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for Cultural Autonomy**

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RESISTANCE: THE KWAIO STRUGGLE
FOR CULTURAL AUTONOMY

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INTRODUCTION¹

In the mountains above the eastern coast of Malaita, Solomon Islands, some two thousand Kwaio tribespeople still sacrifice pigs to their ancestors, still carry bows and arrows and clubs, still give mortuary feasts using strung shell valuables, still subsist on food they grow in rain forest swiddens (Keesing 1978b, 1982b). Yet only 75 miles away, where the Guadalcanal campaign was fought almost half a century ago, jet planes now bring businessmen, development experts, and tourists to Honiara, the small but bustling capital of the UN's 150th member nation.

The Kwaio traditionalists follow their ancestral religion and customs not out of isolation -- they have been part of the world system for 120 years -- but out of struggle. This struggle locks them in conflict with the postcolonial state: they refuse to pay taxes, reject development schemes and logging; they demand massive compensation for past grievances of the colonial period; they reject as best they can an alien legal system, threatening violence against police now afraid to enter their mountains; they demand that they be allowed to live according to "custom" on the land of their ancestors, not Western ways and laws; and they battle the invasive forces of evangelistic Christianity, as represented both by missionaries and by their own Kwaio cousins now living as Christians in coastal villages.

¹This paper represents a radical condensation of a recently completed book (Keesing n.d.1). Since large sections of the final chapter are presented here, without the details of the preceding chapters, the argument is inevitably factually thin (I use footnotes to fill in some of the essential details). The material was first presented as a seminar in the Department of Anthropology, The Australian National University, in August, 1990; it was subsequently presented at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in November, 1990. I am grateful to Don Gardner, Ranajit Guha, James Howe, Jean Jackson, Margaret Jolly, Douglas Miles and Nicholas Thomas for particularly helpful comments.

These struggles by the Kwaio traditionalists, unlike those of some contemporary Third and Fourth World peoples -- the Kayapo of Brazil come to mind -- are not being played out on the world stage. The stakes are small, the battles are local; the threat to the Kwaio is not one of extinction or massive environmental devastation, but a gradual erosion of valued ways, a final weary capitulation to Christianity. Nonetheless, Kwaio struggle is illuminating with regard to issues about resistance now being debated by scholars in several disciplines. We find across the decades both armed resistance and millenarianism; we find resistance by subalterns reminiscent of Scott's Malaysians (Scott 1985), and predatory class-based resistance reminiscent of Willis's British working class youth (Willis 1977). We find in the counterhegemonic discourses of the Kwaio a logic of opposition and inversion reminiscent of Gramsci's workers (Gramsci 1971) and Ranajit Guha's Indian peasants (Guha 1983, 1984): the categories and semiology of domination are mirrored, inverted, even parodied by the Kwaio. Small and local though the battles may be, they illuminate wider issues.

A CAPSULE HISTORY OF KWAIO RESISTANCE, 1870-1990

Recounting the history of Kwaio resistance and a long and continuing struggle for cultural autonomy, drawing heavily on the voices of the Kwaio themselves, has led me through eleven chapters. I can sum up this history most effectively by first giving an outline of the major events since, in 1870, Kwaio men were first kidnapped and taken off to the cane fields of Queensland and Fiji; and then sketching four episodes in this history that illustrate and illuminate the general argument.

1870-1902 Kwaio men go to plantations in Queensland, Fiji, Samoa
and New Caledonia in the famous "Labor Trade" of the

southwestern Pacific.²

- 1880, 1882 Kwaio warriors attack, plunder and destroy recruiting ships Janet Stewart and Borealis.
- 1886 Kwaio warriors attack recruiting ship Young Dick; about 15 Kwaio men (and several Europeans) killed.³
- 1911 Missionary Fred Daniels assassinated by two Kwaio men.⁴
- 1922-26 Kwaio demonstrate against a head tax and resist imposition of colonial law.⁵
- 1927 Kwaio warriors assassinate District Officer Bell and Cadet K. Lillies and massacre 13 Solomons police and servants.
- 1927 Punitive expedition devastates Kwaio interior; about 70 people shot, property destroyed, shrines desecrated; 6 warriors hanged, 31 die in prison, 14 imprisoned for life, 200 detained for months without trial.
- 1938-39 Cult led by pagan priest Noto'i foretells destruction of Tulagi and coming of Americans; leaders imprisoned.⁶
- 1942-45 Kwaio and other Malaita volunteers work with Americans in Guadalcanal campaign and aftermath.⁷
- 1944-50 Maasina Rule anticolonial resistance movement, demanding partial customary autonomy and end to prewar oppression and exploitation; mass arrests, leaders imprisoned 1947.⁸
- 1958-90 Kwaio kastom ("custom") movement attempts to codify customary law and ancestral lands and genealogies as assertion of and demand for cultural autonomy.

²See Corris 1973 and Moore 1988.

³See Keesing 1986a and Keesing and Corris 1980 for accounts of the early ship attacks.

⁴See Keesing and Corris 1980 and Fifi'i 1989 re Daniels' assassination.

⁵The events leading up to the 1927 assassination of District Officer Bell and the massacre of his entourage, and the subsequent punitive expedition, are set out in detail in Keesing and Corris 1980.

⁶I use "pagan" as a shorthand label for the religious commitment of the Kwaio traditionalists despite the pejorative connotations. I use it, for lack of a better alternative, in the old Roman sense, for those who lie beyond the margins of the dominant state religion (or adhere to indigenous religions). The choice of this label is buttressed by the ways in which the Kwaio traditionalists categorize themselves (see below).

⁷See White et al 1988.

⁸See Keesing 1978 and Laracy 1983.

Resistance to taxation, colonial law and Christianity.⁹

- 1965 Missionary Brian Dunn killed by unknown Kwaio assailant while SDA hospital being constructed on the coast.
- 1978 Solomons independence leads to renewed Kwaio demands for cultural autonomy and rejection of taxation. Formation of Kwaio Fadanga ("Council").
- 1980-86 Kwaio demands for massive compensation (billions of dollars) for damages by 1927 punitive expedition; British reject claim on grounds of statute of limitations.
- 1986 Kwaio leaders boycott parliamentary elections, leading to violent confrontation and teargassing. Continuing compensation claims and demands for cultural autonomy.

FOUR SCENES OF KWAIO RESISTANCE

Let me try to bring out some of the themes of my argument by sketching four episodes at different historical moments.

When in the 1920s Kwaio strongmen were eventually faced with a direct challenge to their autonomy by the formidable District Officer Bell, in the form of taxation and arrests and hangings for culturally legitimate homicides, the stage was set for a desperate confrontation. In 1926 the most feared of the Kwaio warriors, Basiana, appeared at the tax collection; Bell demanded that he, like others, pay his five shilling head tax, acknowledging his subjugation. Basiana presented Bell with four shillings. "Bastard!", shouted Bell. "Where is your fifth shilling?" Basiana promised to pay his fifth shilling in the morning. Walking miles back to his mountain hamlet, Basiana smashed a goldlip shell pendant consecrated to his ancestor, and through the night he ground a fragment of shell down until it was the size and shape of a shilling piece. In the morning, he handed it to Bell: "The other four had your King on them; this

⁹See Keesing 1982a.

one has my ancestor on it!" A year later, Basiana smashed Bell's head with a rifle barrel.¹⁰

A second episode ... In the late 1930s, a decade after overt Kwaio resistance had been broken by the devastating punitive expedition, a pagan priest named Noto'i voiced a message from the powerful ancestress La'aka: the Kwaio were to gather, build villages, dedicate pigs for sacrifice; and then the Americans would come, the British would flee, the colonial capital of Tulagi would be destroyed. The two palisaded cult centers, topped by paired flags ("Sea Flag" and "Ree Flag," supposed to have been brought by Americans), were raided by the colonial police; the leaders were imprisoned. The British snickered condescendingly at the foolish natives. We might wonder if some of them remembered, three years later, when the British fled the Japanese advance, Tulagi was destroyed, and the Americans did come.¹¹

A third episode ... In 1947, at the height of Maasina Rule, the Police Commandant and his men came to arrest the Kwaio Head Chief. Some two hundred Kwaio warriors lay hidden in the jungle with rifles aimed; many had been in the 1927 massacre, and some were only recently back from years in prison. Another massed attack on the police, a replay of 1927, was narrowly averted only when the Head Chief insisted on surrendering peacefully to the police.¹²

A final episode ... In the 1980s, Kwaio Fadanga, the council of traditionalist leaders, had demanded three hundred billion dollars as compensation for the 1927 punitive expedition. Embittered that their demands were ignored, the "Paramount Chief" Folofu'u boycotted a parliamentary election

¹⁰This incident is described in Keesing and Corris 1980 and Fifi'i 1989.

¹¹See Keesing 1980 and 1981, Bennett 1989, and Fifi'i 1989.

¹²Fifi'i 1989.

by imposing an ancestral curse. The government sent two patrol boats and a large paramilitary force to guard coastal Christians as they voted. A scuffle led to blows between warriors armed with bows and arrows and clubs and police under machine gun cover, then to tear gassing and warning shots. Again a massacre was averted by a hair's breadth; it might not have been averted at all had the venue not been changed at the last moment -- again scores of warriors with firearms had lain concealed.

CONTINUITIES IN THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

If we look at Kwaio resistance across the decades, continuities in the cast of characters emerge strikingly. Among the principal Kwaio chiefs in Maasina Rule during the 1940s were 'Alakwaifai, one of the two assassins of Fred Daniels in 1911; and Anifelo, the oldest son of Basiana, who killed Bell in 1927. Forty years later, Basiana's younger son Laefiwane led Kwaio Fadanga demonstrations on the Prime Minister's lawn in Honiara.

I have noted how the warriors waiting to attack the police arresting the Maasina Rule chief in 1947 included middle-aged men who had taken prominent parts in the attack on Bell twenty years earlier. Forty years later, their sons confronted the police challenging the Kwaio Fadanga boycott. A final incident will further illustrate the continuities. Among the warriors leading the 1927 attack on Bell were the war leader Fuufu'e and his brother Lamotalau. Fuufu'e was hanged, Lamotalau was shot by the punitive expedition.

In 1988 the two sons of Lamotalau put up blood money of shell valuables and pigs to secure vengeance for a relative killed in a brawl while working on a Guadalcanal plantation -- even though blood feuding had been suspended for years. Sacrifices were made to the war spirits, the rituals and magic performed. In 1989, the sons of these two brothers -- Lamotalau's grandsons --

coolly took an SDA plane to Honiara, killed three Guadalcanal villagers in their beds, and took the plane home to collect the blood bounty (Keesing n.d.5). A year ago I spent a night in the Kwaio mountains sleeping next to one of the killers, the namesake of Fuufu'e, the war leader of 1927.

Such acts of violence, and urban predation, constitute another mode of Kwaio resistance. Young men must go to work on plantations far from home, as their fathers and grandfathers did; but now they form a predatory underclass, many engaging in theft -- petty and major -- and violence. Ancestrally conferred powers and culturally sharpened skills in stealing pigs and valuables are deployed in shoplifting, housebreaking, safecracking -- and clandestine murder (see Keesing n.d.4).

THE ARTICULATION OF RESISTANCE

Kwaio eloquently articulate the ideologies of their struggle. A few weeks ago, I talked with my old friends in a mountain settlement about the continuing efforts of the Christians to invade the mountains. The expressions of defiance were fierce and often eloquent. Dangeabe'u told me,

If we were all to become Christian, we'd no longer know our genealogical histories. I wouldn't know even the man who fathered my father. Or my mother's mother. If I followed the Bible, I'd forget my genealogy; I wouldn't be able to talk about my ancestral heritage. I wouldn't know the things to do with my ancestors and my shrines. I couldn't talk about my land. If I went and became a Christian, I'd have to abandon it all. ...

The mission people call us 'people in darkness'. But we, the ones in the darkness, are the ones who know things -- who know our connections back to ancient origins. If a [pagan] man goes down to the seacoast, he'll know nothing -- none of the important things of his place. He won't give mortuary feasts. He won't do the rituals for crematory sacrifice. He won't do the rituals for the death of an important person. Those are the real things, the important things, handed down to us from ancient times.

It's what's down in the mission villages that's worthless -- but that's what they tell us is important. As far as I can see, all they really want to do is make money. They talk about Jesus, they talk about God. But even the Church is just trying to get money: that's not what's important ...

We don't want to listen to their lies. They tell us we should leave the things that bring death behind, and come down and join them. But the Christians die just the same way we do. The white people die just the way we do. It's all the same. ... People who kill and steal die; people who don't kill and don't steal die just the same. Anyway, we see that no matter what they say, people down there in the mission villages steal. And they claim sexual compensation and death compensation. They're supposed to be following the Bible, but they don't. They just lie to us. They want to bring their mistaken ways to us and make us the same way.

Another day, I sat with his wife Maato'o while she voiced her complaints about the mission villages and what Christianity had brought to the Kwaio:

The reason I'm angry with the Christians is that they've destroyed the things passed down to us from olden times. In the olden days, everything was good in our living. ... People weren't all dying, and they lived until they were bent with age. But since the missions came, people have been dying out.

Now the mission people say to us, "You come down and live here with Jesus, a really good man, and with God. Saetana was thrown down - God's son. He has no fanua [territory], no land; he has nothing good to live with. Because God threw him down and he stays here on earth." They talk like that; and I see them spoiling the things from our custom.

I see people dying from it. They destroy things with their defilement. They shit in streams, down there at the mission villages. ... In the olden days, fresh water and sea were like land. They were handed down to us with the land. People fished in the sea ... for the desacralization [rituals] of the dead and for desacralization after a crematory sacrifice. But now the mission people just shit in the sea. I see it, and I see our people dying from it, and I get very, very angry. ...

The mission people pray and pray every day for our pigs to die and our valuables to disappear and our fishing to be bad. I answer them, "We're not trying to take over anyone else's place. We just stay in our own land -- and if we're poor and dirty, that's our choice. We don't pray for your living to be bad. Why do you pray against us day after day after day? ..."

They reply, "God is powerful, Saetana is weak. All the things your ancestors passed down to you are lies. They said you were descended from a bird. But if people were descended from birds, they'd look like a bird. [They said] we're descended from a snake. But if people were descended from a snake they'd look like snakes.¹³ Those are the lies Saetana foisted on you, and you believe them. The land is God's land."

¹³Here we see the traces of South Sea Evangelical Church efforts in the Solomons to discredit claims about human evolution, as obliquely understood in rural villages.

I reply to them, "How is that though you say this is God's land, when someone in the mission forbids you to work on a piece of land, you come running up to us 'heathens' to find out how you're related to it? You say 'Where is my kinship connection to such-and-such land?' If it's God's land why don't you trace your connections back to God to lay claim to it? It was people, our ancestors, who founded the land." They have nothing to say to that.

The old issues remain unresolved. The demands for compensation for the devastation wrought by the 1927 punitive expedition are surfacing again. I played Devil's Advocate with my close friend and ritual mentor, Maenaa'adi (see Keesing n.d.2). I suggested that although the British had rejected the compensation claim on grounds of a statute of limitations, they might still be willing to express sympathy and retrospective regret by building and funding a medical clinic in the mountains, as they had earlier offered. Maenaa'adi took the bait with gusto:

In the old days, our Kwaio people had their own laws -- about women, about land, about shrines. In those days they had their taboos and their customs, and they held strongly to them.

When Mr. Bell came and brought the tax, he forbade their getting blood money. "The killing is finished." And that intruded on their eating pigs, on their getting valuables, on their living. ... The government forbade old ways and they demanded a tax. The Kwaio people weren't stupid. They saw what that meant. "Here we are living on our own land, gaining the fruits of our own land; how can Mr. Bell come and demand a tax from us? We haven't come to live on the white people's land!" ...

And so they killed Bell and Lillies. ... After that the British government force climbed up and destroyed everything in Kwaio country. They destroyed the pigs, they destroyed the taro, they destroyed gardens, they raped girls and women, they chopped down all the sago palms and coconut palms and betel palms. They did terrible things here in Kwaio.

So many of the things they did weren't right. If they had destroyed Basiana's place, and Fuufu'e's and Tagailamo's and Tolea's place, and 'Ulasia's and Alefo's and Kwai'ime's place -- maybe that would have been justice, because they planned the battle and carried it out. But the destruction visited upon the interior ... -- the overturning of shrines, the throwing of ancestral skulls into the clearings, the throwing of the things from houses into menstrual huts -- the devastation and death from that will afflict the Kwaio for five generations before it is finished.

We know what the laws of England say about killing: the person who kills is taken off to prison. But that's what their police did. They killed indiscriminately.

The British say that if we had a claim to make, we should have made it at the time. But [in 1928] our leaders tried to voice their grievances, and the British said, "If you talk about that, we'll shoot you. If you talk about that we'll send you to prison." ... So nothing could be voiced at the time. And now years later, when some people are educated enough to understand how they could make a claim, the British Government says, "You had to make your claim within ten years. It's all over and done with: it's too late for a claim." ...

I think England is just lying. How can you, England, say it is too late for a claim when you wouldn't let us make one at the time? When you threatened us with prison and with rifles, threatened us into silence? And now you tell us it's too late. ... If we're going to settle things and be friends, it will have to be with pigs, and with money. If we get no satisfaction -- well, that's the way it is. But you, England, don't expect us to forget, when we're still dying from it. And we will be, for a hundred years, or two hundred. ... The dying you've brought upon us goes on from generation to generation. The ruin you bring on a place can go on and on and on. Let me compare it with something you from England will understand. It's like the poison bomb the Americans dropped on Japan. The Japanese are bitter because that poison stays, and even now children are born deformed. That poison is terrible, and it will affect them for generations.

And for us, and the dying caused by our adalo, it's the same. It goes on and on. People say that that poison bomb affects plants, too, for a long time, so they don't grow properly. It gives off emanations that destroy whatever's growing. Pigs, even ants, will die. You can't eat the things that do grow there.

Well, the Americans and the Japanese seem to be friends again. Maybe their customs are different. Maybe death compensation was paid. Maybe the Americans built a clinic for Japan. ... We don't know why the Japanese are no longer angry about that.

... All those people were shot. I've counted them myself. My mother's people had no part in the fight. ... Those people had done nothing wrong. They hadn't incited the killing, they hadn't put up a blood bounty, they hadn't been there. They had nothing to do with it.

... What about the sacred valuables they destroyed, the shell money, the taro, the coconuts, the settlements, the shrines they destroyed? The ancestral skulls in Kwaleo were tossed out on the ground and smashed. But you, England, you're supposed to follow laws. The skulls of the dead didn't go to the battle at Gwee'abe. The skulls of the dead didn't kill Mr. Bell. The skulls of the dead didn't kill your police, Mr. Bell. They just sat in their places. For a hundred years those ancestral skulls had been kept there at Kwaleo. By what law did you come and smash them? They did nothing. They said nothing. They didn't get up and walk. They just rested

where they were. They just stayed -- like the hibiscus outside the High Commissioner's place in Honiara. ...

Why did they shoot the people there? Why did they arrest the people there? They didn't do anything. The laws of England don't allow the deliberate killing of little children, even in a battle. Why did they kill Daulamo's child? A little child, still in its mother's arms. What law was that? What I want to ask England about is this. At the time they killed Mr. Bell, wasn't there a King yet? Maybe there weren't any laws in those days -- maybe that's just something recent. Maybe England didn't have a government yet, back then.

Your laws, England, are not true because you didn't follow them yourselves. We don't want a clinic and some medicines. We want pigs and money. We'll use them following our Kwaio customary laws, and after that, people will live, not die. We'll use them to give atonement and purification to the adalo, and then we'll live, not die. ...

CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN KWAIO RESISTANCE

Let me step back and pose more theoretical questions. A first point is to note the striking continuities across the decades in the themes of resistance as well as in the cast of characters. The stance toward taxation, as an instrument of subjugation and as a one-sided tribute rather than an exchange, has been a continuous theme for almost seventy years. In it we find an astute political understanding of the tax as an instrument of subjugation, an assertion of sovereignty and power on the part of a government whose hegemony the Kwaio continue to challenge. We find here a Melanesian perspective on exchange: a transaction, with the government as with any other, should ultimately be reciprocal and balanced. What, the Kwaio ask, is the reciprocation for their tax?

The theme of "writing down" kastom or "custom" has similarly been a continuous strand, across decades of struggle, for some 45 years (Keesing 1982a). Demands for partial autonomy to follow customary law go back to the 1940s. Since the late 1950s, this has taken the form of a sustained effort to codify customary law in emulation of colonial legal statutes, to legitimate

their demands. Similar continuities emerge in the ideological warfare between Christians and pagans. The depictions of the ancestors as Saetana and the counter-depictions of the white Jesus as interloper on ancestral lands, goes on in 1990 must as it must have gone on in 1920.

We find curious senses of re-enactment and déjà vu, as where in 1947, twenty years after the Gwee'abe massacre, the government party that had come to arrest the Maasina Rule chief faced hidden guns, and massive bloodshed was imminent (Fifi'i 1989); and where, in 1986, another government party faced hidden guns and the police and Kwaio warriors again came right to the brink of another massacre (Keesing n.d.1). Even the geometrical progression of the intervals, 20 years and then 40, gives an eerie feeling. The killing of Dunn in 1965 shows eerie parallels, too, with the killing of Daniels in 1911. I have noted the striking continuities in the cast of characters across the years.

If we counterpose to these striking continuities the changes in Kwaio resistance across the decades, other perspectives emerge. I have no faith in periodization -- dividing a history into time slices with labels -- as an analytical or even expository strategy. But there is some value in distinguishing three major phases of Kwaio resistance, each characterized by a dominant mode of opposition. First, from the early ship attacks until 1927, armed struggle and violent confrontation constituted the dominant mode of resistance. Second, through the 1930s, after overt resistance had been smashed, ancestral revelation and religious (though not quite millenarian) cultism became the dominant mode. Finally, from the mid-1940s to the present, political confrontation has become a dominant mode. Such a periodization adds some enlightenment, in that the successively dominant modes of struggle have a kind of logical and even philosophical coherence: armed struggle as long as keeping

the invading forces at bay was militarily feasible; a retreat into religious and mystical resistance, in the face of massive defeat and overwhelming force; and finally, political confrontation and a kind of collective bargaining, as that colonial force visibly lost its potency in World War II, and the instruments of domination, legal and political, were understood to be negotiable, and could be turned back on those who wielded them. For the Kwaio, in comparison to most peoples subjected to British colonial rule, full political subjugation was to come very late, and hence to last only briefly. It was only during the 1930s, the period when overt resistance had been smashed, that the Kwaio were placed in the classical position of colonized subordination; and significantly, it was in this period that their struggle was displaced into religious forms, so canonical a manifestation of subalternity (see Comaroff 1985 and Guha 1984).

But the enlightenment added by this periodization carries some cost. For the Kwaio pagans, the "religious" is an inseparable component of everyday life, and of "political" action and armed violence (Keesing 1982b, 1978a). When the warriors confronted Bell and his police in 1927, they had sacrificed to the ancestors, prayed for support, read the omens; and when twenty years later, they confronted a government force, they had sacrificed to the ancestors, prayed for support, and read the omens. The 1989 murders were committed by two young men who had sacrificed to the ancestors and read the omens, and were in an ancestrally empowered state of liminality. From the early ship attacks onwards, engaging the colonial enemy -- by whatever means -- has been possible only with the ancestors' support. Outside their home mountains, as well as in them, the Kwaio have depended on and invoked their ancestors for the powers to steal,

kill, fight, and survive the malign and polluting forces to which they are exposed.¹⁴

Moreover, in each period, the other modes of resistance have been important subsidiary themes. There clearly was much political confrontation in the early engagements with colonial power and missionaries, as well as sporadic violent attacks; and in the recent epoque I have characterized in terms of political confrontation, actual or threatened violence has been a recurrent though subsidiary theme. "Religious" resistance runs through the entire period, and contemporary politics is woven of millenarian and well as pragmatic threads, as Maasina Rule was. We see forms of submerged resistance of the sort Scott (1986) calls "Brechtian" in the contemporary predation of young Kwaio in the urban jungle.

Seeing a single and continuous historical struggle manifest in varying outward forms illuminates contemporary debates about the relationship between the subtle and often covert strategies described by Willis and Scott and overt acts of confrontation. The Kwaio case would lead me to argue for a broad and flexible notion of resistance that would allow for its overt manifestation in varying forms.

THE OPPOSITIONAL NATURE OF COUNTERHEGEMONIC DISCOURSE

The most theoretically interesting element in Kwaio resistance, I think, is the way counterhegemonic discourse has been structured oppositionally, constructed in terms of the categories and ideologies of the discourses of domination. In seeing how counterhegemonic discourses are shaped by and modelled on the very ideological systems they challenge, I take theoretical

¹⁴See Keesing n.d.4 on urban theft.

guidance from Antonio Gramsci and my colleague Ranajit Guha (1983, 1984). Gramsci wrote, in the Prison Notebooks, of how "the lower classes, historically on the defensive, can only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations" (1971: 273).

In the Kwaio case, we see this process in many places in the unfolding history of resistance. A project of "writing down the custom" has focussed Kwaio political energies for almost fifty years. In terms of Melanesian experience of colonial rule, the written word -- canonically, in the form of the Bible and the colonial legal statutes -- was a powerful instrument of subjugation. Citing chapter and verse, missionaries challenged and condemned ancestral precepts; citing colonial laws, District Officers arrested and hanged men acting according to the ancestral ways, in enforcing jural rights and preserving morality. To demand recognition of ancestral ways and customary law by the colonial state, the Kwaio have sought to create an indigenous analogue of Bible and lawbook.

The whole notion of "chiefs," in Maasina Rule and since, in a society that had no hereditary leaders (see Keesing 1968, 1978a), represents an indigenous emulation and embellishment of European expectations about how the "natives" ought to be organized.¹⁵ The roles emulated by leaders in anticolonial struggle continue to have this reactive cast, a process institutionalized in the postcolonial state with the recognition of "Paramount Chiefs," including the charismatic but half-demented Kwaio leader Folofo'u, a man of little significance in traditional terms. After the 1986 teargassing, the Gilbert and Sullivan drama of invented customs and non-existent chiefs culminated in a

¹⁵For the Kwaio, see Keesing 1968.

demand that the Christians who voted pay compensation for violating a ritual injunction invoked by a chief: "In Kwaio custom, when the chief taboos something, no commoners can disobey." For a people living at the margins of anarchy, this is heady stuff.

The styles and languages of resistance have had this kind of Black Mass parodic style across the decades. When Maasina Rule leaders presented their demands to the colonial government, when they defended themselves against arrest and trial, the forms and language they used -- given their subaltern perspective on European administrative structures and their limited access to education -- often emerge as (unconscious or sometimes conscious) parodies of British legalism and Colonel Blimpism. So, too, the styles and structures of leadership and organization Maasina Rule had as their models the plumes and swords and rituals of Empire and the rituals of the American military; scant wonder that Maasina Rule had at times something of the theatrical quality and parodic cast of Chaplin portraying The Great Dictator.

Here, we need to take a semiotic perspective. When British colonial rule was imposed on the Solomons, it was clothed in the symbols of sovereignty, European style: the flag, the King, the plumes and swords of Tulagi. (It was also clothed in the symbols of caste domination, in a world of white supremacy where "natives" served, worked, and obeyed and "white men" ruled and commanded.) The legitimacy of British claims to sovereignty was symbolically established with flags and parades and distant King and bewigged magistrates as well as with warships and Winchester rifles.

This then illuminates the counterhegemonic semiology of a Basiana claiming in 1926 that his fifth shilling -- the shell disc -- had a picture of his ancestor on it; and of the flags flying over the palisaded mountain cult

villages in 1939. This striking oppositional framing of resistance in terms of the categories and symbols and language of domination continues into the contested present.

Ranajit Guha¹⁶ suggests that this oppositional process can be clarified if we situate countercolonial discourses with respect to a broader category of "emulation." Part of the process of colonial domination has been to instill in a stratum of the indigenous population simulacra of the manners, languages, styles, and values of the colonial elite. We find striking exemplifications in the ranks of petty functionaries, police, plantation foremen and local church leaders in the colonial Solomons. In colonial discourse, such emulation represents the process of "civilizing" and Christianizing. The semiology and pragmatics of emulation-with-deference by indigenous elites were wondrously intricate, almost a choreographed dance, in the India of the Raj or the Dutch East Indies or British Malaya.

But to emulate without this deference, to presume equality, was transgression, a challenge to white supremacy and colonial domination. Guha suggests that in the gap between emulation and transgression lies the key to subaltern resistance. The first response of the white rulers was often disbelief, a refusal to interpret a challenge to domination as what it was. It could instead be read as madness, demagoguery, millenarian cultism, or simply uncivilized gaucherie by the natives. When Malaitans, and most stridently the Kwaio, combined emulation with assertions of equality rather than subordination, the British reacted with outrage, particularly in their response to Maasina Rule.

¹⁶Personal communication, August 1990.

Considering transgression as emulation without deference in turn allows a further illumination of the parodic cast of counterhegemonic discourse.¹⁷ We find a sort of parody at two levels. First, running through the Kwaio texts, we find parody in a strict sense, a more-or-less intentional imitation of the semiology of the rulers, deployed as a sardonic mode of resistance, as with Basiana's "shilling." Second, we find what is not parody in a strict sense, but appears as such only in the eye of the (Western) beholder: as where Malaitans, often Christian scribes acting on behalf of pagans, write documents in what they take to be legalistic language they intend to be taken with legal seriousness. The sense of parody is heightened when the language is Biblical as well as legalistic, and particularly when the Christian scribes are writing on behalf of the pagans but categorizing the pagans in Manichaeian terms. A 1977 document illustrates the parodic cast of Kwaio resistance at both levels. It was written by a Christian scribe on behalf of pagan priests demanding compensation for the pollution brought about when menstruating and postpartum women flew over their heads in the SDA airplane:

Dear Director of S.D.A. and the Pilot of S. Steck [Piper Aztec]

I just want to let you know that I don't want your plain to fly over my village including Ere ere area from now on. I stop in for the following reasonable reasons:

1. The plain carry women with bloody babies.
2. He always fly over our most Holy Alters where we burn offering to our devil.
3. It always cause death to our people because the devil get angry and kill people.
4. Many pigs are kill to mean the plains fly over our devil.

...

¹⁷On these questions, I am indebted to discussion with Nicholas Thomas and Douglas Miles.

On have of majority of headen people who are living here if you are Christians please don't set your flyth over our area for it cause us death.

Thank you,
Yours sincerely Ere ere Devil Priests
1. Timikooliu
2. Maerora
3. Maealea

A final illustration of the oppositional aspect of Kwaio discourses of resistance lies in their adoption of Christian and colonial racist categories. Most contemporary Solomon Islanders have grown up within one of the main versions of Christianity -- South Sea Evangelical Church, Uniting Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Catholic, Anglican -- and have deeply internalized not only Christian doctrine but Christian representations of their own ancestors and customs. The ancestors are manifestations of the Devil; the past was a time of fear, murder and superstition. Metaphors of light and darkness, of conversion of rebirth, and depictions of Islanders as children are deeply internalized (see JanMohamed 1986). The diehard pagans who have fought for almost a century to keep Christianity out of their mountain fastnesses, and who sacrifice still to their ancestors, who hold sway and enforce their taboos in a shrinking and embattled universe, conceptualize their struggle in the terms of Christian discourse. My friend Bitā Saetana (Peter Satan) and his fellow pagans refer to themselves as wikiti, 'the wicked', or as ta'a i 'itini 'heathen people'.

We can well ask how deeply the thought and experience of a colonized people bears the impress of colonial categories and ideologies.¹⁸ When we find a people articulating their resistance or organizing or characterizing themselves in the terms and categories of the colonialists, does this reflect

¹⁸A problem clearly posed by James Howe in his capacity as discussant of the paper when it was presented at MIT.

hegemony in a deep psychological and sociological sense? Or is the political field structured in terms that compel these modes of categorization and representation? The answers are far from simple. As such writers as Fanon (1963, 1965, 1967), Mannoni (1956) and JanMohamed (1986) have argued compellingly, being treated as a despised and subhuman savage and abused physically and psychologically in contexts of forced labor and colonial servitude leaves deep scars.¹⁹ It would falsely romanticize Kwaio resistance to minimize the degree to which the colonial situation has forced experience into reactive molds through hegemonic force, political and psychological. Yet at the same time, the reactive character of countercolonial action is in many ways structured by the political field itself (Goldsmith, n.d., Keesing n.d.3). Categories (such as "Malaitaman") that were meaningless in precolonial times acquired a reality in contexts of plantation labor and colonial administration. In Maasina Rule, Malaitans created chiefs to challenge the government headmen who exercised local tyrannies; when the postcolonial state vested legitimate power in "Paramount Chiefs," the Kwaio invented one.

In part, as Stuart Hall²⁰ has reminded me with regard to the struggles of West Indians in London, the oppositional cast of discourses of resistance reflects a strategic realization that one must meet the enemy on his own turf. The Kwaio case shows how deep and subtle this process is. If one wants to challenge colonial assertions of sovereignty, one must do it in a language of flags and ancestors-on-coins, in place of Kings. If one wants to challenge colonial legal statutes and Biblical rules by asserting the legitimacy of

¹⁹Jonathan Fifi'i's account (1989, Chap. 3) of his experiences as a Kwaio boy working in pre-war Tulagi underlines the severity of this scarring on adult orientations.

²⁰Personal communication, February, 1986.

ancestral rules and customary codes, one must do so through codification, through writing a counter-Bible/counter-lawbook. A recognition that if counterclaims are to be recognized and effective, they must be cast in the terms and categories and semiology of hegemonic discourse, is politically astute, not blindly reactive.

This picture of the oppositional and reactive cast of antihegemonic discourse calls for two final qualifications. First, the reactive process may generate constructions in which indigenous ways are contrasted with and distanced from alien and invasive ones. Much of the modern ideology of kastom has this reactive cast, where an idealized and mythicized ancestral past is celebrated as the antithesis of Western materialism, individualism and anomie.²¹ In some forms and moments of anticolonial struggle, the social order imposed by colonialism has been dismantled or overturned, the categories of colonial rule erased and transgressed, the semiology deliberately rejected, not merely inverted. In the Algerian revolution, for example, ethnic categories defined by the colonial state (e.g., the distinction between "Arabs" and "Berbers") were strategically obliterated in order to forge a united front.²² A striking example of symbolic resistance through rejection of the semiology of colonial rule was Gandhi's adoption of homespun garb, his choice of the spinning wheel as symbol, his counter-hierarchical style of leadership²³ All this is to say that the reactive process is a highly complex dialectical one in which the categorical structures of domination may be negated or inverted -- hence doubly subverted -- as well as reproduced in opposition.

²¹See Keesing and Tonkinson 1982 and a now extensive subsequent literature, and in particular, Thomas n.d.1.

²²Sami Nair, personal communication, February 1986].

²³An example I borrow from Goldsmith n.d.].

Finally, in examining Kwaio resistance against hegemony, we must remember how pervasively successful the hegemonic process has been in colonial situations. The place of Christianity in the colonization of the Solomons and the eventual creation of a neocolonial elite affords ample illustrations of this process. The Kwaio warriors who killed Bell in 1927 were perceived as wild savages in the clutches of Satan by most of their indigenous contemporaries; the Kwaio pagans of 1990 are despised by the vast majority of Solomon Islanders, staunchly Christian and mainly committed to modernity as well as salvation. As the observations of Dangeabe'u and Maato'o indicate, even the Christian Kwaio living on the coast, who now substantially outnumber the pagans, have deeply internalized European ideologies.

WHY RESISTANCE?

A final question remains, but it is one I cannot really answer. Almost all Solomon Islanders, whose grandparents were following the ways of their ancestors, have long been Christian, and are now bent on Westernization and development. How and why have the Kwaio pagans retained their commitment and maintained their resistance? Why and how did the Kwaio who stood solidly with their "brothers" to the south and the north in the 1940s, continue to stand by themselves when the others were opting for new ways? How, in the face of massive temptations and massive pressures, have they retained not only a faith in their ancestors but a sense of the richness of a way of life that is materially stark and simple and physically arduous?

How, especially now there is another world they can see, with its cars and videos, can these diehard traditionalists still value the old? One cannot answer these questions simply by toting up the facts of geography -- a relative

remoteness and isolation, the lack of coastal land for cash cropping, the lack of road and sea connections. These affect the delicate balances of choice, but they do not tip them decisively.

There is, I think, no simple answer. It certainly will not do to use the old anthropological strategy of invoking vague cultural essences to explain a proclivity to conservatism or to change. In these respects, I think, all Malaita peoples shared the same broad cultural tradition; and we cannot selectively invoke elements of "it" to "explain" conservatism in one part of the island, and openness to change in other parts.

There are other special historical circumstances, some with origins far beyond the Solomons, that have contributed to this Kwaio stance of resistance. Had World War II not intruded, bringing both visible evidence of the vulnerability of a British colonial rule that in the 1930s had seemed all-powerful and monolithic and new visions of political possibility, the Kwaio pagans would probably have become Christians, as so many other Malaitans had. Yet other Malaitans with similar wartime experiences and similar stances of resistance in Maasina Rule have chosen paths to "development," not the ways of the ancestors.

The events of early colonial history are crucial here. Bell might have been killed at any of a dozen passages around Malaita, although even in the 1920s the Kwaio were perhaps the toughest of the island's tough guys. But once they had done the deed, and the government had responded with heavy-handed outrage rather than remediation and reconciliation, an oppositional future for the Kwaio was virtually inevitable. The massacre had set the Kwaio into a position as everyone's villains, as ruffians in the Devil's clutches, to be punished in perpetuity by the colonial state and to be the symbol of

unregenerate heathenism vis-à-vis the missions. This "outlaw" situation set a powerful dynamic of opposition and defiance into motion. Kwaio pagans have known that they were condemned to dangerous marginality, isolated from the patronage of the colonial government²⁴, forever to be persecuted and despised. They have perceived that in the world of plantations (and now, of town) this gives them a mystique of danger and defiance, and considerable power. There is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy here. Young Kwaio men who may be quiet and innocuous at home assume a swagger of arrogance as they hunt in packs far from home. The politics of resistance relies heavily on threat, intimidation, and the mystique of ancestrally supported violence, where what is in the eye of the beholder guides the strategy of the actor. Had the Kwaio been less marginalized and mindlessly persecuted after the 1927 massacre, the dramatic events sixty years later would never have occurred.

It is worth reflecting that a stance of resistance vis-à-vis Westernization and development, although singular at the onset of the 1990s, is not unique. We might think of the Kayapo of central Brazil or the Yanomami or the Penan, who are now finding advocates for their commitment to ancestral ways among environmentalists and cultural nationalists, and finding arenas for their resistance in international conferences and worldwide media. There is a set of interesting contradictions here. The technology of mass communication and jet travel has tied remote corners of the earth into worldwide networks, and has

²⁴In 1977, on the eve of independence, the last Governor of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate confided to me that for fifty years, since the Bell massacre, it had been the unwritten policy of the colonial government to leave the Kwaio interior forever undeveloped as a reservoir of cheap unskilled labor. The Governor's experience in the Solomons dated back to his service as District Commissioner of Malaita during Maasina Rule.

enormously increased the accessibility of previously remote pockets. (This same technology has provided dramatic new material temptations.) At the same time, a Western cultural tradition that was absolutely confident of its ascendancy and superiority, in an earlier imperialist and expansionist phase, is now riven with internal contradiction, criticism, and self-doubt. Countercultural critiques, environmentalist politics, and senses of the alienation of contemporary mass society have led to a romanticization and idealization of primitivity, and a search for alternatives. The Kwaio have had little direct contact with Western ideologies idealizing primitivity. They are surprised when I tell them that there are anthropology students and others reading my books around the world who praise and value their struggles, their cultural conservatism, their nakedness, and the material simplicity of their lives. But indirectly, I think, and partly from the debates that rage around the contemporary Solomons about the perceived environmental, social, and cultural costs of logging and cash cropping, the Kwaio perceive that Christianity and Westernization are not the irresistible juggernauts they once seemed to be. These factors cannot account for the decades of resistance against colonial rule and Christian ascendancy; but the pagans who have resisted so long now find support and sympathy from unexpected quarters, and encounter doubts where once there were certainties, despite the mounting material temptations.

The slow trickle to the mission villages continues, and perhaps the ancestral ways will disappear as the trickle turns to a stream. But perhaps, the resistance and the pride that fuels it will endure into the twenty-first century.

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