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The Genesis and the Escalation of Desire and Antipathy in the Lihir Islands, Papua New Guinea

NICHOLAS A. BAINTON

WHEN A LARGE GOLD MINE WAS CONSTRUCTED IN 1995 ON THE MAIN ISLAND OF THE Lihir group, off the east coast of mainland New Ireland in Papua New Guinea, Lihirians envisioned that the life of which they had long dreamed was closer to their grasp. Many thought that the mine was the harbinger of changes predicted in the 1960s by local leaders of politico-religious movements who imagined that all Lihirians would have access to unlimited wealth and that their islands would become the centre of the world. Instead, mining brought greater social stratification as a result of the unequal distribution of mine-derived wealth within the Lihir community.¹ This was coupled with a heightened awareness of their marginality within the world system, as greater access to the outside world revealed the inherent injustices of the mining industry and exposed them to influential subaltern discourses.² Nevertheless, since mining negotiations began in the early 1980s, Lihirian leaders have sought to realise these earlier prophecies of an inverted order and, at the very least, to minimise state involvement in Lihirian affairs and achieve dreams of economic development that would equally benefit the entire community. These desires reflect the unrealistic expectations for development that large-scale resource extraction tends to generate within host communities; however, in this case, such expectations also represent the residual essence of previous prophecies and aspirations.

This article offers a short economic and political history of the Lihir Islands in order to illuminate historical influences upon the ways in which Lihirians have responded to mining and to illustrate the genesis and escalation of desire for

¹ See N. Bainton, 'Virtuous sociality and *other* fantasies: pursuing mining, capital and cultural continuity in Lihir, Papua New Guinea'. PhD thesis, University of Melbourne (Melbourne 2006), ch. 3; C. Filer, 'Custom, law and ideology in Papua New Guinea', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 7 (2006), 76.

² Lihirian leaders were particularly influenced during the mine's negotiation phase by discussions with Francis Ona, who became the leader of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army.

economic and political autonomy (not necessarily outright secession) and the rising antipathy towards the colonial administration, and later the national government.³ Primarily it is argued that earlier cargo cult movements — namely the Tutukuvul Isakul Association (TIA, meaning ‘stand up together to plant’ in northern New Ireland languages⁴), which evolved into Tuk Kuvul Aisok (TKA, meaning ‘stand together and work’ in the Tigak language from northern New Ireland⁵), and later the Nimamar⁶ movement — are the combined result of moral inequality between Lihirians and Whites, and the gradual process of pauperisation that encompassed Lihir under the Australian administration, generating a sense of ‘economic frustration’. By tracing political and economic developments throughout the colonial period, particularly the latter years of the Australian administration (1945–75) and the peak of these politico-religious movements (1960–70s), I provide a genealogy of Lihirian marginality, discontent, and desire for wealth and independence. This reveals not only the conditions under which these movements emerged, but also their defining characteristics that have continued to influence Lihirian praxis and ideology. Thus, a historical understanding of the ways Lihirians shaped and understood the colonial project and independence is telling of the contemporary political and economic climate within the context of large-scale resource extraction.

Lihir: The Social and Politico-economic Context

Lihir remained marginal under both German and Australian administration, mainly owing to geographic isolation and a lack of government attention. The copra industry waxed and waned as Lihirians received little practical assistance from the Australians, while the Catholic and Methodist missions inspired little economic activity. The advent of mining turned Lihir on its head, providing fantastic amounts of wealth and infrastructural development in addition to employment opportunities and increased health and education services. The open-cut gold mine is situated in the Kapit Ladolam area of Niolam Island and has a projected life-span of at least 30 years.⁷ The Lihir Islands are relatively small, with the total land area of Niolam around 106 square kilometres.

³ This research draws upon 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Lihir between 2003 and 2004. Research was conducted in both Tok Pisin and Lir languages. Archival research on the Australian administration patrol reports was undertaken at the National Archives of Australia in Canberra. This work also draws upon research carried out during regular engagement with the Lihir gold mine through the author’s position at the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland.

⁴ D.K. Billings, ‘The Johnson cult of New Hanover’, *Oceania*, 40 (1969), 18.

⁵ Patrick Turaun, pers. comm., 15 Jan. 2008.

⁶ Nimamar is an acronym of the names of the four islands in the Lihir group: Niolam, Malie, Masahet, Mahur. Supposedly this was intended to imply ‘unity’.

⁷ The Lihir project is owned and operated by a publicly listed company Lihir Gold Limited (LGL). Until 2005, the mine was operated by the Lihir Management Company (LMC), a fully owned subsidiary of Rio Tinto. In October 2005, Lihir Gold Limited assumed full independent management and appointed its own chief executive officer.

While the mining pit represents only a fraction of this landmass, all Lihirians have been profoundly affected by the associated social and economic changes. Mining has also aided population growth through improved health services and the return of absent Lihirians. Over time, numbers have increased from approximately 3,600 in 1925, to 5,500 in 1980, to nearly 14,000 in 2006. With the addition of migrants and other company employees, the estimated total population in 2007 was nearly 18,000 people.

Lihir is a matrilineal society where traditional male leadership revolves around maintaining the lineage's men's houses (*rihri*) as both an edifice and institution, and participating in complex exchange networks, conforming to similar socio-political structures throughout the immediate region.⁸ In many instances, leaders expect support from their matrilineal base in modern political and economic pursuits. More recently, this has been complicated by the proliferation of leadership types and avenues to status, so men regularly strike out from the clan base to achieve individual goals.⁹ Lihirians are largely subsistence farmers, raising pigs and growing tapioca, yams and sweet potatoes, while harvesting some marine life from the sea.¹⁰ Pigs, garden produce and shell money (*mis*) form the basis of an elaborate feasting and exchange system between allied groups and individuals that mark significant moments in the life cycle. Since mining began, Lihirians have channelled vast amounts of money into this system, ultimately vitalising traditional exchange in a modern context.¹¹

Lihirian political efforts and visions of modernity have often centred on the desire for increased control over the processes of production, the distribution of mine-related wealth and benefits, and self-administration. The association between Lihirians and the mining company might be considered a patron-client style relationship of ascribed status between the dominating patrimony of a feudal landlord (the company) and subservient peasant labourers (the Lihirian community).¹² In this case the relationship — and the analogy — is complicated by the fact that Lihirians own the land and resources being developed. As such, Lihirians never truly considered themselves subservient to the company, despite their dependence upon it for economic development.¹³ Lihirians have driven a

⁸ See N. Bainton, 'Men of *kastom* and the customs of men: status, legitimacy and persistent values in Lihir, Papua New Guinea', in John Taylor (ed.), 'Changing Pacific Masculinities', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, special issue, 19:2 (2008), 195–213; B. Clay, *Pinikindu* (Chicago 1977); Richard Eves, *The Magical Body: fame, power and meaning in a Melanesian society* (Amsterdam 1998); R. Foster, *Social Reproduction and History in Melanesia: mortuary ritual, gift exchange, and custom in the Tanga Islands* (Cambridge 1995); H. Powerdermaker, *Life in Lesu: the study of a Melanesian society in New Ireland* (New York 1933); R. Wagner, *Asiwinarong: ethos, image, and social power among the Usen Barok of New Ireland* (Princeton 1986).

⁹ See Bainton, 'Men of *kastom*'.

¹⁰ See Simon Foale, 'Knowledge, practice and management of subsistence fisheries on Lihir', unpublished report to the Lihir Management Company (Melbourne 2004).

¹¹ See Bainton, 'Virtuous sociality and other fantasies'; cf. M. Sahlins, 'The economics of develop-man in the Pacific', *RES*, 21 (1992), 13–25.

¹² Cf. S. Toft, 'Patrons or clients? Aspects of multinational capital-landowner relations in Papua New Guinea', in S. Toft (ed.), *Compensation for Resource Development in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 1997), 11.

¹³ See C. Filer, 'Participation, governance and social impact: the planning of the Lihir gold mine', in D. Denoon (ed.), *Mining and Mineral Resource Policy Issues in Asia-Pacific: prospects for the 21st century* (Canberra 1995), 67–75.

hard bargain throughout all negotiations with the government and the company,¹⁴ and employed diverse (and often diffuse) strategies for craftily extracting concessions.¹⁵ While they may not have inverted the existing corporate and economic hierarchy, they have influenced the course of events, maximised many of the available opportunities for economic development and attempted wholeheartedly to remain self-determining people.

This might be regarded as a typical response to large-scale resource development from small-scale and previously marginal communities. Indeed, similar processes have occurred in other mining ventures throughout Papua New Guinea as landowning communities and other closely aligned groups with vested interests in a particular project seek to assert their autonomy and gain greater control over the mine and its associated wealth, services and infrastructure.¹⁶ However, in each case, the outcomes of these engagements have also been shaped by local historical experiences, social structures and cultural traits. Understanding contemporary responses to external influence, whether experienced through mining, small-scale sustainable economic development projects,¹⁷ or wider political change, requires careful account of the intersection

¹⁴ See G. Banks, 'Compensation for communities affected by mining and oil developments in Melanesia', *The Malaysian Journal of Tropical Geography*, 29:1 (1998), 62; Filer, 'Participation, governance and social impact'; C. Filer, 'Between a rock and a hard place: mining projects, "indigenous communities", and Melanesian states', in B.Y. Imbun and P.A. McGavin (eds), *Mining in Papua New Guinea* (Port Moresby 2001), 13–15; C. Filer, D. Henton, and R. Jackson, *Landowner compensation in Papua New Guinea's mining and petroleum sectors* (Port Moresby 2000), 53–7.

¹⁵ See M. Macintyre and S. Foale, 'Global imperatives and local desires: competing economic and environmental interests in Melanesian communities', in V.S. Lockwood (ed.), *Globalization and Culture Change in the Pacific Islands* (New Jersey 2004), 149–64; cf. S. Kirsch, 'Keeping the network in view: compensation claims, property and social relations in Melanesia', in L. Kalinoy and J. Leach (eds), *Rationales of Ownership: transactions and claims to ownership in contemporary Papua New Guinea* (Wantage 2004), 79–89.

¹⁶ See N. Bainton, 'Imagining a "viable" post mine future: historical continuities and neoliberal influences in Lihir', forthcoming in D. Jorgensen and G. Banks (eds), *After mining: anticipations and expectations for post-mining life in Melanesia*; C. Ballard, 'It's the land Stupid! The moral economy of resource ownership in Papua New Guinea', in Peter Lamour (ed.), *The Governance of Common Property in the Pacific Region* (Canberra 1997), 47–65; G. Banks and C. Ballard (eds), *The Ok Tedi Settlement: issues, outcomes and implications* (Canberra 1997); G. Banks, 'Mining and the environment in Melanesia: contemporary debates reviewed', *Contemporary Pacific*, 14:1 (2002), 39–67; C. Filer, 'The Bougainville rebellion, the mining industry and the process of social disintegration', *Canberra Anthropology*, 13 (1990), 1–39; C. Filer, 'The Melanesian way of menacing the mining industry', in L. Zimmer-Tamakoshi (ed.), *Modern Papua New Guinea* (Kirksville 1998), 147–77; R. Gerritsen and M. Macintyre, 'Dilemmas of distribution: the Misima gold mine, Papua New Guinea', in J. Connell and R. Howitt (eds), *Mining and Indigenous Peoples in Australasia* (Sydney 1991), 35–53; A. Golub, 'Making the Ipili feasible: imagining local and global actors at the Porgera Gold Mine, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea', PhD thesis, University of Chicago (Chicago 2005); D. Hyndman, 'Mining, modernisation and movements of social protest in Papua New Guinea', *Social Analysis*, 21 (1987), 20–38; R. Jackson, 'Not without influence: villages, mining companies, and government in Papua New Guinea' in J. Connell and R. Howitt (eds), *Mining and Indigenous Peoples in Australasia* (Sydney 1991), 18–34; D. Jorgensen, 'Regional history and ethnic identity in the hub of New Guinea: the emergence of the Min', *Oceania*, 66:3 (1996), 189–210; R.J. May and M. Spriggs (eds), *The Bougainville Crisis* (Bathurst 1990); M. Spriggs, M. and D. Denoon (eds), *The Bougainville Crisis: 1991 update* (Canberra 1991); T. Wesley-Smith and E. Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis: changing relations of production in Bougainville', *Contemporary Pacific*, 4:2 (1992), 245–67.

¹⁷ See especially F. Van Helden, *Between Cash and Conviction: the social context of the Bismark-Ramu Integrated Conservation and Development Project*, NRI Monograph 33 (Port Moresby 1998).

between local cultures and historical processes, events and change, particularly the impact of colonisation.¹⁸

It may be that the pace of change is always greater than that to which local communities can adjust, especially in the context of large-scale resource extraction.¹⁹ However, contemporary Lihirian attempts at self-determination and greater control over the production and distribution of wealth are not just desperate attempts to regain a semblance of control over their own lives in a rapidly changing socio-economic environment. Rather, mining has provided a new context for the expression of existing aspirations. Previously, these ambitions were manifest in politico-religious movements, which the colonial administration labelled 'cargo cults'. In Lihir, these movements, which combined ritual behaviour with local cosmology and millenarian sentiments, were primarily a reaction to the moral and material inequality of the colonial era.²⁰

Responses to mining are thoroughly rooted in earlier attempts at political and economic autonomy. While these modern desires are not (yet) manifest in overt calls for secession from the nation-state, or even attacks on company property, they bear the hallmark of micro-nationalist sentiments.²¹ Many Lihirians have long resented the state's access to mining revenue, and recent ambitions include a long-term economic development plan to position Lihir as a Melanesian model of modernity functioning independently of the state.²² As yet, this has not transpired.

These attempts reflect continuing desire for radical change, and the influence of earlier cargo movements. Staunch adherents to these movements have interpreted the mine as (partial) fulfilment of earlier prophecies for radical change preached by charismatic leaders. Some maintain that Lihir will eventually be transformed from an isolated backwater into a thriving 'city' that will exist as the centre of a new world order, effectively fulfilling earlier millenarian prophecies and signalling the inversion of the existing political and economic environment — the delivery of the cargo.

Younger, more educated Lihirians have remained sceptical of cargo cult philosophies that look to the ancestors for deliverance; their sense of expectation and ownership over the mine derives more from an appeal to vague forms of primordialism that link Lihirians with the land and resources under exploitation. Nevertheless, in 2004 most adult Lihirians still expected capital, especially in the

¹⁸ Cf. J. Carrier, *History and Tradition in Melanesian Anthropology* (Berkeley 1992).

¹⁹ R. Jackson, 'Cheques and balances: compensation and mining in Papua New Guinea', in S. Toft (ed.), *Compensation for Resource Development in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 1997), 106.

²⁰ Classic anthropological accounts of Melanesian politico-religious movements include, K. Burridge, *Mambu: a Melanesian millennium* (New Jersey 1960); P. Lawrence, *Road Along Cargo: a study of the cargo movement in the southern Madang district New Guinea* (Melbourne 1964); F.E. Williams, 'The Vailala madness and the destruction of Native ceremonies in the Gulf Division', in E. Schwimmer (ed.), *F.E. Williams: 'the Vailala madness' and other essays* (Honolulu 1979 [1923]); P. Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: a study of 'cargo' cults in Melanesia* (New York 1968). More recent discussions include, H. Jebens (ed.), *Cargo, Cult and Culture Critique* (Honolulu 2004); A. Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy: reinventing race in Bush Kaliai cargo cults* (Madison 1998); L. Lindstrom, *Cargo Cult: strange stories of desire from Melanesia and Beyond* (Honolulu 1993).

²¹ Cf. R.J. May (ed.), *Micronationalist Movements in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 1982).

²² See Bainton, 'Imagining a "viable" post mine future'.

form of infrastructural development, to be delivered by a foreign donor without conditions. Expatriates and the national elite often disparagingly describe such expectations as a 'cargo cult mentality' — the desire for 'something for nothing'.²³ Consequently, chronic community dependence upon the mining company for all forms of economic development, combined with the belief among Lihirians that they should be the sole beneficiaries of all mine-generated wealth, has often strained relations between the community, the company and the government.

The Pauperisation of Lihir

During the late 1800s and the first half of the 20th century, Lihirians remained marginal to regional economic development and exogenous organisations, but were steadily drawn into the sphere of greater external influence when Germany first raised the flag in northeast New Guinea in 1884.²⁴ Lihirians initially engaged enthusiastically with economic activity as large numbers signed on as plantation labour for the Queensland sugar industry.²⁵ Men and women were recruited from various places, with little uniformity across the region. For instance, in 1883, 649 men from Lihir signed on — an extraordinary number given that the population then was well under 3,000 people — compared with only 368 from Tanga, 37 from Feni, 28 from Tabar and 240 from New Ireland.²⁶ Lihirians also participated in the Fiji labour trade, albeit offering only eight men between 1876 and 1911. Similarly, some 36 males from Simberi (Tabar Group), 104 from Lavongai and 325 from New Ireland made their way to Fiji.²⁷ During the 1880s, shifts in Lihirian attitudes towards the labour trade demonstrated an early desire for economic development on their own terms.²⁸ Quite possibly, Lihirians were learning fast lessons in capitalist relations.

²³ Macintyre and Foale, 'Global imperatives and local desires', 154; see also Filer, 'Participation, governance and social impact', 74.

²⁴ J.A. Moses, 'The German Empire in Melanesia 1884–1914: a German self-analysis', in *The History of Melanesia: the Second Waigani Seminar: papers delivered at a seminar sponsored jointly by the University of Papua New Guinea, the Australian National University, the Administrative College of Papua and New Guinea, and the Council of New Guinea Affairs, and held at Port Moresby from 30 May to 5 June 1968* (Canberra 1969), 45–76.

²⁵ Given the comparatively high number of Lihirian men who initially signed on for the labour trade, it is tempting to speculate whether this also had cult-like qualities, and whether Lihirians interpreted recruiters as returned ancestors and thought that this avenue might offer a path to deliverance. Certainly, such beliefs were expressed when the Kennecott mining company later arrived in the 1980s and white employees were incorporated within this cosmology as returned ancestors, emphasising the idea of the European-as-relative (or as someone with access to the ancestors or cargo) as a central premise in cargoistic orientations. For discussion on this idea, see S. Leavitt, 'The apotheosis of White men? A reexamination of beliefs about Europeans as ancestral spirits', *Oceania*, 70:4 (2000), 304–24.

²⁶ C. Price and E. Baker, 'Origins of Island labourers in Queensland, 1863–1906: a research note', *Journal of Pacific History*, 11 (1976), 116.

²⁷ J. Siegel, 'Origins of Pacific Islands labourers in Fiji', *Journal of Pacific History*, 20 (1985), 53.

²⁸ Douglas Rannie's personal account of the 1884 voyage of the *Heron* to the islands east of mainland New Ireland provide a partial and idiosyncratic (yet insightful) view of the dynamics of the caustic relations between New Irelanders, traders and recruiters. See D. Rannie, *My Adventures Among South Sea Cannibals: an account of the experiences and adventures of a government official among the Natives of Oceania* (London 1912), 271.

Lihirians appeared to be on a prosperous economic trajectory: a higher number of men being introduced to wage labour and new consumer goods would possibly generate greater desire to trade labour for money and commodities. However, initial enthusiasm for labour participation never translated into organised and sustained economic activity, though perhaps not always for lack of desire.

In the final years of German rule, the annual reports state in an ominously prophetic tone that ‘hitherto . . . the administration has not been able to play a more active role here [in Lihir] because of poor communications’.²⁹ The Australian administration, which followed the Australian occupation of the Territory in 1914,³⁰ did not bring substantially greater economic development or considerably improved communication with Lihirians, averaging at best one patrol per year until at least the mid 1960s. The Australians inherited from the Germans an organised system of leadership, relying on village ‘police’ and their assistants, known as *luluais* and *tultuls*,³¹ to implement colonial authority.³² With the cessation of German rule, the first task for the Australians was to ‘reassure’ people that, although the Germans no longer held sway, the hierarchical order remained the same: Whites were vested with power to direct the lives of Melanesians, or as Firth appositely states ‘it was the old colonial order under new management’.³³

Between the wars, Lihirian engagement with the cash economy was largely confined to limited copra production and petty trade within the domestic sphere. Reminiscences collected by the author from elderly Lihirians indicate that economic productivity was especially low during these years. Lihirians, conscripted from Lihir and other parts of New Guinea such as Rabaul, participated in World War II as labourers, carriers and messengers for both Japanese and Allied troops. Lihirians received remuneration for their assistance to the Allied troops, and compensation for war loss and damage, including that resulting from activities by the Japanese.³⁴ Most oral accounts stress high numbers of males absent from Niolam Island during this time and the harsh conditions under the Japanese.³⁵ Several older Lihirian males from Niolam recounted their forced labour constructing airstrips on mainland New Ireland. Many recalled Japanese brutality, describing gruesome deaths for those who refused to work or ‘relaxed’ their labour efforts. It is likely that post-war reluctance towards plantation labour was shaped by these experiences.

²⁹ P. Sack and D. Clark (trans and eds), *German New Guinea: the annual reports* (Canberra 1978), 338.

³⁰ See L.P. Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (Melbourne 1948), 13; M.A. Biskup, B. Jinks, and H. Nelson, *A Short History of New Guinea* (Sydney 1968), ch. 8; C.D. Rowley, *The Australians in German New Guinea* (Melbourne 1958); J.D. Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea* (Oxford 1993), ch. 4.

³¹ The words *luluai* and *tultul* originate from the Kuanua language in New Britain.

³² Rowley, *The Australians*, 217; see also S. Firth, *New Guinea under the Germans* (Melbourne 1982), 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ For example, Territory of Papua New Guinea, Department of District Administration, Patrol Report, Namatanai Subdistrict (herein NAM PR), 8 of 1948/49, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, records paying out 248 pounds and 19 shillings to people in Lihir, mostly for pigs taken by the Japanese.

³⁵ See S. Zial, ‘Lihir experiences under the Japanese’, *Oral History*, 3 (1975), 66–76.

By the 1950s, economic development was still relatively limited. A single copra plantation had been established on the plateau at Londolovit (now the site of the mine camp and town), employing imported labour from New Ireland, New Britain, Bougainville, and mainland Papua New Guinea, particularly the Sepik region. Lihirians were apparently not only unwilling to work under foreigners but seemingly uninterested in local production. There were no local copra groves; locally owned plantations were small and used mainly for feeding domestic pigs. While the Catholic Mission, which was established at Palie on Niolam Island in 1902,³⁶ ran a small trade store, it did not yet deal in copra. Government administrators saw agricultural potential in Lihir, but their attention was focused elsewhere in the district.

All of this provided little incentive for Lihirians to develop their own plantations,³⁷ and they were left by the administration to their own devices and ingenuity. Yet when Lihirians attempted to act upon their desires for (economic) self-improvement, their actions were consistently thwarted by an administration that held Lihirians incapable of running their own affairs, said to be the result of 'inbreeding' that produced a higher ratio of natives with 'sub-normal intelligence'.³⁸ Such apparently below average acumen did not stop Lihirians from raising nearly £2,000 towards their cause through 'donations' for the 'Lihir fund', which they were 'advised' by the administration to deposit into a trust account at the Namatanai Sub-District office.

In 1951, Lihirians attempted to purchase a small work boat, to be Lihirian owned and managed, that would provide more regular travel to Namatanai on mainland New Ireland. Although the Catholic mission ran infrequent (and overcrowded) trips to the mainland, this service was insufficient to ensure regular copra trade. This early attempt to assume greater control over the direction of local economic activities was swiftly halted; the administration decided against this cooperative initiative, concluding there would be too many logistical problems associated with local ownership and management of a boat. In years to come, the debacle surrounding the wreck and subsequent demise of the locally managed MV *Venus* on neighbouring Tanga,³⁹ confirmed for the Australians the futility of locally owned and managed boats, causing them to rule such local initiatives 'out of the question' for Lihir.⁴⁰

By 1952, the administration had made the important observation that Lihirians were gaining a sense of economic self-consciousness:

Lihir Natives are awakening to the realisation that they are the poorest natives financially in the New Ireland District. The Lihirs have comparatively small holdings of coconuts and no alternative cash crop.⁴¹

³⁶ See G. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion* (Cambridge 1991), 169.

³⁷ PO J.W. Worcester, NAM PR 4/1951–52.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ See Foster, *Social Reproduction*, 54–6.

⁴⁰ PO R.A. Hole, PR NAM 4/1959–60.

⁴¹ CPO R. Aisbett, PR NAM 6/1952–53.

Even if the administration had the foresight to act upon these observations (to avoid future political unrest), they were still constrained by scarce resources. It was some years before Lihirians connected their economic status with a government that denied their equality. Lihirians were beginning to perceive a process of 'pauperisation'. Like Jorgensen's observations among the Telefolmin in the New Guinea Highlands, this 'was rooted not so much in the "objective" features of the local economy — people did, in fact have more in the way of cash and material goods than before — as in their sense about where they stood in relation to future shares of worldly goods'.⁴² These early murmurs of discontent would later flourish in the TIA movement, and find new life in the context of large-scale resource extraction.

Throughout the 1950s, the Lihirian copra industry advanced minimally, and Lihirians remained peripheral to New Ireland economic activity. Both the Hunio and Lakakot Bay plantations (on Niolam Island) were established in addition to those existing at Londolovi; however, they hardly offered encouraging prices for copra. The estimated total annual income recorded for Lihir in 1959 was £8,355, of which £4,015 was earned by 162 non-Lihirian plantation workers who came from New Ireland, New Britain, Bougainville and Sepik district. Only 33 Lihirians were employed as labourers, earning £1,720; the remaining money was raised through personal sale of copra and food stuffs, including pork.⁴³ The fact that few Lihirians chose to work on these plantations amazed and frustrated plantation managers. While negative associations with indentured labour and wartime experiences undoubtedly influenced Lihirians' reluctance, their desire for economic activity, tempered by their desire to have this exchange on their own terms, continued to be apparent — and was to be a recurrent theme in the relationship between many Lihirians, the mining company and the state.

The administration regarded Lihirians as 'lazy' and 'economically lethargic',⁴⁴ and so concentrated efforts and resources elsewhere. Although various patrol officers noted Lihirian interest in forming copra societies and recognised this could be harnessed if Cooperative Officers were sent to Lihir and if the administration had a more regular presence, it was decided that, until Lihirians showed more signs of genuine self activity (more economic progress without external assistance), the administration would continue looking elsewhere in the district. Such policies kept Lihirians entrenched within a cycle of economic marginality.

During the following years, Lihirians were encouraged to plant more individual copra plantations as a basis for local economic development and political advancement. The administration was perturbed by the fact that Lihir showed so much unrealised potential. If Lihirians were to be incorporated into the Local Government Council, they would need to show more consistent efforts in their copra production. In 1959, Lihirians had over 32,000 mature, and 28,000

⁴² D. Jorgensen, 'Life on the fringe: history and society in Telefolmin' in R. Gordon (ed.), *The Plight of Peripheral People in Papua New Guinea*, vol. 1: *The Inland Situation* (Cambridge 1981), 66.

⁴³ CPO J.B. Moyle, PR NAM 4/1958–59.

⁴⁴ PO R.A. Hole, PR NAM 4/1959–60.

immature coconut plants, which the administration estimated should yield at least 170 tons of copra annually. Instead, Lihirians were only producing between 60 to 70 tons.⁴⁵ These results did not endear Lihirians to administrators, who believed that it was possible to develop the 'natives' by instilling the value of assiduous work and entrepreneurialism but regarded those who failed to respond positively (according to Australian standards) as hopeless.

For the Australians, the acknowledged absence of necessary infrastructure for Lihirian economic development, such as a road, vehicle transport, sea ports and regular marine transport did not excuse a lack of industriousness. Lihirians were encouraged to make use of the marketing channels already available through the mission and the three plantations. In 1959, Lihirians were exempt from taxation, presumably due to such low economic production, but, in 1960, taxation was reintroduced as an incentive to economic activity with the explicit instructions that no exceptions would be granted where people had the opportunity to make copra. This still failed to lift production levels, and the administration argued that this was the result of a peculiar attitude among Lihirians, where people only worked enough to cover their annual £1 for tax and £1 for clothing.⁴⁶

But admitting to years of neglect, the administration argued that the only remedy for Lihirian economic stagnation was increased contact with Europeans, in the belief that this would somehow develop the necessary economic sensibilities. At the same time, even as enthusiasm for cooperative societies increased, indicating that not all Lihirians were as 'backward' as the patrol officers liked to imagine, any economic advancement was still inhibited by the lack of qualified staff and appropriate transport and, for the immediate future, there was no intention of rectifying this situation.⁴⁷ Interestingly, the patrol reports repeatedly state that Lihirians had not lost 'faith' in the administration despite the lack of attention, and that Lihirians were still optimistic about what the administration might do for them. This might be interpreted simply as an administrative delusion, or an indication of government arrogance, ignorance and conceit. Alternatively, it may partly explain why support for the administration later declined rapidly in favour of emerging local prophetic leaders who promised more immediate returns on local investments. New expectations fostered by local leaders who preached radical messages of change would have lasting effect on Lihirians as they began to articulate their desire for greater control over their economic and political future.

'Improvements' and Approaching Impairments

Between 1965 and 1970, Lihir underwent three significant developments that paved the way for TIA (which initially began on New Hanover). These were the establishment of 'progress' or 'cooperative' societies, incorporation into the Namatanai Local Government Council (NLGC), and the emergence of

⁴⁵ PO R.A. Hole, PR NAM 4/1959–60.

⁴⁶ CPO R. Willard, PR NAM 10/1961–62.

⁴⁷ Sgd R.C. Brown, Assistant District Commissioner, to District Commissioner, Kavieng, New Ireland District, letter accompanying PR NAM 13/1964–65.

entrepreneurial ‘big-men’,⁴⁸ who gained new status through their monopoly on copra production. The administration initially took these events as signs of progress that validated administrative policy; in reality, these were less the result of ‘obedience’ to administrative directives and more the cumulative result of nearly 70 years of sporadic engagement with outside influences.

The first of these changes took place after a visit in 1965 from Nicholas Brokam, the member for New Ireland in the first house of assembly for Papua New Guinea.⁴⁹ He came to gauge interest for a locally owned copra boat, believing it would give Lihirians a greater sense of connection to the mainland. Sigial, a *luluai* from Lesel Village (on Niolam), took it upon himself to form a committee with other big-men, with the intention to raise funds through a form of taxation and publicly discuss the need for a government school increased copra plantings, and something described as *lo bilong Brokam* (Brokam’s law). The administration found this an ‘alarming situation’, particularly as there was no consistency in the ‘tax’ levied; women were only occasionally exempted, and men were expected to pay between £5 and £10.⁵⁰ A man of immense ambition, Sigial was partly acting on faith in the administration, and partly attempting to make himself a man of consequence — describing himself as the ‘member for Lihir’ — who could deliver economic prosperity if people abided by the ‘laws’ he delineated as the key to success. The administration was wary of the potential for disturbance as a result of Sigial’s activities, but concluded that, as no cults had ‘broken out’, all they could do was keep watch on his movements (as much as this was possible through annual visits).

This was the first recorded instance of Lihirians attempting to transform their society by mimicking the salient features of administration practice. While ritualistic performance of ‘official’ activities was a common feature of numerous movements throughout Melanesia, this was not mere copying or blatant irrationality.⁵¹ In Lihir, this was an attempt to harness the ‘power’ and ‘success’

⁴⁸ There has been considerable debate in the Melanesian anthropological literature over the term ‘big-man’ that denotes a particular style of Melanesian leadership. Although Melanesian ‘big-men’ have been contrasted to Polynesian ‘chiefs’, many anthropologists have contested the use of this term for all Melanesian leaders. See M. Sahlins, ‘Poor man, rich man, big-man, chief: political types in Melanesia and Polynesia’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 285–303; M. Godelier and M. Strathern (eds), *Big Men and Great Men: personifications of power in Melanesia* (New York 1991).

⁴⁹ Brokam was the Member for New Ireland from 1964 to 1966. Throughout 1965 and 1966, Brokam made numerous inquiries to the house of assembly about obtaining work-boats to better serve patrol officers and communities in the Namatanaï district. As we see below, these requests were not fulfilled on account of limited government resources. He recognised the correlation between discontent in New Hanover and limited development opportunities and government assistance, and argued that a similar situation would arise throughout other isolated island areas if assistance was not provided. See *Territory of Papua and New Guinea, House of Assembly Debates*, Fifth Meeting of the First Session, 17th May to 24th May 1965, vol. 1, no. 5, Question no. 527, 614; *Territory of Papua and New Guinea, House of Assembly Debates*, Sixth Meeting of the First Session, 24th August to 3rd September 1965, vol. 1, no. 6, Question no. 778, 929; *Territory of Papua and New Guinea, House of Assembly Debates*, Ninth Meeting of the First Session, 7th June to 15th June 1966, vol. 1, no. 9, 1425.

⁵⁰ PO L.A. Meintjes, PR NAM 15/1965–66.

⁵¹ See T. Schwartz, ‘The Paliau Movement in the Admiralty Islands, 1946–1954’, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, 49 (1962), 207–421; T. Schwartz, ‘The cargo cult: a Melanesian-type response to change’, in G.A. de Vos (ed.), *Responses to Change: society, culture and personality* (New York 1976), 157–206.

seemingly inherent in the administration's activities, or what Doug Dalton would consider 'corporally doing power'.⁵² In the years to follow, continuing into mining activities, finding the 'right formula' or practices became central to Lihirian attempts to understand and control modern processes of production and wealth accumulation; in each instance, this was inspired by an imagined future that repositioned Lihir in the new world order.

Sigial's activities coincided with the formation of a number of small cooperative societies, some of which were probably spurred on by his messages. These represent some level of economic progress. On the outer islands, people began forming themselves into functioning societies that worked together to market copra. Similar activities occurred on Niolam as people formed *wok society bilong tesin* (plantation work societies). People paid membership fees to join, and spent two days per week maintaining plantation groves 'owned' by various members. The administration understood these activities as confirmation of its modernist ideals:

Community effort will teach them the basics of working together as a unit and will place the progress of Lihir as a whole uppermost in their minds, and not the fostering of tribal differences, a stranglehold on progress at the best of times. These later will no doubt die a hard death, having been the accepted way of life for centuries, but their exit will be hastened when the benefits of community effort are made manifest. A square mile of healthy young palms speaks so much louder than an acre of ancient ill kept ones.⁵³

Copra production levels increased but never reached predicted rates. The rise was partly due to the establishment of new cooperative societies but also the emergence of entrepreneurs who began altering Lihirian economic, political and social conditions. These enterprising big-men began drawing upon introduced forms of governance and economic activity to reinforce authority within existing frameworks of power. Both the 'traditional' and the 'modern' were integrated: *bisnis* (business — petty trade in the form of the copra industry) was in no way extraneous to or *practically* insulated from the realm of *kastom* (custom — traditional economic exchange practices).⁵⁴

Bell's early accounts of Tangan exchange⁵⁵ correlate with anecdotal evidence from Lihir and provide insights into the ways New Ireland big-men managed and utilised introduced items and money within their local political economy. These accounts suggest that Lihirian feasting and exchange became grander and more competitive as big-men controlled and exploited new forms of wealth gained through plantation wage labour by themselves or those under their influence. Notwithstanding the fact that exchange practices were radically altered through 'pacification' and the introduction of steel tools and new forms of wealth,⁵⁶ the changes that occurred as new entrepreneurial big-men gained a stronghold on

⁵² D. Dalton, 'Introduction', *Oceania*, 70:4 (2000), 290.

⁵³ PO L.A. Meintjes, PR NAM 15/1965–66.

⁵⁴ For discussions on this socio-economic theme see Sahlins, 'The economics', 13–25; N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects: exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge 1991).

⁵⁵ F.S.L. Bell, 'The place of food in the social life of the Tanga', *Oceania*, 17 (1947), 310–26.

⁵⁶ For comparable cases see J. Clark, *Steel to Stone: a chronicle of colonialism in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Oxford 2000); C.A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London 1982); A. Strathern, *The Rope of Moka: big-men and ceremonial exchange in Mount Hagen, New Guinea* (Cambridge 1971).

the nascent copra industry in the late 1960s and early 1970s represented a new era in Lihirian economic relations. Their ability to manage clan and village labour which assisted their domination of the cash economy bolstered their local authority. This did not create a rural proletariat, but it did mean that the majority of Lihirians were subordinate to the success of these men and remained peripheral to 'commoditisation'. As in other Melanesian societies engaged in cash cropping, the colonial economy began to reconfigure in terms of big-man politics.⁵⁷

These men established small trade stores, maintained large copra groves that employed relatives and village members as casual labour, formed 'progress societies', and provided transport services with motorised canoes. Leadership was consolidated around their management of a local political economy that was completely enmeshed with council activities and the control of local copra production, placing them among the 'biggest' men in Lihir. Their strategic effort to subsume the cash economy into the local exchange system represents an early attempt on the part of Lihirian people to control their entry into modernity and global capitalist exchange.

In 1967, Lihir was officially incorporated into the NLGC and, within one year, the council was fully entrenched in Lihir with the appointment of local councillors. Elderly *luluais* and *tultuls* were replaced by younger and more educated men. While some *luluais* stayed on as councillors (the new local government leaders under the NLGC), many were happy to relinquish their positions, especially those who lacked authority and were unable to implement their charges. Despite continual references to Lihirian ignorance and uninterest in political progress, in 1970 it was noted that Lihirians had a 'grossly excessive representation' in the Local Government Council, with 11 members, which far exceeded the number of any other census division on a per capita basis.⁵⁸ Regardless of whether Lihirians were able to comprehend the Westminster system, or who represented them in the national political arena, their entry into the new government system did not dampen enthusiasm for government-funded development. Indeed, it was this increasing expectation of government assistance and attention — never to be realised — that bred disillusionment, hostility and dreams for an inverted order.

Lihirians were becoming increasingly aware of their relative deprivation in comparison with Europeans and their close neighbours in the region. Reluctance to work for Europeans and non-Lihirians on local plantations reflected the minimal wages and returns offered in this 'exchange' and the inferiority Lihirians were made to feel at the hands of *kiaps* (government patrol officers) and plantation owners. Incorporation into the NLGC (which coincided with the formation of cooperative societies) and an increased interest in local economic production fuelled expectations for the changes that the administration promised

⁵⁷ See B. Finney, *Big-Men and Business: entrepreneurship and economic growth in the New Guinea Highlands* (Canberra 1973); Foster, *Social Reproduction*, ch. 2; A. Strathern, 'The division of labour and processes of social change in Mount Hagen', *American Ethnologist*, 9 (1982), 307–19.

⁵⁸ H.J. Redmond, Assistant District Commissioner, Namatanai, to District Commissioner, Kavieng, in letter accompanying I.G. Mcswewyn, PR NAM 12/1969–70.

would arise through 'self activity'. Inclusion into the new government system brought increased control into their lives but did not secure economic activity, in spite of the efforts of some Lihirians. Copra societies might have represented local enthusiasm for collective activity but without the necessary transport and infrastructural support from the administration, these efforts were bound to fail.

The rise of entrepreneurial big-men, who gained prestige across various realms, introduced Lihirians to unprecedented forms of economic stratification. As younger big-men merged their monopoly over copra production with their local political aspirations, many Lihirians expressed discontent over individual wealth accumulation seen as possible only at the expense of others. Combined with resentment towards the existing colonial hierarchy, Lihirians, especially older big-men with waning political influence, were receptive to the radical messages that would arrive from New Hanover.

The 'Johnson' Influence

In 1964, the Territory of Papua and New Guinea held the first national elections to provide representatives for the House of Assembly.⁵⁹ In New Hanover, north of mainland New Ireland, which had a population of approximately 7,000, nearly half the adults refused to follow the prescribed voting method, instead voting for America's President Johnson. These stirrings of discontent soon reached Lihirians as people responded with increased antipathy towards the government's inability to fulfil local desire for economic progress and moral equality. According to Billings, people in New Hanover had been impressed by US army surveyors working in the district, whose generosity with food, goods and payment for locally hired labour was unprecedented. This became known in New Hanover as 'the American way'.⁶⁰ Frustrated with their marginal status and comparatively slow economic progress under the Australian administration, people from New Hanover voted for Johnson and raised \$1,000 to pay his fare to New Hanover. The administration responded to this with more regular patrols, political education and violent punitive expeditions; in return, the people of New Hanover refused to pay taxes. Defaulters were consequently imprisoned.⁶¹

The movement was labelled 'The Johnson Cult' (at least among its critics), although it was never a cult in any common sense of the term: it spawned no prophetic leaders, and the emphasis was practical not ritual. There were no visitations, no deities, no spirit mediums, elaborate doctrines or epiphanic revelations. Whether the ancestors knew how to produce cargo was unclear and largely irrelevant: clearly, the Americans knew how, and they could teach the people of New Hanover, as the Australians apparently refused to share their

⁵⁹ See R.J. May, *State and Society in Papua New Guinea: the first twenty-five years* (Canberra 2001).

⁶⁰ Billings, 'The Johnson cult', 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; N. Miskaram, 'Cargo cultism on New Hanover: a psychopathological phenomenon or an indication of unequal development?' in C. Loeliger and G. Trompf (eds), *New Religious Movements in Melanesia* (Suva 1985), 75–89.

save (knowledge). The main aim of the movement, which gained several thousand supporters in southern New Hanover and parts of New Ireland, was not political independence but rather to replace the Australians with Americans as a means of improving the people's welfare and status.⁶²

In an effort to channel these energies into more productive ends, Father Miller, an American Catholic priest working on New Hanover, encouraged people to form themselves into an 'investment society', which they named Tutukuvul Isakul Association, or TIA. Miller's American heritage proved influential, often reinforcing the conviction among adherents that the Americans would somehow come to their aid. TIA gained momentum throughout New Hanover, with strong support from Johnson 'cultists'. Although TIA membership stipulated payment of government taxes, many members remained resistant towards the council and refused to pay.

Lihirian Adoption

The movement soon spread to Kavieng district, and groups organised themselves under the new title Tuk Kuvul Aisok (TKA), partly in an attempt to separate themselves from the stigma of the Johnson cult associated with TIA. TKA was reportedly introduced to Lihir in 1969 by Theodore Arau from Matakues Village on Niolam, described by Yngvar Ramstad⁶³ as a quiet and shy man of about 45 years of age at the time.⁶⁴ Arau was never a big-man in the traditional sense, but he had once been a catechist for the Catholic mission and then a native *dokta boi* (doctor boy). While living in Kavieng, Arau became a member of the TKA movement, later encouraging other Lihirians to join. Reportedly, within three months, close to half the adult population of approximately 4,500 people had joined and, within several years, as influence and membership increased, every village was split between members and non-members. Inspired by the activities in New Hanover, Lihirian members also refused to pay taxes. Initially, the administration took a hard-line stance towards TKA, jailing those who refused to comply with territory laws, assuming that this would deter others. As was the case in New Hanover, however, this only made martyrs of the prosecuted, strengthening local resolve and resistance.

At various times, TKA resembled a 'progress society' or 'self-help movement', emphasising pragmatism over religion and self-help over myth. TKA held regular working days that often drew people away from government tasks such as cleaning villages, maintaining paths or building roads and bridges. Efforts were

⁶² May, *State and Society*, 59.

⁶³ Yngvar Ramstad conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Lihir in the late 1960s for his doctoral thesis at the Australian National University. He did not complete his thesis in English (although he may have done so in Norwegian); he wrote three short seminar papers on Lihirian society, focusing on kinship, ritual, and the TKA movement.

⁶⁴ See Y. Ramstad, 'The TKA Movement in New Ireland', paper presented to the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University; PO R.S. Coles, PR NAM 7/1968-69.

supposedly concentrated on clearing and maintaining TKA copra plantations in various villages. The divide between government and TKA work caused obvious rifts but, according to several elderly (pro-administration) Lihirians, the problem was not so much the division of labour, but rather that TKA workdays were often spent holding meetings and discussing possible dates on which the cargo would arrive. Reportedly, TKA charged its members 40 cents for every day they did not spend cleaning and maintaining TKA coconut plantations, which may account for the reluctance of some entrepreneurial big-men to join the association. Membership fees ranged from \$2 for women to \$10 for men. Most people were unsure where their money was being stored or for what purposes it would be used, except for a sure belief they would soon see a return on their 'investment'.

In 1969, patrol officer D.M. Donovan conducted a 'slow and thorough' investigation of all 'cult activities' in Lihir.⁶⁵ The 'outbreak' sparked the beginning of more concentrated administrative attention; this only strengthened TKA support and resentment towards the administration that supposedly denied them knowledge and blocked their 'road' to progress.⁶⁶ Within a matter of years, the administration again admitted that for too long they had concentrated their efforts on Tanga, Anir and Namatanai, and that it was 'now Lihir's turn'.⁶⁷ But their ineffectual best only consisted of more admonishment and rational modernist discourse.

After Donovan's initial foray, it was clear to the administration that they were dealing with a 'full-blown cult'. This was confirmed by the high level of membership and the commitment displayed by leading prophetic figures such as Arau (the president) and Tienmua (vice president or 'number 2' for Lihir) and other office-holders such as Kondiak ('board member' for Lisel Village) and Pesus from Londolovit Village (clerk, subject to Arau). TKA ideologies were closely aligned with those on New Hanover, although if Billings is correct and the TIA was more practically orientated than ritualistic, the Lihir version represented a significant departure.

Arau's prophetic messages and 'rules', which he received from New Hanover, centred around three dominant themes: the need to resist the council (and the administration); that change was imminent and likely to come from America; and that Lihirian ancestors were thoroughly implicated in this process. While Donovan was carrying out his investigations, he collected a list of incidents and 'rules', which he translated from Tok Pisin, that summarise TKA beliefs and provide some insight into local activities at the time:

Teachings of Arau and Tienmua

1. Now is the time to get rid of the Council.
2. If you see a 'Kiap' coming, get your basket and run away into the bush.
3. If you are taken to court, TKA will bring you back.

⁶⁵ PO D.M. Donovan, PR NAM 8/1969–70.

⁶⁶ Cf. Burrige, *Mambu*, 184.

⁶⁷ H.J. Redmond, Assistant District Commissioner, Namatanai, to District Commissioner, Kavieng, in letter accompanying D.M. Donovan, PR NAM 8/1969–70.

4. If a person is not a member of TKA, he will be a 'rubbish' man and no money will be forthcoming to him. Also if he wants to sell one or two bags of copra to any member of the TKA, he will only receive 50 cents for it and be told to go.
5. All plantations which we have planted are for temporary measures only. If the 'Egg' hatches, they will be destroyed or left to feed to pigs.
6. If the 'Egg hatches' you will not have to work to find money. You can rest but money will come to you like flowing water.
7. If a person said something bad against TKA that person will become known to the TKA automatically.
8. TKA is a country we have not seen.
9. America is one of the true country and one is at Palie, Father J. Gliexner.
10. USA is one of the Countries that will never die and some of them are here — Fr. Tom Keller (Namatanai); Fr. Miller (Lavongai); Fr. David Milmila (Duke of York); Fr. Peter Vavro (Tanga). These priests are from USA, the country that never dies, but lives for ever.
11. And Fr. P Vavro is from Mazuz (Lamboar Lihir Island), he is not from USA.
12. Now a big ship and an aeroplane are being loaded with cargoes. Both are not fully loaded yet, but they will be sent to us when they are ready.
13. A man and a woman whose wife or husband has died shall not re-marry. They shall await the arrival of his wife or her husband when the 'Time Change'.
14. Those children who attending schools today can be saved, but we will await the time when life changes and then knowledge will come unlimited.
15. There are two types of 'Crabs'. One type went ashore on Siar and the other on Kavin (Kavieng).
16. If a person dies, do not say he is dead, you must say 'He has gone'.
17. If we hear the spirits of the dead, we must not refer to them as 'Ghosts', we refer to them as 'Brothers'.
18. If we call them ghosts or devil, this will stop the arrival of cargoes, time will not change and the 'Road' will not open to us.
19. Supposing this country wants to declare war with another country, our country will destroy that country.
20. It is the same with money, where the white man have changed their face value e.g. 10 cents = \$ 1.00 and 20 cents = \$ 2.00.
21. All of our money have been sent to the Bishop in Kavieng who will convert into American currency and then send them to America.
22. During March 1970, shipment of cargo will arrive from America. Note: Previous to this THE target date January and Feb were also marked for such.
23. Tienmua and Kaiprot of Konogogo (W.C. Namatanai) have been going around showing pictures from a book to people.
24. Arau and Tienmua have been telling the people that they propose to go to another place by secret means.
25. The people believed that they went to Lavongai in a submarine.
26. All male persons must marry before they could become a member. Because when the time changes, they must go inside the 'House' with their wives.
27. Iaspot [Yaspot] of Malie Island asked Cr. Lusom why the Council knew more about this work. Why haven't they bothered to find out the truth of government laws which are 'eating' the people.
28. On the 5th of January 1970, Toron of Malie island Committee for TKA collected fees from members at Malie Island. \$1.00 for males. 50 cents for females.
This they said is to purchase a car for the members use.⁶⁸

This list provides one of the few detailed accounts of TKA beliefs during the early stages of the Lihirian movement. Although many of these points resonate with more general themes from New Hanover, some require clarification. This list also provides an opportunity to consider some of the cult activities and enduring

⁶⁸ PO D.M. Donovan, PR NAM 8/1969–70.

TKA beliefs that shaped Lihirian expectations for development and the islands' contemporary political and economic environment.

Arau often used the metaphor of an egg 'breaking' or 'hatching' (*kiau bai bruk*) to describe impending change and the delivery of cargo — the new millennium. This was not his own prophesy or words. Rather, we find them used elsewhere some years prior to the introduction of TKA in Lihir. Billings recalls that, during the elections in Kavieng in 1964, that she heard rumours of 'a Big Egg which was said to be believed to be hovering over New Britain and about to hatch cargo'.⁶⁹ Lihirians and other New Irelanders have a history of cultural borrowing from New Britain; quite possibly such metaphorical images were imported from similar movements occurring in New Britain at the time.⁷⁰ Indeed, many Lihirians were willing to believe Arau's prophecies due to his magical knowledge from the *buai* cult which originated in New Britain and southern New Ireland.

The idea that money would flow like water regardless of labour input was also expressed in the idiom of 'live money' and 'dead money', an expression some older Lihirian men later applied to wage labour earnings and royalties and compensation monies received by landowners from the mining company. For some, mine-derived wealth is the fulfilment of 'live money': wealth obtained without physical or moral diminution as opposed to 'dead money' earned through the back-breaking and humiliating work of *kagobois* (cargo boys), cash cropping for minimal returns and low paid unskilled work in the mine.

Ancestral Connections

Phrases like 'Time Change' and 'TKA is a country we have not seen yet' represent the genesis of later millenarian concepts expressed in the idea of becoming a 'city' and the return of deceased ancestors. Arau's 'prophecies' generally appeared vague and non-committal; instead of concrete images, TKA hinged on the expectation of some form of revolutionary departure from their supposed condition of subjugation and material poverty. Possibly in recent years Lihirians have retrospectively applied the concept of a 'city' to Arau's prophecies. Certainly their contemporary urban ambitions that draw from images of New York, Singapore and Sydney — available through increased media access — are vastly different from how they appeared in the 1970s, when the weatherboard buildings in Kavieng town were considered metonyms of Melanesian modernity. Alternatively, the first 'city' that some older Lihirians may have seen or heard stories of was the US air force base on Emirau, north of New Hanover, seemingly built in a matter of days or weeks, and literally brimming with technology and people.

Arau's prophecies were expressed in the Lihirian concept of a *peketon*, which refers to waves crashing on the shore, washing flotsam and jetsam onto the beach

⁶⁹ D.K. Billings, *Cargo Cult as Theatre: political performance in the Pacific* (Lanham 2002), 29.

⁷⁰ See D. Counts, 'Cargo or council: two approaches to development in northwest New Britain', *Oceania*, 16 (1971), 228–97.

and then with the receding tide, carrying the debris to other places: as change (cargo) comes to Lihir, it will then emanate outwards from the new centre. It is likely that the reference to ‘crabs’ travelling to Kavieng and Siar is symbolic of Lihir-centred change; given the insularity of Lihir in this period, these two places possibly intimate the ‘limits’ of the known world for many Lihirians. The vision of becoming a ‘city’ reflects local conceptions about centres of power, and a continuing concern with their peripheral status. While Lihirian millenarian concepts have undergone transformation as new leaders emerged together with new political goals and radically altered conditions through mining, the metaphorical concept of a *peketon* has remained central.

American Annex

In the 1970s, TKA members came to believe that America would eventually replace Australia as the governing body. This might not equate to secessionism, but it does reveal their dissatisfaction with the Australians. The administration naively regarded this belief as a gross manifestation of big-man politics:

In their social structure, if their head man does not give them what they want, they merely keep replacing the head man until they find one that satisfies them. In the same way they wish to replace New Guinea’s head man (Australia) and obtain a new one (America), which in their opinion will be more beneficial to them.⁷¹

It is probable that Lihirian engagement with Americans during the Second World War encouraged their desire to be annexed under America and the belief that America is the ‘true’ country that would deliver the promised cargo. This opinion may have been influenced by stories or experiences on Erimau, where US wealth, power and organisation were demonstrated. This confirmed TIA’s strong pro-America messages, and the stories of harmful race relations in New Hanover most likely resonated with Lihirian experiences with the administration. Lihirians deeply admired the people of New Hanover, who surmounted government persecution and opposition. Letters of encouragement were sent from New Hanover urging people not to support the administration and that soon New Hanover and New Ireland would be a state of America.⁷²

What Did They Really Want?

Billings argues that, as the descendent organisation of the Johnson movement, the TIA was principally concerned with social equality and not just material wealth. Being primarily a politico-economic movement it was not ‘fundamentally religious’ nor was it ‘a manifestation of gross materialism’.⁷³

They wanted to understand history, historical forces, and power well enough to maintain their place and their ability to control their lives. Those with the broader view did not like being

⁷¹ APO I.G. McSweyn, PR NAM 4/1970–71.

⁷² APO M. Lorenz, PR NAM 17/1970–71.

⁷³ Billings, *Cargo Cult as Theatre*, 165–66.

considered ignorant and poor, and did not like feeling constantly humiliated by white people and by their own educated compatriots. They wanted equal status, and equal knowledge, in the modern world.⁷⁴

Likewise, Lihirians were not merely vulgar materialists. As various commentators have noted for similar movements, such as the Yali cult in Southern Madang, the Mambu cult in Manam, the Kaun movement in Karavar, or the Kaliai cult in New Britain, nifty Western stuff is only half the story.⁷⁵ Obtaining wealth, goods and even 'organisation' or 'order' is premised upon gaining respect and a sense of equality. Consequently, indigenous questions over the origins of wealth have often been interpreted as less about cargo *per se* and more about Black and White relations: questions not only about material deprivation, but about the denial of equal humanity.

Through obtaining the desired cargo, Lihirians not only sought to enhance their daily lives, but also to gain the respect of Europeans by possessing what they so obviously valued. Thus, we begin to see the practical and symbolic qualities of goods; the social uses to which they can be put, and the idea that things are valued not only for their utility, but because they can be used in social transactions that establish mutuality and respect.⁷⁶

In the early 1970s, rumours circulated as far afield as Kavieng and New Hanover that Lihirians were erecting large storage houses in anticipation of cargo ships sent by their ancestors. Some Lihirians admitted these and other structures were attempts to prove that they were 'ready' to receive the cargo. Preoccupation with cooperative activities reflected a similar concern with 'proving' they could organise and work as efficiently as Westerners. Lihirians shifted between the practical and symbolic understanding of work as they attempted to understand Western success and power. However, given that Lihirians wanted America to replace Australia as the 'papa country', much of this was designed to impress both the ancestors and Americans, not the Australians. For some, America was conflated with notions of a benevolent father, the home of the ancestors and the fulfilment of TKA. Here, the enduring relationship between Lihirian ancestors, Whites and receiving cargo (or obtaining development), is located in *proving* their 'modernity' or their 'worth'. This contrasts with Leavitt's examination of cults among the Bumbita Arapesh of East Sepik, where people aimed to fix the rift in their relationship with ancestors who were supposedly withholding the cargo until such time.⁷⁷

However, even though Lihirian political and economic ambitions were deeply rooted in the desire for moral parity, arguments for equality commonly employed by anthropologists attempting to make sense of Melanesian politico-religious

⁷⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁵ See BurrIDGE, *Mambu*; F. Errington, 'Indigenous ideas of order, time, and transition in a New Guinea cargo movement', *American Ethnologist*, 1:2 (1974), 255–67; Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*; A. Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy*.

⁷⁶ Cf. A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge 1986); M. Sahlins, 'Cosmologies of capitalism: the trans-Pacific sector of the "world system"', in M. Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: selected essays* (New York 2005), 415–69.

⁷⁷ Leavitt, 'The apotheosis of White men?'

movements only partly capture the reality of contemporary Lihirian ambition. By the time mining operations had commenced Lihirians no longer articulated their aspirations in terms of equality. They wanted unlimited access to the 'blessings' of industrial technology, but also control of these processes, ensuring their autonomous distribution of wealth, while expatriate mining personnel would ultimately become subordinate to Lihirian management.

Divisions and New Directions

Not all Lihirians were convinced that Arau was capable of delivering his promises. As the association expanded and consolidated its membership, tensions increased between members and non-members, as people disagreed over which 'road' would lead to the desired destination of modernisation. Some sided with the administration out of loyalty and the belief that their own (relatively) close connection with *kiaps* and other Whites would eventually bring them closer to what they sought. Similarly, councillors rarely joined, because the administration provided them with political authority and a consistent (albeit meagre) income. John Yaspot's assertion that the councillors were colluding with the administration and deceiving the people is indicative of the tension between councillors and TKA members.⁷⁸ Disagreement over the correct 'road' to achieve dreams of emancipation continued to characterise political events during mining activities and negotiations over development (compensation, royalties, infrastructure and business). Persistent tensions between the desirable and the possible, and between 'truth' and 'deception', have been central to Lihirian relationships among themselves and with Whites, governing bodies and external agents.

In 1973, a young and educated member, Bruno Sasimua, aided by Father Tom Burns from the Catholic mission station at Palie, attempted to transform the TKA into a registered business group, adopting the name TFA (Tutorme⁷⁹ Farmers Association). The administration commended these efforts, recognising it as 'an honest attempt to create business opportunities amongst its followers',⁸⁰ and promised to send more regular boats to the island for shipping copra. This failed to transpire and, as independence approached, Lihirian attention riveted on the new national government that was expected to 'deliver the goods'.

The death of Arau in 1975, combined with national independence, temporarily threw the association into chaos. Lihirians supported independence, which they expected would bring the desired change; however, their expectations were simply beyond the capacity of the newly formed government. Ferdinand Samare assumed TFA presidency in 1977 and, during his leadership, anti-government sentiments flourished as TFA members refused to pay taxes or vote

⁷⁸ Yaspot was a vocal advocate of TKA on Malie Island and showed formidable opposition to councillors and the administration. In a twist of irony, Ambrose Silul, his first-born son, later became the president of the Lihir Local Level Government.

⁷⁹ In Lihir Tutorme can be translated as 'we stand together'.

⁸⁰ D.R. Bergin, Assistant District Commissioner, Namatanai, to District Commissioner, Kavieng, in letter accompanying PR NAM 16/1972-73.

for anyone but Jesus Christ. Samare and others were jailed, which again only made them martyrs in the eyes of their supporters. While the association had always uneasily existed as a combination of 'development association' and 'cargo cult', during the latter part of the 1970s there was a marked withdrawal from 'politics' and 'business'. Frustration over the lack of change delivered by the new government led TFA members to seek more esoteric options. Colin Filer and Richard Jackson, who conducted the original social impact assessment for the mining project, note that visions, prophecies and supposed miracles sustained people's belief in the new millennium, and members met in designated areas, where they prayed, sang and performed dances.⁸¹

The association gradually shifted away from pragmatic endeavours, abandoning its links with New Hanover and its nominal ties with 'farming'. There was a greater push towards self-government, and TFA leaders re-formed under the new name of Nimamar. This represented an official reformation of the TIA movement. This group would eventually become the Nimamar Rural Local Level Government (the Lihir Local Level Government). Over the following years, the original Nimamar members were replaced as Lihirians became more involved in mining negotiations. However, strong anti-state sentiments and millenarian aspirations (not necessarily belief in cosmological intervention, rather the re-ordering of society) have remained influential within Nimamar and throughout the wider Lihirian community.

Unanticipated Outcomes

The protracted experiences of the colonial era, during which Lihirians were drawn into the world system, yet kept on the margins of economic and political advancement and denied a moral equivalence with Europeans, perpetuated local frustration and antagonism towards governing authorities, aiding the adoption of TIA philosophies that promised a reversed hierarchy. Internal changes to the mode of production, the emergence of new forms of leadership that creatively synthesised custom and business, and incorporation into regional political activity created favourable conditions for local politico-religious movements. Lihirians have responded to marginality in multiple ways, all of which express dissatisfaction with inequality; they have challenged the authority of Whites, the administration, the national government and more recently the hegemony of transnational corporations. While Lihirians have actively directed the course of events in their history, their actions have not always produced the desired outcomes.⁸² This is an important observation to make if we are going to avoid the pitfalls of a sanitised and romanticised depiction of their engagement with the dominant forces that sought to alter their lives.

⁸¹ C. Filer and R. Jackson, *The Social and Economic Impact of a Gold Mine in Lihir: revised and expanded*, 2 vols (Konedobu 1989), unpublished report to the Lihir Liaison Committee, 174.

⁸² Cf. S. Ortner, 'Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37 (1995), 173–93.

Lihirians have historically been made to feel inferior at the hands of expatriate authorities. While this has spurred resistance, particularly in the form of politico-religious movements, it has not generated a discourse of inferiority: Lihirians do not exist in an abject state.⁸³ Rather, they have continued to believe that they possess the ability to reverse their situation. At the height of the TKA movement, this belief was expressed through the abstract notion of a *peketon*: the idea that change would come to Lihir, which would ultimately affect the wider world that Lihirians knew. As circumstances changed, this idea persisted. Lihirians have rearticulated the specific details of their desire to suit a new environment where transnational corporations have replaced colonial authorities.

Their attempts to engage with the cash economy and to administer themselves have historically concentrated on the esoteric origins of wealth (and power). Initially Lihirians sought equality with their European counterparts. They concentrated on the incredible symbolic power of cargo, as a marker of equality, worthiness and prestige. While the emphasis has shifted to more pragmatic approaches as Lihirians have come to engage with the very tangible power and wealth of the mining company, the objective has remained the same: to gain respect and to control the structures that govern their future. However, large-scale mining has increased the stakes, and Lihirian desires for equality have evolved into ambitions for political and independent autonomy. While this appears a reaction to mining *per se*, this article has demonstrated the continuity with past movements: earlier desires have been amplified to suit an altered milieu.

Ultimately large-scale resource extraction has not ushered in the new millennium but, instead, perpetuated inequalities through the unequal distribution of mine-derived wealth and development. This experience confronts the unrealistic expectation that all Lihirians would equally benefit from resource development in ways that conform to pre-existing dreams. In reality, for those who retrospectively interpret Arau's prophesies as the forecasting of a Lihirian 'city', many of the more pernicious aspects of these urban aspirations have been fulfilled. But for those who hoped for a just and equitable future — a virtuous society of equals where everyone is rich — perhaps recent experiences simply represent the false cargo of modernity.

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⁸³ Cf. J. Robbins, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and moral torment in a Papua New Guinean society* (Berkeley 2004).

ABSTRACT

When large-scale resource extraction began on the main island of the Lihir Group in 1995, Lihirians anticipated that their long-held dreams of economic advancement and moral equivalence with Europeans would finally materialise. Lihirians have placed huge expectations upon this mining project, few of which have been realised. Many of their desires surfaced in earlier politico-religious movements during the colonial period. The beliefs and expectations for radical change which emerged in response to colonial inequality have decidedly shaped how many Lihirians interpret the presence of the mining operation and the nature of their relationship with the government and the mining company. In order to comprehend contemporary Lihirian ambitions and engagement with outside bodies, it is necessary to consider the genesis and continuity of earlier politico-religious movements. This paper provides a short history of the conditions and significant events during the latter part of the Australian administration (1945–75), detailing the emergence and persistence of desire and antipathy.