, Suau speak of the loss of persons through death through idioms of 'forgetting'. At the first funeral I attended on the Suau Coast, a young man told me in English, 'After this, the work is finished and we can forget all about it.' By 'it' he may have referred to the recent death, but more likely meant the funeral work itself, which reorganizes the relationships thrown into an anomalous condition by death: one cannot stand in relation to someone who is absent. The work of a Suau funeral follows the typical Massim division between mourners and laborers. In Suau, the laborers are affines of the bereaved lineage and are called *tau'anban*, 'funeral wealth eaters,' in reference to the gifts they are given to compensate them for their work. Almost immediately following a death, young men and women of the *tau'anban* lineage arrive to chop firewood and cook for the funeral sequence while members of the bereaved lineage keen and sing hymns for their dead kinswoman. This period of weeping over the corpse goes on for at least twenty-four hours, during which none of the mourners may sleep in order to 'punish' them for any wrong they might have done during the deceased woman's lifetime. At the end of this period the dead woman is bathed, dressed in her Sunday best, and interred, preferably on her matrilineal land. The period of time between the death and the burial is a dangerous one, since the spirit (*yaluwa*) of the deceased may roam about, harrassing or even causing sickness in her kinfolk. A miniature house is built over a new grave and a sprouting coconut planted there, the house serving as a short-term and the coconut palm as a long-term memorial (*he'ihē'inoi*). These memorials also serve the purpose of anchoring the *yaluwa* in place so that the spirit cannot molest the living.

Following the burial, there may be a divination held to determine which sorcerer killed the woman and why, since nearly every death in Suau is attributed to malevolent magic. The outcome of the divination may be used as a basis for later court proceedings against the sorcerer. Also at this stage, the widower of the deceased goes into seclusion while the *tau'anban* prepare for the funeral feast proper, the *buga*. These preparations may take up to a fortnight, since food must be harvested from the garden and bought in from the provincial capital, eating platforms, washing and cooking areas constructed, and pigs solicited from kin all along the coast and its hinterland. During the period of preparation for a *buga* all normal activities of the bereaved village are suspended: markets are not held, bush is not cut or burnt for new gardens, football matches are not played. This is done out of respect (*ha'atiti*) for the woman who has died. All minds are turned to the work of preparation for the *buga*, which, when it is finally held, will also last for a day or more. Throughout the *buga* relatives of the deceased arrive carrying pigs, with those from consanguines designated as *silia* and those from affines designated as *ya'o*. These will be exchanged for each other at the conclusion of the feast. When the feast is over, two *ya'o* are trussed onto poles and propped up against the ladder of the house in which the widower has been sequestered. He descends from the house by means of the poles, and at this point the 'normative time' of village life may resume and the dead woman may be 'forgotten' (*nuwa-ye hui*). Her name must not be spoken, unless and until it is 'recycled' in the person of a descendent.

The work of forgetting is of course not just the funeral feast itself, but all the preparations that have gone into it for the previous fortnight, during which all quotidian

village activities are suspended. The 'funeral time' inhabited until the end of the *buga* is one in which all human endeavor is geared toward the 'finishing' (*ha'ohi*) of the dead, a concept found not only throughout the Massim but in other Austronesian-speaking societies of island Melanesia (e.g. de Coppet 1982, Foster 1990). To finish the dead in Suau includes the redistribution of relationships which pointed to the deceased person, a dangerous anomaly because (unlike in other parts of Melanesia) one cannot transact with the dead, by means of exchanges between the lineage of the deceased and their affines. Accompanying these exchanges are anchoring or guiding practices surrounding the *yaluwa*, which if allowed to wander at large will certainly present a nuisance, and possibly a mortal threat, to the living.

So there is an acknowledgement not only that forgetting is the appropriate way to respond to loss in the context of death, but more importantly that there are particular actions through which forgetting is deliberately realized: it isn't something you do by accident. Of course, alongside the techniques of forgetting or finishing the dead there are also memorializing techniques which over time encompass the lineage as a whole. Graves and their accompanying plantings eventually help to demarcate the land boundaries of the lineages to which they belong. In the much longer term (and ideally, in perpetuity) the deceased's name and likeness will resurface in future generations. These activities are not incompatible with the aim of forgetting the dead; rather, the acts of memorialization that Suau engage in appear to reinforce the notion of forgetting as a *fixing* of memory, rather than an *effacement* of it. I would like now to raise the question of what this might imply for other relationships which Suau may have found it necessary or expedient to forget.

Forgetting *kastom*

To the best of my knowledge, F.E. Williams was the last anthropologist to conduct fieldwork on the Suau Coast before my arrival there in the mid-1990s. While I would not want to read too much into this fact,^{vi} I was struck during the time that I spent there by the absence of some of the more spectacular practices which are found among island Massim peoples but not among their mainland-dwelling neighbors. Suau do not participate in kula and no longer participate in trade with the island Massim. Their mortuary sequence has been heavily compressed and otherwise 'edited' in the period of time between Williams' research and my own. The last *mata'asi* or competitive exchange feast to be held on the Suau Coast was thirty years ago. Pre-Christian songs, dances and various benign forms of magic are defunct. Significantly, sorcery is not defunct, a fact I discuss later and which Suau lament as vigorously as they lament the absence of 'good' custom.^{vii} For it is not only the anthropologists who have noticed, either by their presence or their absence, the relative paucity of 'custom' in this area. Suau themselves have noticed it, and in fact remark on it on an almost daily basis. Either they note the way in which their custom has in fact become Christian, or they claim, more dramatically, that they have 'lost' or 'forgotten' it entirely.

But custom is never just custom in this part of the world; it is also *kastom*, a temporal category found in many Pacific creoles, including Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea. *Kastom* has been made to signify a very wide range of practices attributed to a precolonial past: things no longer done, things still done which probably should not be done, and things possibly done at one time but now passed out of living memory. It has

been pressed into the service of numerous political agendas, most frequently those of urban elites interested in the invocation of the past to countervail the 'corruptive' influences of the colonial period on the present (Anere 1979, Keesing 1989, Narokobi 1983). It has, in its English form, also lent itself to the proliferation of hybrids – customary law, customary land tenure, customary marriage – that enable scholars and other elites to demonstrate that for every European institution and practice imported to Pacific colonies, there was a local analogue with which it could be compared and combined. In much the same way that the culture concept is imagined to refer everywhere to analogous systems of meaning and practice (Strathern 1995), *kastom* has become the Pacific mechanism by which people can potentially say, 'You have yours, but ours is just as good (if not better).' It has additionally become a way for Pacific peoples to politicize internal forms of differentiation, for instance between those who embrace state-generated distinctions of 'public' from 'private' action and those who don't (Albert 1989), or between men and women (Bolton 2003).

On the Suau Coast, talk of *kastom* calls attention to people's genuine preoccupation with what they have left behind them. Anthropological accounts of Suau from the 1920s and 30s (Armstrong 1921, Williams 1933) relate elements of the mortuary sequence, for example, which are no longer in evidence. Suau no longer tattoo the bodies of preadolescent girls, engage in ritual asceticisms to increase their magical and economic efficacy, or sponsor *mata'asi*. They no longer practice respectful avoidance of their cross-sex siblings and affines, and indeed, as some older people darkly predict, even the observance of lineage exogamy may be on its way out and young folks these days will 'just marry anyone.' The point of this laundry list of defunct

or moribund practices is simply to generate an image of the bodies of knowledge which Suau attribute to kastom, and more significantly, attribute to a past which is always just the other side of living memory – that is, they *know* what ‘old time people’ (*iti huyadi*) used to do, but no one alive today does these things any more.

A notable exception is the complaint by young Suau women that ‘kastom is hard’, by which they mean the social and economic constraints attendant upon courtship and marriage. Premarital relations must be undertaken without the knowledge of parents and especially of cross-sex siblings (*yohu*), not because they are forbidden, but because to allow one’s family to know a boyfriend is visiting would be the height of disrespect, potentially requiring the payment of compensation to one’s *yohu* (Demian 2000:103). Not until the declaration of a young man’s intentions to marry, or the more common revelation of the relationship through pregnancy, is a respectful girl to let any of her close consanguines know with whom she is carrying on. In their formulation of the problem, young women hold that kastom is alive and well and making their love lives difficult, whereas senior men and women are more apt to invoke kastom in the sense of an obsolete complex of linguistic, magical and ritual knowledge.

Kastom is used by Suau, in other words, much the same way that ‘culture’ might be used by anthropologists. As an item of political rhetoric it also appears as a signpost for those aspects of themselves Suau claim to have lost. In an era when damages for ‘culture loss’ are claimed in Australian and American courts (Weiner 1999, Brown 2003) and international tribunals (Kirsch 2001 a), this is an assertion to take seriously. Significantly, and unlike most other groups claiming cultural loss, Suau do not appear to lay the blame for their loss of kastom at the feet of the various colonial figures to have

appeared on their social and political horizon over the past 150 years. Instead, they typically attribute the forgetting of kastom to their own interests or, sometimes, their own negligence. 'We Suau people are *stupid!*' one man of my acquaintance told me, in English. 'We're forgetting our culture!'

But why have Suau people been 'stupid', when other groups in Papua New Guinea with comparable colonial histories have done everything they could to maintain particular forms of kastom? Other lowland peoples in particular, such as the Tolai of New Britain (Epstein 1998; Errington & Gewertz 1993; Sack 1985) and the Mekeo of Central Province (Bergendorff 1993; Mosko 1991, 2002) have adapted the very indices of relationships Suau say they have lost – ancestral songs and dances, political forms, long-distance trade partnerships – to the shifting expectations of church, government and urban-rural economic relations. Several writers (e.g. Foster 1992; Jolly 1994) have suggested that kastom is itself an artefact of historical processes throughout Melanesia and the Pacific more generally, emerging from the particularities of the colonial encounter in a given locale. According to this model, kastom anticipates the colonial regard, so that while particular kastom belongs to a particular people, the *idea* of kastom actually belongs to the colonizers and their definitions, or more accurately to the 'moment' of colonization.

To speak of kastom is tantamount to speaking of one's own practices *as they might be seen by others*, that is, as a reflexive move. And this reflexivity is not universally but specifically applied. Stasch (2001) documents the renunciation by Korowai in West Papua of retributive homicide against accused witches as a particular response to the morally unintelligible violence of Indonesian police. Korowai did not

give up all forms of violence, and they certainly did not give up witchcraft. (Indeed one suspects that as in Suau, this would be impossible to imagine as the unabated presence of witchcraft is demonstrated by the fact that people continue to die.) To relinquish the killing of accused witches is to respond to the caprice of others with a Korowai ethics of transaction, including the transaction of anger and violence. Stasch notes that 'police imagery and police injunctions have had a life in Korowai discourse out of proportion with immediacies of the outsiders' actual interventions' (2001:46), suggesting that the anticipation of police violence has been integrated into sense of 'a larger transformation in the very make-up of the world' (2001:47). The emergence of others so profoundly different in appearance, behavior and apparent imperviousness to witchcraft as to intimate that they are not themselves entirely human, requires nothing less than the reconfiguration of Korowai prescriptions for social action. But it is not so much what the others say and do, as what they are believed to say and do, that matters. The Korowai social landscape is altered by Indonesian reprisals for witchcraft-related homicide, both actual and threatened. In neither case can the *intentions* of others be known; instead, their *actions* are deciphered by means of appropriating them and emplacing them within locally constituted moral complexes. As an endogenous move, reflexivity is nonetheless initiated by the need to deal with the (hidden) intentions of exogenous others whose (visible) acts are taken as a cue to responsive or anticipatory action (Strathern 1988:116-119, 260). It remains to ask what kinds of relationships give rise to these particular forms of reflexive interpretation and action. My contention is that the kinds of mobile and apparently relationless others encountered in a colonial period – Indonesian police, British and Polynesian missionaries – require the

people into whose worlds they intrude to imagine themselves as 'locals' in a way not previously required of them.

This is not to claim that any society is or was an isolate prior to the colonial encounter. Suau obviously had extensive contact with other Massim peoples in the pre-colonial era, as well as with Mailu Island to their west.^{viii} But this contact took the highly circumscribed forms either of marriage, trade between clan-mates and other exchange partners, or warfare. It may not have been until the arrival of European interests on the island of New Guinea that Suau were actually obliged to consider the negotiation of long-term peaceful relations with a class of others, and in particular others whose kinship and political affiliations seemed both impossibly far away and problematically immediate. In the 1960s, a linguist talking to a Suau man about historical housebuilding and ornamentation styles was told that 'The Queen doesn't want us to build those houses any more' (R. Cooper pers. comm.). What F.E. Williams called the 'adverse influences' of government and church were therefore not just the indifference or hostility of these entities to local usage, but the reflexive position adopted by Suau toward the newcomers in a possible attempt to anticipate the most effective relationship to be had with them. Talk of *kastom* and its loss is a discursive mode that projects a kind of double vision. The first image is *kastom* as what present-day Suau imagine to be the practices of their forebears as apperceived by the new foreigners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The second is the assumption that *kastom*, so defined, was an object of disapproval by these newcomers, or that it was ineffectual as a means of dealing with them. Finally, to mourn its loss is to mourn what Suau looked like to themselves during the heyday of colonialism.

It is also possible that this same doubling of perspective enabled the partition between knowledge held and knowledge practiced among Suau who felt constrained to decide which knowledge should and should no longer be acted upon. I heard *kastom* most commonly set up in opposition to some contemporary aspect of social life as against 'missionary ways' (*misinale edi laulau*) of conducting funerals, and as against money. These two instances suggested that *kastom* was not only a response to the moral dispensation offered by missionaries,^{ix} but also a response to the economic dispensation which followed in their wake. *Kastom* refers to a temporal field of action. It is shorthand for a pre-mission, pre-government span of time which, although 'forgotten,' has left its marks on contemporary lived experience (see Battaglia 1992:5). Someone may say of former funeral practices 'we forgot everything' and then give a detailed explanation of what they were. During the funeral for a middle-aged woman in 1996, one of my hosts enumerated for me the different kinds of shell valuables and stone axe blades which would at one time have been brought to cover the corpse of the deceased, to be removed later by the *tau'anban*. She had not seen this done since she was a girl, and even then only rarely. 'These days,' she said, 'we do it in the missionary way.' Which was to say, pigs and food were still brought to funerals but not shell or stone valuables, the mourning period was shorter, there would be only one funeral feast rather than two or three, and the bones of the dead would not be disinterred and placed in hillside ossuaries as they were in the past. I would not be able to outline these practices if this knowledge was no longer held, as well as no longer practiced.

My point then is not that *kastom* has vanished from memory, but that its application or relevance to contemporary life has become irrecoverably diminished. The

adjustments made to the mortuary process is a case in point: the whole procedure is shorter, the wealth exchanged is all consumable rather than perdurable. These alterations are, Suau people say, emblematic of what has happened to kastom over the past hundred years. Exchanges which formerly required shell valuables or pigs can now sometimes be accomplished with money, and exchange cycles are much faster (cf. Strathern 1999:54-57). The missionaries, soldiers and planters are long gone, but the economic apparatus they left behind them remains and has become even more complex since independence. As well as relations with persons, Suau must now contemplate relations with entities such as schools, churches, courts, provincial planning offices, timber and oil palm companies. All these relations require that space, of both a concrete and a cognitive nature, be made for them. The most effective way to do so is to forget previous relations that no longer 'point to' the possibility of efficacious action.

I wish to stress that the forgetting of kastom, like the forgetting of the dead, does not necessarily translate to loss of identity; claims to identity in Suau can be based on continuity *or replacement*. A lineage in a land dispute can base their claim on their identity as the 'new Duhumodawa' since the 'old Duhumodawa have all died'; replacement is a legitimate, even a normative mode of reproduction (Demian 2000). People assert things that have been 'forgotten', such as songs, which old people still know and can sing. They mean that these songs are no longer part of everyday life because their place has been taken by new practices, new songs. So to claim that kastom has been lost, and more significantly that it has been forgotten, is to say that this is knowledge which no longer connects up the world of persons and relations in a

meaningful or effective way. I might even suggest that the knowledge is dangerous in the same way that the rampant spirit of a dead person is dangerous.

So what has occurred in the thirty years between 'The Queen doesn't want us to build those houses any more' and 'We Suau people are stupid, we're forgetting our culture'? Forgetting in this case has entailed not simply a 'loss' of knowledge, but a disavowal of its relevance to the present dispensation. That there has been a tremendous rejection of former practices in the past century is not under dispute. But the process by which these practices were deemed obsolete cannot, I feel, be attributed simply to the proximity of Suau to the center of colonial activities,^x or to the efforts of mission and government suggested by Williams in the 1930s. Forgetting has been as much an indigenous as an exogenous project, and while it has without question been inspired by the vicissitudes of the colonial encounter, it is important to ask why this encounter was interpreted in such a way that it seemed necessary or desirable to jettison so much knowledge from active memory in Suau.

The answer lies, I suspect, somewhere in the process by which relationships are replicated over time in Suau. The introduction of an entirely new field of relationships may have been seen as 'replacing' many of those which formerly constituted the social world. New people on the Suau social horizon had to be accommodated somehow by their cosmology, and it may be that they accomplished this by 'replacing' the ancestors and ancestral ways with some new heroes (notably the missionaries James Chalmers and Charles Abel) and *their* ways. How could they benefit from the new relationships otherwise? Suau people demonstrated their desire to enter into relationships with the colonials by anticipating colonial social forms, or Suau interpretations of those forms;

this would later be transformed into a nascent accommodation of their identity as Papua New Guineans, members of a nation state. A Papua New Guinean colleague remarked to me that 'Those Suau are very interesting people...The way they are now is the way the whole country might be one day' (L. Kalinoe pers. comm.). He referred not only to the long history of contact between Suau and Europeans and the subsequently high level of Suau participation in education, church and government activities, but also to the ambivalence I have described here, the prevalent notion among Suau that success in the metropolitan arena has been accompanied by the suppression of kastom. Their ambivalence stems in part from the fact that the others for whom Suau initially reconfigured their social world have all gone, and post-independence Papua New Guinea has seen a resurgence of interest in kastom both as a form of proto-nationalism among elites, and as a form of disdain for the failure of the postcolony to live up to its promises of 'development'. Given these conditions, Suau may justifiably complain that they have outfoxed themselves by attempting to anticipate the form of relationships that were not, in fact, going to benefit them in the long run.

Kastom was about those immediate relationships, spatial or temporal, which now tend to be lumped under the rubric of 'the local', while what came after kastom – whatever it was – required Suau to see themselves as objects of the intentions of others about whom they initially knew very little. The missionization of the Suau Coast in 1877 was followed by wage labor on rubber and copra plantations, the establishment of vocational training centers, two world wars,^{xi} and the surveillance of the Australian administration.^{xii} One consequence of this newfound perspective was that Suau had in effect to reappropriate their own position, to replace themselves. Reverence for the

ancestors was replaced by reverence for Jesus and the Christian God; trade with totemic 'kinsmen' in the islands was replaced by signing on to work for planters, soldiers or government patrol officers. Each substitution of this kind did not of course obliterate the relations that came before it, but it instead suppressed them by drawing the flow of positively-valued action in novel directions. The dying-out of the lineage which previously governed a piece of land means that the lineage currently residing on it can legitimately claim it as theirs. In similar ways, the assignment of kastom to the domain of the forgotten potentially enabled Suau to lay claim to the new resources suggested by new fields of translocal action. Where they ran into trouble was in assuming that the new domain of action before them would endure. As each set of potential relationships with missionaries, planters, soldiers or whomever appeared and then disappeared, Suau were obliged to reassess at each turn the options in front of them, and to 'forget' those which no longer seemed to offer the possibility of positive action.

What all these relationships had in common was that they were conducted in the view of others, a quality or state of action called *masalaha* in Suau and indicative of relations which have been been 'cultivated' properly, as when the giving of bridewealth enables a newly married couple to 'sit down in the open' (*bawamasalaha*) in contrast with their courtship, respectfully conducted at night and in secret. In addition, these relations were 'roads' (*'eda'eda* or *dobila* in Suau and a common idiom throughout Papua New Guinea) along which physical, material and political benefits could travel, and which enabled the visibility of the relations themselves. To refer again to the example of marriage, it is bridewealth and subsidiary prestations which 'open the road of marriage' (*tawasola dobilana ye so'e*) and convert the previously secret relationship

into one observed and recognised by the families of the newlyweds. But it is precisely the visible spectrum of Suau relationships in their 'activated' or 'opened' state that can require the suppression of other relations, the closing of old roads, because of the work demanded of anyone who has acknowledged a new relation: it must be negotiated, maintained, and thought about. Much harder to dispose of are those relationships which have no positive effects, which no one will ever own up to, and which no one can ever see in operation. These are the permanently hidden and negative relations of sorcery.

What is invisible cannot be forgotten

Sorcery is in some respects the original long-distance relationship, since it does not require physical contact between the sorcerer and his victim.^{xiii} But it is a relationship nobody wants, implying as it does the stillness of death. I would like here to draw an analytical distinction between sorcery and long-distance relationships of the more positive variety, which have built into them the assumption and anticipation of mobility. These are the relations which were held to proliferate during the 'golden age' of mission and plantation activity for Suau. As this mobility moved Suau out of relation to place and the fixing-in-place of memory, their evaluation of kastom was further concretisable as standing not only for a time that has been lost, but for a place, and therefore a body of memory recapitulated as historical knowledge. The more that Suau urbanites, for instance, think about kastom, the more distant it appears, and the more urgent it may seem to them to recover it and establish it as what 'ought' to govern their relationships. The context in which kastom is used necessarily changes its specific point of reference,

although in all cases it maintains a relationship to what was done 'before'. For activists and politicians in the provincial capital of Alotau, it is synonymous with 'culture' and refers to readily-packageable performances of difference (songs, dances, housebuilding styles) which can be displayed at Independence Day celebrations and other public occasions. For a village court magistrate it means a fine imposed will be one of traditional wealth (pigs, feasting) rather than money. For the hosts of a foreign anthropologist it explains and at least partially excuses the behaviour of village boys waking her up at night. And for anyone talking about the cause of a death, it denotes sorcery. In sorcery lies an entire domain of *negative* action which, because it is not conducted in the open, could not be disposed of in the way that 'good kastom' could. Because of this, sorcery is the most problematic item of kastom for Suau.^{xiv}

The identification of sorcery with kastom indicates sorcery's belonging to 'the old times' (*huyahuya yai*), a phenomenon impervious to the influences of mission and government. In this respect sorcery is most analogous to the concealment of premarital sexual relations, which, if revealed at the wrong moment or to the wrong people, can also evince a subversive agency that temporarily inverts appropriate relations within and between families. But sorcery, as an immutable 'relic' in the conversations of my informants, appears to mediate between temporal registers in a way no other expression of kastom could. Because of its identification as a practice from 'before', it connotes replication, or perhaps projection into the present. Sorcery performed now is the same as that performed formerly,^{xv} because it is taught by father to son, specialist knowledge which is exempt from the normative matrilineal trajectory of inheritance in Suau. And because of its social repercussions over time, sorcery connotes a kind of

aggregation; its consequences may be felt and exacerbated years or even decades after the original insult to a sorcerer. Death by sorcery provides an opportunity for people to interpret the effects of their actions and those of others in terms of the history of their relationships with one another. All this serves to complicate sorcery's temporal register: it will not stay put in the past along with the rest of *kastom*, but it is the sort of *kastom* people claim that they want the least. I would like to offer an instance of this kind of complication.

My own presence on the Suau Coast was a direct result of the sense of loss among Suau urbanities I have been describing. I was brought there by Matilda Pilacapio, an activist and sometime politician from Alotau with maternal roots in the Suau hinterland.^{xvi} She introduced me to this village so that I should engage in some form of 'salvage ethnography' before the residents of her maternal village became irretrievably Westernised. In this respect her project more closely resembled the rhetoric of cultural preservation among urban elites than the strategy of forgetting found among Suau villagers. Matilda's synecdoche for all things genuinely, meaningfully Suau was 'the matrilineal kinship', a phrase she repeated often and which she insisted was what I would be studying. This phrase came to take on a dual significance the more I came to know both Matilda and the Suau region in general. There was obviously some concrete concern on her part that land registration in Suau was being 'corrupted' by the patrilineal sensibilities of both Western jurisprudence and other Papua New Guinean groups. But in addition to this was perhaps a reference to the past, a desire to forge some sense of continuity to withstand the sense of disruption I heard voiced frequently by educated people in Milne Bay. Continuity was, of course, conceived in

wholly cosmopolitan terms: it was land registration that would preserve the matrilineal devolution of title, in Matilda's view.^{xvii} Ironically, or perhaps with perfect appropriateness, her solution was to achieve this by means of initiating a relationship between her place and a foreigner. In asking an anthropologist to be the standard-bearer for matriliney, Matilda relied upon the old strategy of imagining or reimagining kastom by means of an outsider's regard. If Suau could not hold on to what they looked like to foreigners in the late nineteenth century, perhaps they could achieve something like it with a foreigner in the late twentieth century. And Matilda was hardly alone in this sentiment among educated Suau; as a schoolteacher remarked to me in the market at Fife Bay,^{xviii} 'Those Trobes [Trobriand Islanders] already have plenty of books. When will you write our book?' However, Matilda had very definite ideas about what sort of kastom was an appropriate object of scrutiny.

In September of 1996 she invited me to spend the Independence Day celebrations with her in Alotau. Most of these took place on the grounds of Cameron Secondary School, where the playing fields had been roped off for student performances of dances from their parts of the province. In 'Cameron Village' there were demonstrations of mat weaving, sago making and other subsistence activities. The 'village' consisted of houses representing each of the major architectural styles of Milne Bay: a Trobriand house, a Dogura house, a Woodlark house, and so on. The dances were cordoned off with twine and announced over a public address system. Like the houses, each was meant to represent a region of Milne Bay, with the most anticipation and enthusiasm reserved for the raunchy Trobriand 'tapioca dance'.^{xix} The next day, suffering somewhat from nostalgia fatigue, I asked Matilda if 'tradition' meant whatever

you can put on display. 'Don't be silly,' she snapped. 'We don't put witchcraft on display.'

In her remark lies the heart of the problem with sorcery, its peculiar resistance to the project of forgetting in spite of the fact that it is something almost no one admits to doing and is categorically invisible in its operations (but not in its effects). Suau sorcerers work entirely in secret and their magic is not visible to the uninitiated, although the identities of the more notorious specialists are public knowledge and may be subjected to post-mortem divination techniques. When a death occurs, sorcery is always the cause, reminding Suau that sorcery is still and presumably always will be with them. Sorcery is also periodically held up by Suau as evidence that they still are incompletely converted to Christianity, 120 years after the arrival of James Chalmers and the establishment of an LMS station at Suau. It is the *kastom* nobody wants; coastal Suau accuse their inland neighbours of being especially vicious and intractable practitioners of homicide magic, while claiming at the same time that inlanders don't do 'good' *kastom* such as funeral feasting properly. 'Good' magic such as garden spells has, along with other techniques and technologies of the pre-contact era, been 'forgotten'. As one old man ruefully put it, 'Before we had magic, and our gardens were small but abundant. Today we have steel axes and other new things, and our gardens are enormous but there's no food in them.' The magic which helped to sustain people is gone, and all that Suau have left is magic for making people sick and killing them. Sorcery is therefore not only undisplayable because it is invisible, but it is also undisplayable because it is shameful, suggesting a category of action that has lost its moral compass.

The fact that sorcery is undisplayable points also to its nature as 'subversive agency' (Munn 1990:13), that element of relationships which is activated by anger, exclusion, jealousy and other negative sentiments made manifest by the sorcerer in the bodies of his victims. As Munn has observed, sorcery projects the past, conceived as the history of particular relationships, into the present, and obliges those relationships to be acted upon (1990:5). Like other items of *kastom*, sorcery 'has no future', but unlike them it cannot be forgotten because it was never regarded as part of a repertoire of positive or productive relationships to begin with. Forgetting is only possible where remembering is its potentially desirable alternative. And because sorcery cannot be forgotten, it still obliges people to assess forensically each instance of its appearance in the form of illness and death, a sign of moral error somewhere in the bewitched person's field of relations. Sorcery persists in causing people to anticipate the perspective of others: it is, in other words, generative of reflexivity.

The reflexivity demanded by sorcery and the reflexivity with which Suau approached the colonial encounter are, on the face of it, quite different from each other. What distinguishes the two is, on the face of it, scale: sorcery is a product of people 'up close' but in the distant past, while colonization is a product of people 'far away' but in the more recent past.^{xx} Thus, the effects of both are analogous. Just as death by sorcery obliges people to confront the history of relationships in order to 'finish' them, so the period of the colonial encounter may have compelled the 'finishing' of particular forms of knowledge about local relations in order to activate the potential of translocal ones. But whereas colonialism is ostensibly 'over', postcolonial relations with translocal

others are often even more elusive than colonial ones were – to the point that they are *restatable in local terms*.

In 1999, on a visit to my host family from previous fieldwork, I was told the following story about the mysterious illness of their granddaughter, my namesake, when she was still an infant. Her grandfather Saunia said that small Melissa had been taken to the hospital at Alotau with stomach problems, which resulted in an operation where an X made of twigs was removed from her intestines. A doctor apparently then ‘prescribed’ a prayer meeting with the family, after which Melissa made an excellent recovery from her surgery. The understanding of my former hosts was that somebody *within the family* had made her sick through sorcery, a highly unusual phenomenon, because my friends had not agreed to have the family’s land logged by a timber company. ‘Because the problem was about trees,’ Saunia explained to me, ‘she had the wood in her stomach’ (*Pilipili oyagi pa’ana, oyagi bogana yai* – Suau uses the same lexeme, *oyagi*, for what would be differentiated in English as the tree and its material). There were several implications for the revealed nature of Melissa’s illness. One was that the family was fighting over its own trees, never a good sign, as Suau lineages ideally decide upon the disposal of their resources with ‘one mind’ (*nuwa ’eseqa*). Another was that whoever had performed the magic to make Melissa sick communicated to Saunia in no uncertain terms that the trees lay at the heart of the disagreement, and furthermore that the disagreement threatened to cause kin to act like non-kin (cf. Demian 2004:37). Never far from my mind was an additional possibility, that Saunia and his family perceived the magical attack on Melissa to be a critique along the lines of ‘You don’t need the money from logging because you already have a

materially beneficial connection to a foreigner.’ Because the namesake relationship is a responsibility-bearing one in Suau, an attack on one of a pair of namesakes is in very real terms an attack on the relationship itself. Sorcery had made the displeasure of other lineage members manifest to Saunia, and additionally laid bare for scrutiny the assessment of his long-distance relations versus his nearer ones.

Papua New Guinea abounds with examples of the discourse of sorcery being used to gauge the status and ‘length’ of relationships, and these instances are intimately implicated in evaluations of loss. Kirsch (2001b) offers the case of a mining company regarded as a ‘corporate sorcerer’ by the Yonggom people whose land the Ok Tedi copper mine has devastated. Once the company can be identified as exhibiting sorcerer-like behaviour, it can be dealt with as one deals with sorcerers and their depredations: by demanding compensation. In so doing, they transform the long-distance relationships preferred by the mine into the more immediate relationships within whose terms Yonggom are able to act. To put it another way, sorcery does what other kinds of *kastom* cannot: it collapses distance, not physically, but socially. This is of course the kind of effect sorcery has always had. What has changed is the way these invisible processes and their visible effects are related to loss. Demands for compensation in the wake of deaths by sorcery are only partly about restitution for the person lost; they are also about the restoration of respectful relations between the family of the sorcerer and the family of his victim.^{xxi} Where loss occurs on a wholesale and impersonal scale, the possibility of restoring concord between the parties whose discordant relationship precipitated the loss seems remote. Yonggom and other peoples affected by the the Ok Tedi mine can point to the destruction of their territory

and the literal loss of their livelihood virtually overnight, whereas Suau are left to contemplate a series of social, political and economic relations which have been lost, found, and lost again over nearly a century and a half of engagement with translocal and transnational interests. There is no one from whom they can claim compensation, only a domain of knowledge to be 'forgotten' as a means of anticipating that there will be yet another set of relations to come along.

Comment [IG1]: Make these last two sentences begin a whole new paragraph, and explain them for your conclusion. These sentences are too dense, and really are a delightful conclusion fleshed out.

I have argued that the discourse of loss in Suau requires a different set of analytical connections from those which suggest that the category of kastom is primarily an artefact of the colonial encounter. The reason is that this line of argument has, like sorcery, no future, only a past, and as such is analytically fruitful but impracticable for the people who claim the kastom category and its loss in the first place. Suau are actively engaged in anticipating a future for themselves precisely by means of getting kastom out of their way. The formulation of the Suau strategy is on the face of it negative – 'We've forgotten our kastom' – but its effect is positive, in that it forces the contemplation of what relations may come next and how they are to be accommodated. Loss for Suau offers a means of 'Asking how a given "present" becomes a medium of what is "not present"' (Munn 1990:12), because the idiom of loss is ultimately a claim to the empty space of relationships whose potential is yet to be realized. It is in the maintenance of that space that a future, however uncertain, becomes imaginable.

10,377 words

Notes

This article has had a long gestation, but it first appeared in embryonic form as a paper presented to the 'Loss and Compensation' panel convened by Stuart Kirsch at the 2001 conference *Innovation, Creation and New Economic Forms: Approaches to Intellectual and Cultural Property* in 2001 at the University of Cambridge. My thanks go to Dr Kirsch for encouraging me, on several occasions, to turn that paper into an article. Other parts of the article appeared as papers given at the annual AES meeting in Providence, Rhode Island, in 2003, and to the Department of Anthropology at Yale University in 2004, and I thank all who contributed comments and criticism on those occasions. Finally my deepest appreciation goes to the three anonymous reviewers for *Ethnos* and to Ilana Gershon, whose thoughtful and uncompromising editorial input enabled this piece to fully make the transition from all those earlier manifestations to its present form.

ⁱ This is not to say that concerns about identity are absent among Suau, but they are overwhelmingly the preoccupation of urban elites, and not generally of rural people. I have even heard Suau lectured by members of other ethnic groups about their apparent disregard for the indices of identity, as when a pastor from Central Province harangued his Suau congregation about the fact that their youths were trying to 'look Japanese'.

ⁱⁱ Notable exceptions are Macintyre 1989 and Young 1989 and 1996.

ⁱⁱⁱ The year of the establishment of a London Missionary Society headstation at Suau by James Chalmers.

^{iv} I must qualify this statement with the observation that those 'others' encountered by Suau undeniably sought the transformation of what we would now call Suau culture, due to the outright hostility to local practice of the Polynesian LMS teachers with whom Suau initially had the most contact, and later of Charles Abel, whose fundamentalist breakaway mission at Kwato aimed explicitly to alter the entire sociological and economic landscape of the Suau Coast (Prendergast 1968, Wetherell 1996). That they did so is undisputable; what I might still question is whether this process was coterminous with the loss of culture.

^v Or to invoke a more familiar concept in the Papua New Guinea context, compensation. Compensation, a concept and a demand that exercises the imaginations of resource extractors, journalists, policymakers and academics alike, has spawned its own interpretive cottage industry. See in particular Toft 1997, Strathern 1999:188-192.

^{vi} Although as Wagner (1981:7) notes, the anthropologist as 'culture missionary', like other missionaries, produces a self-consciousness in the people with whom he or she is working. It is this process, he suggests, which enables anthropologists to elicit something they can call culture from people, just as Christian missionaries elicit something they can call Christianity. Christian missionaries, however, were at least historically inclined to seek to produce Christianity among peoples who didn't have it. The same may or may not be true of the culture missionary. While few anthropologists would actually make the claim that some people have no culture or that some have more culture than others, I am intrigued by the curious aversion of anthropologists to Suau since 1933. By contrast, anthropology in the island Massim has been more or less endemic throughout the 20th century, to the point where anthropological research

was actually banned in Milne Bay Province for two intervals during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Douglas (2001:52) has also discussed the 'chauvinism' of 1960s and 1970s anthropological work in island Massim societies against neighbouring peoples deemed 'too Christian' (i.e. insufficiently 'authentic') to do fieldwork with.

^{vii} That is, forms of custom which have become revalorized in the post-Independence era. Many of these, including songs, dances, tattooing, benign magic, competitive exchange at funeral feasts and *mata'asi*, and the veneration of ancestors and culture heroes, were classed as 'bad' custom during the missionary era. Probably the only two institutions which were considered 'bad' then and are still considered 'bad' now are polygyny and sorcery. I was in 1999 treated to a spirited defense of polygyny by the last living polygynist on the Suau Coast and his surviving wife (he had had three). He was also a sorcerer. As sorcery is not only specialist knowledge but men's knowledge, he could not possibly have discussed that subject with me, let alone defended its use.

^{viii} Trade between Mailu and Suau in fact still occurs, during the dry months of November-January when betel nut is scarce on Mailu but still obtainable from the Suau hinterland.

^{ix} It should be noted that the missionaries with whom Suau had the most sustained contact were Polynesian, and most often Samoan, rather than European. The policy of the London Missionary Society during the time that Suau became its third outpost on the south coast of New Guinea was 'itinerant', meaning that Polynesian teachers were left *in situ* under the intermittent supervision of British pastors (Prendergast 1968).

^x For almost the entire duration of the colonial era Samarai Island, at the eastern extremity of the Suau Coast, was the district headquarters of Milne Bay. In 1969 they

were moved to Alotau on the mainland, due for the most part to Samarai's tiny size, which did not permit for the expansion of what would soon be the provincial capital. Because of their historical proximity to the seat of regional government Suau are still sometimes referred to as 'Samarai' when they travel to other provinces in Papua New Guinea.

^{xi} During the Second World War, Suau villages were emptied of able-bodied men, nearly all of whom went to Alotau to work as 'domestics' for the Australian and American soldiers stationed there.

^{xii} The interest of the administration in heightening the 'visibility' of its subjects had profound implications for some inland lineages, who were compelled to relocate to the coast or to the estuary of Mullins Harbour so that they could more easily be visited by patrol officers. These lineages are now living and gardening on borrowed land; sometimes their members trek for hours to garden on their old ancestral ground in the mountains fringing the coast.

^{xiii} Although sorcery can be conveyed physically, through a bespelled betel nut or food. 'If you ever go there,' a dinghy operator once told me as we passed by a certain coastal village, 'don't eat anything.' 'Why not?' I asked. 'Just don't,' he said darkly, his reluctance to be more specific communicating with perfect clarity that he considered the inhabitants of the village in question to be a pack of sorcerers and witches. This said, in all instances where people described to me the kinds of sorcery used to kill someone rather than simply to cause them mischief, they was marked by the theory that the sorcerer committed a homicide by means of a spirit double or enchanted weapon that

travelled and struck of its own accord. I could not ask sorcerers themselves about homicide magic, as this is men's knowledge.

^{xiv} I gloss as 'sorcery' the Suau term '*aiyahan*, malevolent magic practiced by men.

Women also have dangerous magic, *kalawan*, which Suau themselves tend to gloss as 'witchcraft'. *Kalawan* does not kill people directly in the way that '*aiyahan* does, but can sicken, disorient or deceive them to the point where self-destruction may result.

^{xv} There is an important qualification to this, however. Some younger Suau I spoke to were of the opinion that men of their generation had only been taught witchcraft 'halfway', e.g. young sorcerers could make people sick but not make them better again. So knowledge of witchcraft is now even more dangerous than it had once been because it is assumed to be incomplete, while those who know the 'entire' repertoire of the sorcerer are dying off.

^{xvi} Her father was from Woodlark Island/Muyuw, and her paternal grandfather was Filipino, which accounted for her surname.

^{xvii} Perhaps fortunately, land registration is far too expensive a process for most rural Suau to contemplate. I say 'fortunately' because registration would almost certainly have the opposite effect to the one imagined by Matilda (see Demian in press). However, commercial interests such as timber and oil palm companies that operate on the Suau Coast have come up with their own methods for identifying and transacting with 'landowners', which, because they bear no relationship to how land stewardship actually works in Suau, will undoubtedly guarantee a steady stream of land disputes for the next twenty years or so.

^{xviii} An old LMS mission station which boasts the Suau Local Government Council, a health center, a primary school, a police station and a United Church seminary, Lawes Bible College. There is also a market every Saturday morning.

^{xix} This dance, or a variation of it, has achieved transnational familiarity in Jerry W. Leach's 1975 film *Trobriand Cricket*, in which one of the cricket teams performs a dance that demonstrates its own virility, and may also draw analogies between stamina on the cricket pitch and stamina in sexual intercourse. Tapioca, while a very low-status food, is in the context of the performance a phallic reference.

^{xx} The presumed 'localism' of magic has been amply critiqued in, for instance, Geschiere 1997 and Sanders 2001, both of whom demonstrate the ways in which magic has begun to follow the logic of the market in West and East Africa, respectively. People who express concern about this phenomenon are not so much worried about the buying and selling of foreign magics, as they are about the unknown moral valence of these magics, thus reasserting 'local' value in 'translocal' artefacts and procedures.

^{xxi} Suau village court magistrates have been known to require reciprocal payments between sorcerers and the families they prey upon, with the explicit intention that the payments are not compensation but are instead meant to restore respect, if not goodwill, between the two families.

References

- Albert, Steve. 1989. 'Kastom I Winim Ol Lo'? Development and Political Culture in the Lak Electorate, New Ireland. *Research in Melanesia* 13: 19-29.
- Anere, David Lusa. 1979. Pig Exchange in Suau in the Milne Bay Province. *Oral History* 8: 54-89. Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.
- Armstrong, W.A. 1921. *Report on Suau-Tawala*. Port Moresby: Territory of Papua Anthropology Report No. 1.
- Battaglia, Debhora. 1992. The Body in the Gift: Memory and Forgetting in Sabarl Mortuary Exchange. *American Ethnologist* 19: 3-18.
- . 1993. At Play in the Fields (and Borders) of the Imaginary: Melanesian Transformations of Forgetting. *Cultural Anthropology* 8: 430-442.
- . 1995. On Practical Nostalgia: Self-Prospecting among Urban Trobrianders. In *Rhetorics of Self-Making*, edited by Debhora Battaglia. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bolton, Lissant. 2003. *Unfolding the Moon: Enacting Women's Kastom in Vanuatu*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Brown, Michael F. 2003. *Who Owns Native Culture?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- de Coppet, Daniel. 1982. The Life-Giving Death. In *Mortality and Immortality: The Anthropology and Archaeology of Death*, edited by S.C. Humphreys and H. King. New York: Academic Press.
- Damon, Frederick H. & Roy Wagner (eds). 1989. *Death Rituals and Life in the Societies of the Kula Ring*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.

- Demian, Melissa. 2000. Longing for Completion: Toward an Aesthetics of Work in Suau. *Oceania* 71: 94-109.
- . 2004. Disputing Damage versus Disputing Ownership in Suau. In *Rationales of Ownership*, edited by Lawrence Kalinoe & James Leach. Oxford: Sean Kingston Publishing.
- . In press. 'Land Doesn't Come from Your Mother, She Didn't Make It with Her Hands': Challenging Matriliney in Papua New Guinea. In *Feminist Perspectives on Land and Law*, edited by Hilary Lim & Anne Bottomley. London: Cavendish Publishing.
- Douglas, Bronwen. 2001. Encounters with the Enemy? Academic Readings of Missionary Narratives on Melanesians. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43: 37-64.
- Epstein, A.L. 1998. Tibuan: The Survival of the Male Cult among the Tolai. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 12: 15-28.
- Errington, Frederick & Deborah Gewertz. 1993. The Triumph of Capitalism in East New Britain? A Contemporary Papua New Guinean Rhetoric of Motives. *Oceania* 64: 1-17.
- Foster, Robert J. 1990. Nurture and Force-Feeding: Mortuary Feasting and the Construction of Collective Individuals in a New Ireland Society. *American Ethnologist* 17: 431-448.
- . 1992. Commoditization and the Emergence of *Kastam* as a Cultural Category: A New Ireland Case in Comparative Perspective. *Oceania* 62: 284-294.

- Geschiere, Peter. 1997. *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Jolly, Margaret. 1994. *Women of the Place: Kastom, Colonialism and Gender in Vanuatu*. Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Keesing, Roger M. 1989. Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific* 1: 19-42.
- Kirsch, Stuart. 2001a. Lost Worlds: Environmental Disaster, Culture Loss, and the Law. *Current Anthropology* 42: 167-178.
- . 2001b. Property Effects: Social Networks and Compensation Claims in Melanesia. *Social Anthropology* 9: 147-163.
- Macintyre, Martha. 1989. Better Homes and Gardens. In *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, edited by Margaret Jolly & Martha Macintyre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mallett, Shelley. 1998. Living Death: Understanding Respect and Respectful Understanding on Nua'ata, Papua New Guinea. *Canberra Anthropology* 21: 1-25.
- McDowell, Nancy. 1985. Past and Future: The Nature of Episodic Time in Bun. In *History and Ethnohistory in Papua New Guinea*, edited by Deborah Gewertz & Edward Schieffelin. Sydney: Oceania Monograph No. 28.
- Mosko, Mark. 1991. Great Men and Total Systems: North Mekeo Hereditary Authority and Social Reproduction. In *Big Men and Great Men: Personifications of Power in Melanesia*, edited by Maurice Godelier & Marilyn Strathern. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- . 2002. Totem and Transaction: The Objectification of 'Tradition' among North Mekeo. *Oceania* 73: 89-109.
- Munn, Nancy. 1990. Constructing Regional Worlds in Experience: Kula Exchange, Witchcraft and Gawan Local Events. *Man* (N.S.) 25: 1-17.
- Narokobi, Bernard. 1983. *The Melanesian Way*. Boroko: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.
- Prendergast, Patricia A. 1968. *A History of the London Missionary Society in British New Guinea, 1871-1901*. PhD dissertation, University of Hawai'i.
- Rohatynskyj, Marta. 1997. Culture, Secrets, and Ömie History: A Consideration of the Politics of Cultural Identity. *American Ethnologist* 24: 438-456.
- Sack, Peter. 1985. *Bobotoi and Pulu*. Melanesian Law: Normative Order or Way of Life? *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 41: 15-23.
- Sanders, Todd. 2001. Save Our Skins: Structural Adjustment, Morality and the Occult in Tanzania. In *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Henrietta L. Moore & Todd Sanders. New York: Routledge.
- Schwartz, Theodore. 1993. Kastom, 'Custom', and Culture: Conspicuous Culture and Culture-Constructs. *Anthropological Forum* 6: 515-540.
- Stasch, Rupert. 2001. Giving Up Homicide: Korowai Experience of Witches and Police (West Papua). *Oceania* 72: 33-52.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1988. *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- . 1995. The Nice Thing about Culture is that Everyone Has It. In *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge*, edited by Marilyn Strathern. New York: Routledge.
- . 1999. *Property, Substance and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things*. London: Athlone Press.
- Toft, Susan (ed). 1997. *Compensation for Resource Development in Papua New Guinea*. Canberra: ANU Press for PNG Law Reform Commission.
- Tonkinson, Robert. 1982. National Identity and the Problem of Kastom in Vanuatu. *Mankind* 13: 306-315.
- Wagner, Roy. 1981. *The Invention of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weiner, James. 1999. Culture in a Sealed Envelope: The Concealment of Australian Aboriginal Heritage and Tradition in the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Affair. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 5: 193-210.
- Wetherell, David. 1996. *Charles Abel and the Kwato Mission of Papua New Guinea 1891-1975*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Williams, F.E. 1933. *Depopulation of the Suau District*. Port Moresby: Territory of Papua Anthropology Report No. 13.
- Young, Michael. 1989. Suffer the Children: Wesleyans in the D'Entrecasteaux. In *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, edited by Margaret Jolly & Martha Macintyre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- . 1996. Commemorating Missionary Heroes: Local Christianity and Narratives of Nationalism. In *Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific*, edited by Ton Otto & Nicholas Thomas. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.