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To be Makiran is to see like Mr Parrot: the anthropology of wonder in Solomon Islands

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This article lays out a general thesis for the development of a comparative ethnographic approach to the anthropology of wonder. It suggests that wonder is both an index and a mode of challenge to existing ontological premises. Through analytical engagement with the theme of wonder in Western philosophy and the anthropology of ontology, it extends this thesis to include the corollary that different ontological premises give rise to different wonders. Ethnographically, the article supports these claims via analysis of wonder discourses among the Arosi of Solomon Islands. These discourses, it is argued, both respond to and promote ontological transformations in a context where the premises at stake are neither those of the Cartesian dualism commonly ascribed to modernity nor of the relational non-dualism commonly ascribed to anthropology's ethnographic 'others', but of a non-Cartesian pluralism termed poly-ontology.

Mr Parrot (*Mwane Kira*) and Mr Octopus (*Mwane 'Uria*) lived in our island, Makira. One day these two friends agreed, 'Let's try to hide [from each other]'. Mr Parrot is a bird that lives in the bush; it's a bird whose colour is beautifully green. Mr Octopus lives in the sea and has eight tentacles.

Mr Parrot said, 'You hide first. I'll look for you.'

So, Mr Octopus went and stayed on top of a rock. He changed and looked like that rock.

And Mr Parrot said, 'I can see you down there on top of that rock. I can see you very well.'

'I'll go again!' Mr. Octopus went and stayed on top of another rock and changed to look like that rock.

And Mr Parrot said, 'You're down there on top of that rock. I can see you!'

At that point Mr Octopus became a little angry and thought, 'Goodness, how can I hide from Mr Parrot? This time I'll go down and try to hide really well!'

Mr Octopus went down into the sea and went under a stone. He changed and looked like that stone.

And Mr Parrot said, 'It's you under that stone and you've changed to look like that stone!'

Mr Octopus gave up and said, 'You hide as well.'

Mr Parrot went and flew up into a tree and cried out, 'Can you see me?'

Mr Octopus looked and looked, but he couldn't see him. He kept looking and looking, but no! And as Mr Octopus kept looking, his eyes stuck out a little.

So, Mr Parrot won and Mr Octopus lost. And today, if you see Mr Octopus, you'll see his two eyes sticking out, and if you come across Mr Parrot singing in a tree, you'll hear him but you won't be able to see him.

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This is my edited translation of a story I heard in 2006 during an eight-month field stay among the Arosi of Solomon Islands. The Arosi are a population of around 9,400 Austronesian-speaking Melanesians whose home region, also called Arosi, lies at the northwest end of the island of Makira. Makira (formerly San Cristobal) is the southernmost large island in the Solomons chain, about 2,000 kilometres northeast of Australia. A British protectorate from 1893, Solomon Islands became an independent nation-state in 1978.

The story of Mr Parrot and Mr Octopus belongs to a genre Arosi call *mamaani* 'oni'oni, made-up tales, often about animals, told to children. But the young man from whom I recorded the above version, Alfred Mwaerahanihori of Bwa'uraha village in southwest Arosi, offered an allegorical interpretation that imbued the story with seriousness, even mystery. He implied that Mr Parrot, *Mwane Kira*, is a figure for Makirans and represents the fact that they are endowed with sharp vision amounting to clairvoyant insight. This interpretation hinged on a folk etymology for the name Makira. 'In the olden days', he explained, the name was Marakira, a combination of the Arosi word *mara*, meaning 'like', and *kira*, the local name for the singing parrot (*Geoffroyus heteroclitus*), whose call, Arosi say, sounds like *kira-kira-kira*. Thus, to be Makiran is to be *mara kira*, like Mr Parrot:

They called it [the island] after the character of Mr Parrot. If a person hides over here, we people of Makira would still see him. Whether just by knowledge, or because you left something that no one knows about, we poor little people, who look like we are covered in dust, will still see you. It is their character; they are like Mr Parrot . . . Look, it isn't as if this is just about us Arosi; the whole island has this character. We look like poor unimportant people, just pitiful – or we act like that – but our knowledge is so special.

Alluding to this fable in a separate context, Joash Ashley Hoanidangi, an older resident of Bwa'uraha, shared a different etymology. He asserted that the true name was once Maakira, a compound of *maa*, meaning 'eye', with *kira*, and he suggested that the capacity for special vision inheres not only in the people of Makira, but also in the island itself:

This island has the name Makira. It means that this island has an eye like the bird called *kira*, the singing parrot. It can look and see things that are hidden or whatever is secret. It can see them and know, or it has a feeling and can hear whether things are or aren't true.

These interpretations of Mr Parrot are examples of what I call 'wonder discourses'. With this concept, I aggregate discursive practices that meet one or both of two criteria. First, a discursive practice is a wonder discourse if it is evidence of a heightened interest in or mood of wonder in a given context. Second, a discursive practice is a wonder discourse if people engage in it as a way of cultivating wonder. Wonder discourses are therefore analytically distinct from myths or folktales that tell of extraordinary beings and events, although – as in the case of Mr Parrot – they may reference such stories (cf. Lattas 2010: xxi).

Among Arosi, as I will explain, wonder discourses are both expressions of and contributors to a heightened mood of wonder about Makira itself. Since my doctoral research in 1992 to 1993, Arosi have elaborated an extensive repertoire of discourses about Makira that suggest the island constitutes and conceals a marvellous power, or *mena* (the Arosi variant of Oceanic *mana*), in which they and all things autochthonous (*auhenua*) to Makira participate. In their own terms, Arosi sometimes describe whatever

seems to hint at or disclose this hidden power as a *ha'abu'oahu*, 'something amazing', 'a miracle', 'a wonder'; some even use the English word 'wonder'.

My most encompassing agenda in this article is to bring my analysis of Makiran wonder discourses into dialogue with Western philosophy and the anthropology of ontology to offer a general thesis for the development of an anthropology of wonder. The thesis I propose is that wonder – broadly construed to include awe, marvel, astonishment, shock, dread, amazement, and horror (cf. Rubenstein 2008: 9) – is an index and a mode of challenge to existing ontological premises. Wherever there is wonder, there has been a destabilization, whether fleeting or prolonged, of specific assumptions about the nature of being or becoming. But wonder is not only a spontaneous response to such destabilization; it is also a mood that can be created and sustained as a way of contesting received ontological limits and reconfiguring ontological possibilities.

In what follows, I explore how the mood expressed and generated by Makiran wonder discourses is an index and a mode of challenge to the received ontological premises of Arosi cosmology. According to these premises, socio-cosmic order is an aggregate of independently arising, territorially specific, and matrilineally sustained categories of being. Today, however, as processes of ethnogenesis in Solomon Islands harden insular and regional identities, images of Makira as a whole, and of Makirans as a single island-specific category, can appear to Arosi as intimations of something amazingly at odds with their ancestral precedents: maybe the lineage-cum-land entities of Makira coexist in continuity rather than discontinuity of being. As the eschatological content of some Makiran wonder discourses suggests, this possibility is disquieting as well as exhilarating. It promises empowerment *vis-à-vis* other incipient infra-national groups, but dooms Makirans to incestuous confusion.

I begin by situating my thesis within Western thinking about wonder and highlighting how aspects of this tradition illustrate what the thesis contends. This establishes a comparative framework for an ethnographic approach to the nexus between wonder and ontology. Set within this framework, my ethnography offers an account of what generates wonder when the ontological premises at stake are those of neither the Cartesian dualism commonly said to define moderns nor the relational non-dualism commonly imputed to anthropological 'others'.

Wonder and ontology in Western thought

The history of Western thought provides strong precedents for the thesis forwarded here and also offers instances of philosophical, poetic, and anthropological practices that support its claims. In *The passions of the soul*, for example, René Descartes wrote: 'When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new, or very different from what we knew in the past or what we supposed it was going to be, this makes us wonder and be astonished at it' (1989 [1649]: 52). This account clearly identifies difference, or unknown otherness, as that which evokes wonder. For this reason, it has been a touchstone for critical thinkers who wish to link wonder and alterity in their cultural histories or ethics (e.g. Greenblatt 1991; Irigaray 2004). But, if wonder arises from some inkling of novelty or difference, this raises the question, novelty or difference in relation to what (cf. La Caze 2013: 14)? It is only relative to expectations conditioned by some sense of what there is and of what is possible that something can provoke wonder. Wonder is inextricably linked not only to alterity but also to people's ontological premises, and, indeed, demonstrates the existence of such

premises, however we theorize them (as evolved, acquired, or configured by interplays between the two, etc.).

Recognition of this nexus between wonder and challenge to ontological premises is most apparent in the writings of philosophers who focus on wonder as a response to that which is not merely new or different but inexplicable. The inexplicable, they emphasize, casts seemingly unquestionable axioms about the way things are into radical doubt and suggests new realities. Playing on the possible etymological relationship between English 'wonder' and 'wound', philosopher of religion Mary-Jane Rubenstein observes that wonder responds to 'a destabilizing and unassimilable interruption in the ordinary course of things, an uncanny opening, rift, or wound in the everyday' (2008: 10). Or, as Jerome Miller puts it, wonder arises from experiences that 'are charged with ontological significance', because they 'transform our knowledge of what is by awakening us to realities of which we would otherwise be oblivious' (1992: xii).

Exploiting this capacity of wonder to awaken us to new realities, diverse Western thinkers have sought to induce wonder in order to question the seemingly self-evident and explore previously unimagined possibilities. This was how Socrates operated. By posing questions that forced his interlocutors to contradict what they took for granted, he led them into *aporia*, a state of dizzying perplexity in which they became 'lost in wonder' (Rubenstein 2008: 3; cf. Kofman 1988: 19). He fostered wonder with intent to undermine everyday precepts and open apertures onto the unknown as a spur to inquiry after 'the highest things' (Green 2004: 45).

'Greece never existed', wrote André Breton in a 1948 poem entitled 'Rano Raraku', after a volcanic hill on Rapanui (Easter Island) noted for its *moai* statues (in Debaene 2014: 255). With this line, Breton obliterated the idealization of classical antiquity and asserted the radical alterity of the *moai* and their cultic milieu. Yet Breton's agenda for Surrealism hinged on wonder in ways that link him back to Greece and to Socratic Method. Whereas Socrates generated wonder through logical contradictions, Breton induced it through the poetic juxtaposition of incongruous images: through verbal metaphors, chance encounters, the random finding of objects shorn from their original contexts, and the assembling of artefacts from afar (cf. Edwards 2008: 192-6). He pursued 'the marvelous [*le merveilleux*], with all it implies in terms of surprise, splendor, and dazzling outlook' because the outlook it offers is 'onto something other than what we are able to know' (Breton 1995: 173).

Socrates professed abiding ignorance about 'the highest things', yet arguably his unwillingness to prescribe alternatives to the ontological premises he challenged promoted wonder itself as 'conducive to engendering good individuals and a good city' (Green 2004: 64). In contrast, Breton aimed to realize the 'something other' to which he said wonder gives access. He enjoined surrealists to provoke wonder so that 'the poetic (surrealist) vision of things' might 'account for the interpenetration of mind and matter' and 'overcome the dualism of perception and representation' characteristic of 'the realist vision' (Breton 1995: 171-2). For both thinkers, wonder was a *practice* with the potential to transform ontological premises *as* social and political change.

Data supportive of the thesis I am proposing for an anthropology of wonder come also from several of the discourses now constituting the anthropology of ontology.¹ Among these, it is possible to discern more than one agenda for anthropology that implicitly renders it a wonder practice capable of de-centring the ontological premises ascribed to moderns by grappling with the ontological premises ascribed to others (e.g. Evens 2008: 223, 294; Ingold 2011: 74-5; Rose 2011: 5-6).

Such an agenda is legible, for example, in the work of Martin Holbraad, a leading voice in the Cambridge-originated ‘ontological turn’. Referencing Socrates, Holbraad (2012: 246) advocates a ‘recursive anthropology’ in which the provocation of ‘ethnographically driven aporia’ (2012: 263) is pivotal. Holbraad argues that a distinguishing feature of anthropology has been, and ought to remain, its concern with alterity, but alterity defined in specific terms. Alterity, according to Holbraad, is that which cannot be represented without recourse to logical contradictions and oxymoronic formulations: ‘Things that are also people, people that are also gods, gods that are also wafers, twins that are also birds’ (2012: xvi). Alterity, in other words, is precisely that which challenges a cardinal ontological premise of realist rationalism: the law of non-contradiction according to which a thing cannot be both itself and something else at the same time. Holbraad’s claim is that this kind of alterity, like the contradictions elicited by Socratic questioning, leads anthropologists into the conceptual and verbal impasse of *aporia*. And for Holbraad, as for Socrates, this is the necessary condition for the birthing of new insights. Holbraad (along with his co-authors) recommends therefore that, whenever alterity causes anthropologists to marvel (cf. Holbraad, Pedersen & Viveiros de Castro 2014), they should resist the inclination to explain that alterity away as indicative of ignorance, madness, or metaphor. Holding on to their ‘wonderment’ (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007: 1), they should allow alterity, recursively, to prompt them to generate new concepts that might destabilize the premises of realist rationalism. ‘Immanent’ to this recursive anthropology, moreover, is ‘the politics of indefinitely sustaining the possible, the “could be”’ (Holbraad *et al.* 2014).

In keeping with my own comparative approach to ontology, however, the anthropology of wonder I seek to develop values the recursive power of the anthropologist’s wonder, but extends also to an ethnographic focus on what constitutes a wonder to others. What is it that provokes wonder in others, and how might their experiences of wonder, and their wonder practices, be indices or modes of challenge to the ontological premises relevant to them?

It is always possible (probable?) that one’s field interlocutors will presuppose realist rationalism, at least in some contexts, and will express or promote wonder at that which challenges its ontological premises. But it is also possible that they will, either additionally or instead, be the recipients and generators of worlds other than the world of realist rationalism – worlds configured by other ontological premises, entailing other criteria for what makes a wonder. That which prompts the ethnographer’s wonder may not, therefore, astonish the people he or she meets in the field, and vice versa. Likewise, something may appear wonderful to different people – or to the same person – by reason of different onto-logics.

Again, Holbraad’s theorization of alterity aids explication, as it implies just such a model of diverse, ontologically conditioned wonders. His ethnography yields the inference that, for the people who cause alterity to appear to anthropologists, that alterity is no alterity at all and, hence, no source of wonder. By his account, for example, the capacity of ritual specialists in Cuban Ifá divination ‘to bring Orula [a god] forth into immanence during divination conjures no sense of paradox, nor is it the object of wondrous contemplation as, say, the grace of the Eucharist might be [i.e. to anyone for whom a god-wafer asserts continuity of being between two ontologically discontinuous things]’ (2012: 129). This is because, he says, the ontological premises of Ifá cosmology are relational: Ifá cosmology posits neither a plurality of discontinuous self-same entities (pluralism) nor an underlying identity of being (monism), but a ‘field of relations’

(2012: 164) in which everything is intrinsically pre-related and there are no pre-existing fundamental elements. Accordingly, the diviners' ability to elicit deities from 'the relative ontological distance of transcendence to the relative proximity of immanence' (2012: 172) inspires respect but not awe among Ifá practitioners. What intrigues me, however, although Holbraad does not pursue it, is the implication that the relational premises of Ifá cosmology entail their own criteria for alterity and, thus, for what *would* strike Ifá practitioners as wondrous.

It may now be stated, in fact, as a corollary to the thesis that wonder is an index and a mode of challenge to existing ontological premises, that different ontological premises give rise to different wonders, in both senses of the word: different wondrous actualities and possibilities, and different affective nuances of wonder. This corollary guides a comparative approach to wonder as an aspect of the anthropology of ontology (cf. Scott 2014*b*). Because 'our' wonder may not be 'their' wonder, this approach does not begin with an essentialist definition, but proceeds by attending to expressions of wonder during fieldwork and investigating what wonder arises from and what it does. It acknowledges that the ethnographer's notion of what wonder looks like will not match exactly what his or her field interlocutors experience, yet deploys that notion anyway in order to allow similarities and differences to transpire (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2004).

This leads to a further recommendation for a comparative approach to the nexus between wonder and ontology: the anthropology of ontology needs to move beyond what has been a productive but limiting preoccupation with a single opposition. Many of the discourses that have coalesced into the anthropology of ontology have developed a contrast between the ontological premises said to inform anthropology as a product of Western modernity and the ontological premises said to inform most, if not all, of anthropology's ethnographic 'others'. In consequence, as I have previously analysed (Scott 2013), much of the anthropology of ontology appears to posit only two inverse ontologies (but see Descola 2013).²

Each of these ontologies defies adequate description via one '-ism' alone. So far, I have used 'realist rationalism' to describe the world allegedly generated by Western modernity. This language emphasizes the ontological premises that there is one objective reality and that it consists in a discontinuity of mutually exclusive entities and kinds. Anthropologists also use the terms 'pluralism' and 'essentialism' to emphasize the premise of discontinuity. Not adequately captured in this language, however, is the modern premise of absolute discontinuity between that which extends in space (matter) and that which does not (mind); the label 'Cartesian dualism' is best reserved, I suggest, for emphasizing this real/ideal discontinuity.

The inverse world of anthropological 'others', by contrast, is usually styled relational. This language emphasizes the chief ontological premise said to configure relationism: nothing exceeds relations. There are no pure elementary entities that enter into relations, only an infinite regress of pre-relations, both extensively and intensively. Furthermore, whereas Cartesian dualism is said to entail a master discontinuity between matter/signified and mind/sign, the relationism of ethnographic 'others' is said to entail a pervasive continuity between materiality and meaning. Everything is potentially a subject, animate with information and often with intentionality; and these different bodies of information can generate different worlds. In opposition to Cartesian dualism and its 'dead matter', therefore, relationism is sometimes called non-dualism, or animism.

This two-worlds theory has consequences for an anthropology of wonder. It pre-determines that, in tandem with these two inverse ontologies, there are two inverse sources of wonder: continuity of being to a Cartesian essentialist and discontinuity of being to a relational non-dualist. We have already considered claims that Cartesian essentialists experience wonder when confronted by things that violate the law of non-contradiction. This is especially true of phenomena that appear as a confusion of animate subject and inanimate object (such as a god-wafer). Returning to the question of what Holbraad's Ifá practitioners would find wonderful, one might infer that they would marvel at anything that presented itself as free of relations, impervious to all influences, complete and unchanging. And, indeed, the iconically relational Mt Hageners of Papua New Guinea are said to be amazed by 'wild spirits' that 'have no insides' and 'sky beings' that exist 'formlessly and timelessly in themselves'; they have even, at least initially, mistaken Europeans for such entities (Strathern 1992a: 249-50).

I have deduced this mirror-image model of wonder based on passing observations in the ethnography of others. I would not endorse it without targeted wonder-focused field study. Yet, even if such an inverse correlation between Cartesian essentialism and relational non-dualism and their respective criteria for wonder were substantiated by further research, this model would not exhaust the range of possible ontologies or wonders. This, at least, is what Makiran wonder discourses lead me to conclude. These discourses, as I will now elaborate, index and advance challenges to the premises of a distinctively non-Cartesian Arosi essentialism that I call poly-ontology.

Wonder as index of challenge to ontological premises

It is well recognized that some Melanesian contexts exhibit an 'uncompromising' matrilineal essentialism (Young 1987: 230; cf. Macintyre 1989; Thune 1989; Weiner 1978). In the Massim (Papua New Guinea), for example, this is most legible to analysis in death rituals that disarticulate matrilineal categories from affinal and other relations. As Marilyn Strathern (1992b: 100 fn. 5) acknowledges, such unilineal essentialism entails a claim that 'relations engaged in the lifetime' render 'the complete lineage person "incomplete"'; death restores a person to his or her lineage category, conceptualized as both an original and an ultimate unit of self-sustaining completeness.

Arosi likewise exhibits a strong matrilineal essentialism, amounting to a non-Cartesian pluralism that I have termed a poly-ontology – an experience of the cosmos as composed of many autonomously complete land-based entities (Scott 2007: 12-17). Arosi poly-ontology finds its clearest expression not in death rituals, but in matrilineage origin myths. Such myths present socio-spatial and cosmic order as coming into being through the establishment of external relations among a plurality of independently arising, intrinsically generative, and heterogeneously autochthonous categories of being. Three Arosi matrilineages understand themselves to be descended from the asexually produced daughters of different snakes. Members of another matrilineage claim that their first truly human ancestress was born from a *kakamora*, a kind of autochthonous dwarf said otherwise to 'die' by replacing itself from within, who 'married' a *masi*, a proverbially dim-witted type of primordial quasi-human. Another matrilineage traces itself to a stone that was also a female person. Another says its progenitor was sung forth by a bird. Still others describe their pre-human forebears as wild *adaro*, a type of elemental power distinct from the ancestral dead (also called *adaro*). These *adaro*, according to the narratives, procreated with males of unspecified origin to whom they appeared as beautiful women. These myths depict, in other words, a plurality of spontaneously

productive *complete* primordial beings either before or as they first engage in the relations that will render their descendants *incomplete*.

Yet the resulting matrilineal categories, as the humanized transformations of these primordial entities, remain latently whole. Arosi say that, despite the 'mixing' of bloods through lineage exogamy, the *mena* of matrilineal blood 'keeps going' when passed on through women. If, to paraphrase Strathern (1992b: 86), it is impossible to imagine an Arosi person cut out from inter-lineage relations and remaining alive, Arosi nevertheless regard those relations as surplus to a matrilineally sustained primordial entity that inheres in them and in which they inhere. Relations may temporarily obscure, but cannot fundamentally change, the *mena* specific to each such entity. Each is furthermore conceptualized as consubstantial with a particular area of land. The pluralist premises of Arosi poly-ontology compose Makira as, in effect, an aggregate of island-like matrilineal bodies, bound together by exogamy and other inter-lineage ties.

Points for comparison now stand out. Being a form of essentialism, Arosi poly-ontology entails its own version of the law of non-contradiction: nothing can belong to more than one matrilineal category. Amaeo and Araha (the names of two matrilineages) cannot be predicates of the same subject. But this version of non-contradiction does not extend to the predicates 'person' and 'place'. A thing can be both a person and a place at the same time. To belong to the *auhenua* matrilineage of a particular territory is to exist in continuity of being with that land. Arosi poly-ontology is therefore essentialist with respect to differences among the lineage-cum-land entities, but not along the Cartesian mind/matter axis; and it is non-Cartesian within each lineage-cum-land entity, but cannot on that account be taken for a boundless relational animism.³

But Arosi also have mythic resources for envisaging Makira as a primordial whole in ways that can contest the premises of poly-ontology as *matrilineal* essentialism (Scott 2007: 261-300). Among these are Arosi variants of the regionally widespread myth of the severed snake. This myth figures the island and its generativity as a giant snake that has suffered dismemberment and alienation from its true place. To summarize the essentials: the snake once lived on Makira, where it gave birth to a daughter with human form. When the daughter grew up, she married a man of unspecified origin, despite the snake's misgivings. The man was unaware that his wife was the daughter of a snake. When the couple had a baby, the mother would secretly leave the child in the care of the snake while the couple worked their garden. One day, the man discovered his child in the coils of the snake and chopped the snake into pieces. The pieces re-joined themselves, however, and the snake, offended by this treatment, left Makira, taking its generativity away to the neighbouring island of Guadalcanal. Even Arosi who do not know this story in full are familiar with the idea that the snake's departure is why gardening on Makira is difficult, while wild fruits and cultigens grow well on Guadalcanal.

Such images of encompassing insularity can suggest that all Makiran matrilineages share an underlying identity of being, or are somehow pre-related. Conceptualized as a primordial snake, the island appears as an apical ancestor, either as the source of a female who became the mother of all Makirans, or as a common ground of being from which all the progenitors in matrilineage origin myths emerged as sibling-like projections. In both cases, the whole obtrudes before the parts, causing Makira and Makirans to seem like one endogamous lineage-cum-island entity.

I have documented exceptions (Scott 2007: 262-5), but most Arosi would object that such a perspective on origins makes the tabu practice of lineage endogamy inevitable and amounts instead to a doomsday scenario. As Casper Kaukeni, one of my Arosi

hosts, said in 1992: ‘Even if the whole of Makira were full of people, no one could marry if everyone belonged to the same lineage; it would be the end’. Avoiding this repugnant conclusion, the myths of singular matrilineal beginnings discussed above limit the narrative frame; they home in on one intra-island scale of origin without presupposing any insular-scale whole. If anything, they intimate that the island-snake suffered segmentation at the hands of an outside agent *prior to* the appearance of a matrilineal progenitor in – and *as* – each of its several parts. They focus, in effect, on only one piece of the severed snake, sequestering it as though it were a regenerated whole impinged on by another.

That said, the Makiran wonder discourses I encountered in 2003 and 2006 seem to respond to just such an apprehension of Makira as a unity in which all ‘true’ Makirans participate and which connects them directly to a trans-matrilineal *mena*. This was especially evident in wonder discourses about the dwarf-like *kakamora*. In 2006, one man told me a story, versions of which I had heard in the early 1990s, about how white men once seized a *kakamora* and took it to the US, where it taught Americans their advanced technology (cf. Abong 2008: 107); but this man’s account included a detail that was new to me. He said that, when they tried to grab the *kakamora*, it turned into a stone and then into a snake and then back into the diminutive quasi-human shape ascribed to *kakamora*. Another consultant separately suggested that a *kakamora* is ‘part-animal, part-*adaro*, and part-human’. Ontological change is in these details: if *kakamora* are shape-shifters, then the differences among the pre-human progenitors in matrilineage origin myths become ambiguous. The autochthonous things of Makira – snakes, rocks, *kakamora*, birds, wild *adaro* – which have given rise to diverse matrilineages, look like the *internal* transformations of a single underlying Makiran substance.

A range of discourses that were new to me seemed, in fact, to have promoted *kakamora* from mischievous little boggarts to self-replicating replicas of Makira and its *mena*. In the 1990s, what Arosi told me about *kakamora* differed little from what the Anglican missionary ethnographer Charles E. Fox (1924) wrote about them in the early twentieth century. Yet, in the early twenty-first century, I found I had much to learn about them. The great physical strength and wisdom long associated with the *kakamora* is now said to reside in a removable stone lodged in one armpit. But the *mena* of such a stone is not just the *mena* of the *kakamora* to which it belongs; it is said to instantiate the power of Makira as a whole. In the apt phrase of one university-educated consultant, a *kakamora* stone is ‘the common denominator’ of Makira. Other discourses previously unfamiliar to me credited *kakamora* with preserving an original true Makiran language and tradition (Solomon Islands Pijin: *kastom*) otherwise lost or corrupted among Makiran humans. This now widespread idea makes *kakamora* icons not only of an ur-Makiran way, but also of a supposedly innate ‘good character’ (*baronga goro*) said to manifest itself in all true Makirans: like *kakamora*, true Makirans appear small and diffident but are endowed with profound hidden strength. I have always known Arosi to refer to *kakamora* as *sae auhenua* (autochthonous people), but this phrase now seems to privilege them as *the* Makiran aboriginals. This again suggests that all the progenitors portrayed in matrilineage origin myths were *kakamora* under other forms. In violation of the Arosi version of the law of non-contradiction, this would mean that Amaeo and Araha (and all the other matrilineage names) are effectively predicates of every Makiran subject; each contains all, and all replicate the same *kakamora* ontology.

My analysis, in light of these developments, is that contemporary Makiran wonder discourses are indices that matrilineal essentialism has been destabilized and is

giving way to insular essentialism as an upscaling of the premises of Arosi poly-ontology. The fundamental elements of the Arosi cosmos are no longer necessarily matrilineal categories; they are now potentially whole islands or regions. Within this reconfigured poly-ontology, insular essentialism has not absolutely displaced matrilineal essentialism; the two now coexist in unresolved tension. But for those who engage in them, Makiran wonder discourses give narrative form to an expansive sense that a person's fullness of being resides not in one exclusive lineage-cum-land entity alone, but also – and more fundamentally – in the *mena* of Makira.

This upwards scalar shift has long been in the making. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the acceptance of Christianity, in particular, has prompted many Arosi to assert that their ancestral traditions – their matrilineally innovated stories, norms, rituals, and tabus – were self-sufficient versions of God's law revealed to each lineage in its land.⁴ Yet such bids to deny that God had left Arosi in darkness until the advent of European missionaries have reduced and homogenized matrilineal traditions, subordinating differences to a common core *kastom* said to be consonant with Christianity. This idealized and genericized *kastom* connotes what Arosi call 'doing the way of a woman': behaving like a strong maternal figure towards strangers by welcoming and caring for them, but also disciplining them if they fail to respect their hosts. Distilled even further, this benevolent maternal rule is often alluded to simply as a special Makiran 'goodness' (*goroha*), 'good character' (*baronga goro*), or 'good way of living' (*awa goro*) that brings peace and prosperity. Today, this is the Makiran *kastom* identified not only with Christianity but also with the *kakamora*. It furthermore informs a new discursive practice of referring to Makira as 'the Motherland'.

At the same time, colonial and postcolonial regimes of geo-political and ecclesiastical division have made it impossible for Arosi to ignore the positing of 'Makira' as a given whole, or to escape essentialization as 'Makiran' in relation to the people of other such given wholes. Euro-Americans, informed by the Cartesian mandate to classify, have consistently approached the Solomons as a chain of unitary islands or island clusters and have sought to map, Christianize, exploit, govern, and assist these units as coterminous with a variety of physical, psychological, and social types. In so doing, they have contributed to the creation of a semiotic system among these units as incipient ethnic groups. Shaped by almost two centuries of Euro-American fear of and respect for Malaitans, this now indigenized system consists in a single gendered opposition: the island of Malaita versus many of the other large islands and island groups. By the terms of this opposition, Malaitans are the biggest, strongest, most warlike and contentious, most numerous and mobile, most capable and industrious people in the country; they are also known for adhering fiercely to a patriarchal *kastom* with patrilineal land tenure. Conversely, according to this binary, the people of other islands and regions are passive, gentle, forbearing, and content to stay put; as part of the oversimplification that ethnogenesis requires and yields, they are also seen to be predominantly matrilineal. Among the latter, moreover, Makirans have been stigmatized as especially weak – as small, timid, indolent, and backwards.⁵

Around the turn of the millennium, this mode of ethnogenesis intensified into violent civil crisis. Between 1998 and 2003, a small-scale war, now commonly referred to as the Tension, took place on Guadalcanal, mainly around the national capital, Honiara (Allen 2013; Moore 2004). The larger complexities of this conflict notwithstanding, the primary antagonism lay between people identified with Malaita but settled in the Honiara vicinity and people identified with Guadalcanal who claim indigenous land rights

there. Mutual grievances led to armed confrontations between Guadalcanal-aligned militants seeking to drive the settlers off their island and Malaita-aligned militants making a stand by seizing control of the capital. Law and order were quickly restored in mid-2003 with the help of the international Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands.

In the aftermath of these events, my consultants represented Malaitans as the wrongful instigators of the trouble and recalled that there had been significant fear among Arosi that Malaitans might next set their sights on Makira. As one man put it: ‘Malaitans say, “Let’s marry to Makira, become plentiful, and chase away the Makirans”’. This statement reveals what many Arosi think was happening on Guadalcanal and expresses their anxiety that Malaitans see other islands as appropriable brides. Malaitans, Arosi suspect, want to marry women in matrilineal contexts and transplant their patrilineal by asserting that, just as their *kastom* dictates that men rule over women, their *kastom* overrules the *kastom* of their thus colonized wives and affines.

Although the fighting never reached Makira, this Tension was the immediate stimulus behind the Makiran wonder discourses that, after my ten-year absence from Arosi, struck me as recent and prolific. These discourses have flourished because the Tension caused Arosi to attend to Makira as a whole with exceptional emphasis. When they contemplated themselves from the off-shore perspective they ascribed to Malaitans, Arosi experienced an acute sense of vulnerability conducive to a hard lean towards insular monism. Accordingly, many of their wonder discourses – such as those associated with Mr Parrot – raise images of an autonomously transpiring and self-monitoring insular *mena*. The wonder that these discourses express is hopeful amazement that, contrary to the premises of matrilineal essentialism, there may be a singular power rooted in the island as a whole and infused through all its parts. It is a wonder primed to recognize signs that this power is active at every Makiran scale – that it is quietly guiding the destiny of the island, that true Makirans may find it inside themselves, and that it can be relied on to detect and repel ill-intending strangers, just as the ancestral powers of a lineage-cum-land entity may still be relied on to defend their descendants in their land.

This last element is most notable in the Makiran wonder discourses that constitute the entity Arosi call *bahai nai ano*, or *gao nai ano* – ‘the underground’. Both terms connote the idea that, deep inside the island, there is a secret high-tech urban-military complex run by the *kakamora* in alliance with an army composed primarily of white men. Usually conceptualized as Americans, the whites in the underground are said to speak a purer form of Arosi than Arosi themselves and to follow the original true Makiran *kastom* of the *kakamora*. This claim is most often raised to suggest that members of the army may be the returned descendants of geographically dispersed Makiran women. But army personnel are also sometimes represented as visitors who have ‘adopted’ Makiran ways or become ‘Makiranzed’ through contact with the *kakamora*. This collaboration, it is said, has produced supra-scientific technology (stealth weaponry, omniscient data collection, nuclear-like energy), which enables the army to protect Makira by means of surveillance and occasional awesome self-disclosure.⁶

Talk about the underground has clear antecedents in Maasina Rule, a sociopolitical movement that developed in the central and southeast Solomons after the Second World War.⁷ Like other anti-colonial movements in the post-war British Empire, Maasina Rule was a bid for civil rights, better education and employment, and greater self-government in the hope of acquiring modern development. Some participants promoted the idea

that Americans, whose military power had been evident in the region during the war, would rid Solomon Islanders of British rule and help them achieve material parity with whites. In Arosi, this idea acquired an additional detail that may have had parallels elsewhere in the archipelago (Scott 2012: 118-19): some people asserted that American forces had hollowed out the core of Makira and constructed an underground 'town' stocked with manufactured goods to initiate Makiran prosperity.

Augmenting this legacy, present-day discourses about the underground say that the army will one day reveal the metropolis it has constructed and translate its infrastructure and technology into development for the surface. This prosperity will provide the foundation for Makiran autonomy as either a federal or independent state. The true language and ways of the *kakamora* will be restored, bringing harmonious social order as well as plenty. Makira will then, according to some prognostications, rise to national and regional pre-eminence as the 'Motherland' and 'peacemaker'.

Another sub-discourse composing the wonder of the underground is a conspiracy theory according to which Solomon S. Mamaloni (1943-2000), a famous Arosi-born politician, did not die in January 2000 as officially reported, but will reappear with the army. Mamaloni served as the first Chief Minister (1974-6) prior to independence, Prime Minister of three governments (1981-84, 1989-93, 1994-7), and leader of the opposition for many years (Chevalier 2015). Talk that he might still be alive consists in a veritable canon of purported irregularities attending his death in Honiara and his funeral in Arosi. A constant of this canon is the assertion, voiced by mourners at the open-coffin funeral, that the body did not look like Mamaloni as last seen. Its hair should have been short and grey, but it was 'big' and black as when he was first Chief Minister. Its chin was smooth as if it 'had absolutely no whiskers'. Its face and chest felt like 'rubber', or 'as though there weren't any bones'. Its lips were swollen, and its ears 'didn't look like Mamaloni's'. In a Solomon Islands Pijin word, the body looked like a *dole* – a doll, or substitute mannequin.⁸ Among Arosi, to rehearse these details is to invite speculation about a link between Mamaloni and the underground. It is to raise well-known conjectures that Mamaloni secured influence and resources with the aid of the underground and that he used these to serve its agenda. It is tacitly to ask: did Mamaloni stage his own death and go into hiding – either underground or abroad – where he is preparing to lead the army to the surface?

In west and south Arosi especially, talk about the eventual manifestation of the army connects this event with prophecies that the long-delayed arrival of Makiran development will signal the onset of the end times. These prophecies are described as 'parcels' (*biibii*), messages packaged up in a variety of geophysical features, names, and stories associated with the coastal cliffs around the area known as Rohu at the northwest end of the island. In local exegeses, these 'parcels' predict the ultimate disclosure of abundant resources in Makira. But they also foretell that these riches will remain locked up until just before the end times. The fulfilment of these prophecies will consequently be double-edged. One prophecy warns that the sudden eruption of plenty will induce 'loose sexual morals'. Another plays on the name Arosi itself, which many people gloss as 'completed' or 'finished'. When the army appears, initiating these changes, God's plan for the world will finally be *arosi*. In the words of those who taught me about these prophecies, Makira will 'come up in the successful world' only when it is 'too late'.⁹

Meanwhile, Arosi have been experiencing unusual occurrences they find amenable to interpretation as evidence of the army's superintending presence. Although these occurrences peaked during the Tension, Arosi report that they continue sporadically,

and interest in them remains active. The most talked-about phenomena have been remarkable aircraft, ranging from small drone-like objects to large jet formations. There have also been reports of unidentified warships, an aircraft carrier, and mysterious underwater lights. I heard many stories about people having seen large mechanical whales and porpoises crewed by unknown humans. Another frequently cited anomaly is the sudden appearance of white men in military fatigues, encountered or glimpsed in inaccessible places where they seem to have come from nowhere.

All these phenomena are said furthermore to come and go from Rohu. This coastal area is characterized by an extensive uplifted and flat-topped limestone escarpment with seaward-facing terraces. The plateau and faces of these cliffs are pitted with sinkholes, crevices, and caverns, and there are several gracefully arched marine grottos (Jeffery 1977: 41-2). A kind of contemporary folklore has it that, some people, when approaching this coastline from Guadalcanal, have seen what looks like a city shining along the shore, while others, passing by in boats, have peered inside coastal caves and seen trucks humming along illuminated roadways. In these accounts, Rohu is a luminous portal, a border zone where the wonder that is Makira is most likely to show forth.

The ontological implications of these Makiran wonder discourses are elucidated by another. In 2003, people told me that the snake who went to Guadalcanal has come back. It swam up through a blowhole at Rohu and came inland over the plateau. Several consultants recounted how they, or others they knew, had seen the path it made. It must have been a huge snake, they said; its track was a yard wide. It left a fishy smell and, where it had passed, all the grasses were pressed down. The small trees were broken over, and the bark on the larger ones was marked with abrasions. 'The snake went into a cavern', said Esther Bwairageni, 'and hasn't appeared again'.

Wonder as mode of challenge to ontological premises

What I have been describing is only half the story, however. When Arosi engage in wonder discourses, they not only respond in wonder to intimations of Makiran unity, they also inculcate wonder in ways that enable them to precipitate and participate in pan-Makiran ontology and identity. These two movements of wonder are mutually reinforcing. To convey a clearer sense of the second, I focus in this section on the wonder practices of my consultant Hoanidangi, the man who derived the name Makira from the words *maa* (eye) and *kira* (the singing parrot). Whereas most Arosi generate wonder through spontaneous, casual, or facetious references to discourses about Makira, Hoa – as he is known locally – has compiled, both in his head and in exercise books, a miscellany of Makiran marvels. His orientation to Makiran wonder discourses shows how the accumulation and iteration of these discourses can serve as a method for producing and inhabiting the wonder of being one with a monadic Makira.

In September 2006, I spent five days as Hoa's guest at Bwa'uraha. At that time he was probably in his early fifties and, like the majority of people in southwest Arosi, had been raised in the South Sea Evangelical Church. During our conversations, Hoa presented almost catalogue-like voicings of already well-formed units of oral tradition about strange Makiran events. In so doing, he often punctuated the beginnings and endings of these units with phrases such as: 'It's just confusing'; 'What could it be?'; 'We're utterly baffled'; 'Question, question, question?'; 'We question ourselves about these things'. His talk actively produced the mystery of Makira by linking disparate themes as 'another thing we don't understand'.

One evening, for example, he narrated a *kastom* story he regards as an encrypted prediction of Mamaloni's 'death', an event he said looked like a *ha'abu'oahu*, 'something amazing'. From this story, he transitioned to his allegorical interpretation of Mr Parrot, explaining that, because of their special Makiran insight, Arosi have a feeling that Mamaloni is still alive. He then observed: 'Another thing we don't understand and that makes us ask "What's that?" is little planes with lights'. This cued a description of his own sighting of such an aircraft, which he said descended onto the Rohu plateau and disappeared. From this first-hand account, he segued to a reported incident:

[Here's] another story about our island which we don't understand and about which we don't know what is true and what is not. It's a story told by a Reef Islander who went with an Australian or New Zealand patrol boat that was going around Guadalcanal. When they came down to Marau [Sound] they said they'd take a look in at Makira. They used their 'detector machine' up at Makira Harbour . . . When they came down to Rohu, the machine gave off a red light that is a 'bad sign', and the person who was operating the machine said to turn it off, because if they didn't they would burn. So that is one story as well about Rohu that I don't understand.

He capped this sequence with another reported incident, attributed to a young nurse-aide from Malaita. The woman is said to have said that, during the Tension, Jimmy 'Rasta' Lusibaea, the feared leader of one of the Malaitan militias involved in the fighting on Guadalcanal, wanted to go to Makira. With this intent, he boarded a passenger boat from Malaita on which the woman too happened to be travelling. As they approached Makira, two ships suddenly appeared, one in front of them and one behind. The two ships projected beams of light onto the smaller boat, and its engine stopped. Then the two ships disappeared. The crew members of the passenger boat were able to re-start their engine but, unnerved by what had happened, they changed course and headed for Honiara. In bringing this story to a close, Hoa hinted that he has a preferred theory; he is predisposed to conclude that the strange tales from the Tension all point to the existence of the Makiran underground:

[I]n that account given by that woman, that's what they saw. And they looked in at Makira and saw something like a town with bright lights . . . That's what she said. We people of Makira, we hear accounts from people about what they've seen, but we haven't seen such things. We don't understand them and we don't know them.

The next morning, Hoa showed me an exercise book in which he had made notes in English on 'the Seven Wonders of the World'. His treatment of this theme was not limited to the ancient wonders, however; it included three lists, each with seven additional 'wonders'. The first was a list of seven phases of history correlated with biblical passages. The second was a list of manifestations and attributes of God, likewise correlated with biblical passages. The third, which Hoa referred to as the Seven Wonders of Makira, assigned names to seven of the above-mentioned eschatological prophecies associated with Rohu.

I was familiar with several of these prophecies from interviews with other Arosi, but I had never encountered a practice of enumerating seven together as 'wonders'. Accordingly, I asked Hoa, 'What you've written about the Seven Wonders comes from where?' He replied that he had copied the lists in his exercise book from a similar book shown to him by Jemuel Hagu (b. 1921), a man from the nearby village of 'Omaahaoru. Hoa explained that the copied material was part of a 'study' Hagu had received from 'people under the ground' sometime before the year 2000. This study also provided

clues about when and how the Seven Wonders of Makira would be fulfilled in the early twenty-first century.

Many Arosi readily identify at least some of the prophecies Hoa called the Seven Wonders of Makira as teachings associated with John 'Araubora (d. c.1964), an important leader of the Maasina Rule movement in Arosi. The week after my visit with Hoa, I interviewed Hagu at 'Omaahaoru, and he acknowledged this as well, having known 'Araubora during the movement. It seems clear, therefore, that key elements of Hoa's wonder talk about Makira date back to Maasina Rule.

Aware of this legacy and valuing it positively, Hoa tended, in fact, to talk about 'Araubora, Hagu, and other men noted for their involvement in Maasina Rule as marvels in their own right. He described them as 'like prophets' whose predictions about things that would happen on Makira have come true. They did and said what Hoa called 'amazing things' that suggested they were in contact with Americans living underground. But even as Hoa recounted anecdotes about these men, he returned repeatedly to the problem that current understanding of their words and deeds is imperfect:

The story that they told us is that there are people down in the ground, but we don't know properly and neither have we seen them . . . we're very confused. Do those people live with us or what?

Rather than a source of explanation, the Maasina Rule prophets and their fragmented teachings are now analogues to the tales of strange happenings during the Tension and to the underground itself as an enigma. They constitute 'another story about our island which we don't understand'.

It has since become apparent to me, furthermore, that Hoa's discourse about his confusion is *itself* a Makiran wonder discourse, a discourse about confusion as a wonder and a sign that the prophecies in Hagu's study are being fulfilled. Recall that the first of the three lists of Seven Wonders that Hoa transcribed from Hagu's study was a list of seven phases of history. The third phase on this list was the 'Great Confusion', to be followed by 'Peace and Safty [*sic*]', 'Sudden Destruction', 'Fourth Kingdom', and 'Battle of Armageddon'. Referring to the year 2006, Hoa said: 'During this year some things are going to be difficult for us in our lives . . . It comes to the period of confusion in these wonders'. Confusion, in other words, was a positive experience for Hoa, a state of mind to be welcomed and even talked up. He found a virtue in and nurtured the inconclusiveness of the stories he had heard. The confusion they induced not only vindicated Hagu's study and the underground behind it, but also made Hoa a locus at which the unique power and destiny of Makira was demonstrably emerging.

Hoa's practice of collecting and iterating wonder discourses about Makira is a marked example of a general phenomenon. Many Arosi – and other Makirans as well – enjoy comparing different accounts they frame as puzzling stories about Makira and thereby engendering feelings of amazement and perplexity. '*Kakuahugaau hako!*' – 'We're all baffled!' – was an exclamation I heard repeatedly. In everyday modes of interaction – from gossip and jokes to serious confidences – diversely positioned speakers associate a wealth of heterogeneous elements that, by force of repetition, foster a sense of mystery about their island and thus about themselves. Ostensibly engaged in as attempts to make sense of claims and occurrences Makirans find confusing, these discourses have become an end in themselves – a practice undertaken not to dispel confusion, but to

dwell in it as an exciting disorientation, a heightened mood of openness to unknown possibilities.

The wonder of monadic Makira

Often transparently, Makiran wonder discourses resist the onto-political positioning of Makira and Makirans as among the weakest and least places and people in Solomon Islands. One source of wonder that these discourses clearly register and promote is wonder at the possibility that, contrary to these premises, Makira and Makirans are momentarily powerful. I would not contest this analysis, but neither would I end with it as adequate to the data. In this final section, therefore, I highlight evidence that the ontological premises challenged by these discourses are – less obviously but more comprehensively – those of matrilineal essentialism, and that the central wonder they register and promote is the wonder of a monadic Makira.

The ways in which Makiran wonder discourses treat Makira as a large-scale analogue to a matrilineal category are the primary signs that – for some Arosi, in some contexts – the locus of ontological completeness, and thus of the awesome power ascribed to that condition, has shifted from the latter to the former. This shift helps to account, moreover, for the cargoistic and millenarian aspects of Makiran wonder discourses. Once ontological completeness resides at the scale of the island, processes for freeing its prodigious generativity imply the end not just of a mortal person, but of the historical island and, with it, the world.¹⁰

As already noted, wonder discourses about the underground envisage that, when the army emerges, true Makiran language and *kastom* will be restored, the hidden riches of Makira will bring fabulous prosperity, sexual immorality will run rife, and Makira will become an autonomous superpower. Arosi who shared these discourses with me lamented, however, that in the meantime development is stunted on Makira, and even true Makirans are unable to realize the *mena* of the ‘good character’ within them. Explanations for this situation were concordant: the *mena* of Makira cannot rise freely, in the island or its people, because it has been compromised by a long history of reproductive and social ‘mixing’ with outsiders. ‘We want to get back to the true *kastom* of Makira, the good character’, Hagu said, ‘but we’ve thrown it away, and it is gone because of the mixture of the language . . . Lots of people came to the island, and with us the good character is lost’. Similarly, a much younger man from east Arosi complained that the *mena* of Makiran ‘culture’ (Solomon Islands Pijin: *kalsa*) is no longer ‘active’ to Makirans because, in his words, ‘we have a different *kalsa*. We don’t know *kastom*. We’re all over the place now . . . It’s a *kalsa* of another people. That’s why West Makira [Arosi] doesn’t develop’.

The problem, in other words, is relations; as with a matrilineal category, so with the island as a whole. Recall that, as Strathern notes, in ‘so-called lineal systems’ in Melanesia, ‘relations engaged in the lifetime are regarded as making the complete lineage person “incomplete” (1992b: 100 fn. 5). In effect, this claim is raised to the insular scale by Makiran wonder discourses that identify ‘mixing’ with non-Makirans as the reason Makiran *mena* appears weak: relations with outsiders engaged in throughout the history of Makira have made a complete Makira incomplete. And, just as the goal of many death rituals in so-called lineal systems is the post-mortem restoration of the lineage person to a ‘state of pre-procreation’ (Strathern 1992b: 100 fn. 5), the outcome anticipated in these discourses is the eschatological restoration of Makira to a state of pre-relational purity, a state of parthenogenetic plenitude that is the insular-scale

analogue to that of the pre-human progenitors in matrilineage origin myths. When the agents in the underground emerge, these discourses predict, they will purge the island of alien ways. They will see and know who is a true person of the island and will discipline or evict anyone from elsewhere who fails to respect the precedence of Makirans. This subordinating and shedding of relations with outsiders is expected to render Makiran *mena* resurgent, yet it is also anti-social. Makiran wonder discourses express an uneasy sense, therefore, that to be completed (*arosi*) is to have reached 'the end'. Just as it is impossible to imagine an Arosi person cut out of inter-lineage relations and remaining alive, these discourses cannot imagine Makira cut out of global relations and remaining viable in ordinary time. Their element of eschatological dread acknowledges that completion – insular as well as personal/lineal – can only ever be achieved 'too late' for normal sociality.¹¹

Given this parallelism between a matrilineal category and the island, it becomes clear why the figure of Mr Parrot is good to think about this double-edged autonomous completeness at the insular scale. In the Arosi language, *kira* is not only a category noun for the singing parrot; it can also serve as a verb that means 'to say your own name, as the parrot says *kira*', an act 'considered wrong' (Fox 1978: 247). Understood as an image of the true name of Makira and of Makirans as exceptionally insightful people, Mr Parrot signifies Makira as a self-positing monad, the island that transgressively, anti-socially, says its own name. It is as if the origin myth of the matrilineage whose ancestress was sung into being by a bird has been raised to the insular scale; Makira is the island that, by the superabundance of its lone wholeness, sings itself forth.¹² This splendid isolation, although intensively potent, is inevitably terminal. Like the tabu practice of endogamy at the matrilineal scale (Scott 2007: 155-61), it implies a reversal of all social and cosmogonic processes.

The meaning of the period of 'loose sexual morals' thus comes into focus as well. When approaching this subject, my consultants evinced embarrassment. They seemed apologetic at having to mention it among other eschatological prophecies associated with Rohu. David Sioha (b. 1953), a nephew of John 'Araubora, talked expansively about how the restoration of true Makiran *kastom* will bring peace and development. Then he added: 'But a bad thing is there as well – sexual license. I'm not talking so as to spoil us [Arosi], but I'm talking about the fulfilment of the things that are down there [at Rohu]'. Undoubtedly, this element in Makiran wonder discourses is informed by biblical images of promiscuity prior to judgment, such as the depiction of Rome as the whore of Babylon in Revelation 17. Yet its presence in these discourses owes more, I suggest, to the shift towards insular monism. Expectations that the final eruption of Makiran *mena* will trigger sexual impropriety intuit a fearful wonder: they apprehend that if Makiran matrilineages are pre-related in a greater Makiran monad, and if that monad is restored to primordial purity, then incestuous endogamy will be inevitable.

Passing details in other Makiran wonder discourses can likewise expose to analytical view the crux of the matter – the incommensurability between insular and matrilineal essentialisms that makes the prospect of a monadic Makira wondrous. A final example from my conversations with Hoa illustrates this point.

As part of his wonder practices, Hoa was interested in the powers ascribed to certain Makiran stones known as *nagi*, which he referred to as 'the missiles of Makira'. About these stones, he said:

Makira has many powers that exist all around it . . . [W]hen white people want to attack somewhere, they 'press button' and their missile goes off. We people of Makira have our own *kastom* 'power' and

we can also 'press' them and they will go off and attack wherever you choose, like another island. If we want lightning to hit Guadalcanal, we would just work it on our island, and lightning would go and strike them on Guadalcanal, or Malaita, or wherever. We would work whichever *adaro* (ancestor) we want to use in the village and it would then go off.¹³

This discourse both obscures and admits a contradiction in Arosi terms. On the one hand, Hoa talks about the *nagi* stones as though they were all tokens of one type of power – Makiran *mena* – which 'we people of Makira' can activate at will. On the other, he acknowledges that, if the people of a village wanted to make use of such a stone, they would have to decide on 'whichever *adaro*' they wanted to use, a phrase which recognizes that the stones all, in fact, pertain to particular matrilineage-cum-land entities and their dead but still agential ancestors (*adaro*). Most Arosi would agree that only a member of the matrilineage whose pre-Christian forebears had *ha'amaeaa* that stone – made it sacred as an extension of their *mena* – would be existentially qualified to manipulate it. This might furthermore place such stones beyond use, as safe and efficacious handling of them is thought to require the renewal of ritual relations with one's *adaro*, a move many are wary of as 'going back to being pagan' (Scott 2014a: 79).

But how can a *nagi* stone manifest a Makiran *mena* that is simultaneously intrinsic to all things Makiran and exclusive to only one Makiran matrilineage? Or, stated the other way around, how can a plurality of matrilineal powers be unrelated but also participate in one Makiran power? The tilt towards insular essentialism meets resistance from the premises of matrilineal essentialism. This, I suggest, is the paradox that makes the emergence of a monadic Makira a wonder. Experienced as a stand-alone whole, Makira intimates two astonishing possibilities: either the island is an unfathomable mystery as an absolute monad that is also many absolute monads at the same time, or the matrilineages have existed in continuity of being all along as transformations of the same island ontology. The latter is fraught with the spectre of incest and risks attenuating matrilineal claims to particular places and powers, but both seem to offer the promise that all Makirans could, especially if they shed foreign ways and relations, become immediate conduits of a generic Makiran *mena*.

Conclusion: disillusionment, Arosi style

This article has been a bid to stimulate anthropological attention to wonder as part of the wider anthropology of ontology. As a provocation to debate, I have laid out a general thesis that wonder is an index and a mode of challenge to existing ontological premises. To this, I have added the corollary that different ontological premises give rise to different wonders. And I have tried to illustrate the merits of these claims via an analysis of wonder discourses among the Arosi of Solomon Islands. These discourses, I have argued, both respond to and promote an upwards scalar shift from matrilineal to insular essentialism in a context of non-Cartesian pluralism that I call poly-ontology. In closing, I append a note on disillusionment that further underscores this analysis.

In 2006, Wilfred Muriani (b. 1960), an Anglican from the village of Tawatana, told me how he had stopped believing (*hinihini*) in the Makiran underground. Around the peak of the Tension, he had taken the idea seriously. He had heard a local politician say that 'the underground world was true' and that 'the army at Rohu' was a 'superpower'. He had seen small flying objects zig-zagging over the island, and a teenage girl he knew had reported seeing a young white man up in her garden who spoke to her in

Arosi. So Muriani wrote a note asking to meet with anyone from the underground. He wrapped it in polythene and nailed it to a tree in the bush above the gardening area. For three months he checked his note, but when no answer came, he decided the girl had been lying. Doubting the underground, he considered whether the flying machines might be from ‘other planets’, but then he stopped seeing them. Finally, he settled on an explanation: there was no underground, only ‘the things of *kastom*’, by which he meant pre-Christian methods and items for working sorcery against an enemy, especially the *nagi* stones. Muriani concluded that talk about the underground was itself a *biibii*, a parcelled-up way of referring to these traditional weapons in order to frighten Malaitans. And he noted that, in order to reactivate the power of such weapons, it would be necessary to find ‘the head people of those stones’ and ‘try to sacrifice to *adaro* again’. He reverted, in other words, to the presumption that *mena* is specific to each matrilineage in its land. Muriani’s disillusionment was not disenchantment in the modern sense; he did not give up trusting in land-based powers. He simply came back down to earth, Arosi style – back down to many rather than one ground of being and power (Scott 2014a).

Muriani’s case shows that failed wonder is as relevant to the anthropology of wonder as wonder itself. When wonder fails – when the challenge to existing ontological premises succumbs to challenge – this can reveal precisely what ontological premises have been at stake. Disillusionment may even be a more forthright informant than wonder, especially where wonder reacts to destabilization of what has been taken to be the moral and the true. Anthropologists need to avoid explaining our own wonder away, but we should not ignore what explains wonder away for others, as this too can disclose the ontological possibilities their lost wonder has opened up for debate.

NOTES

I dedicate this article to my early teacher, William E. Mitchell (emeritus, University of Vermont), in appreciation for Bill’s formative classes, generous mentoring, and ongoing friendship. I also thank the people of Arosi, on whom all my work depends. This article in particular has benefited from critical reception at the departmental seminars of the universities of Bergen, Goldsmiths, Oxford, Kent, and Edinburgh. It is also stronger for input from Joshua Bell, Judith Bovensiepen, Joanna Cook, Magnus Course, David Dinwoodie, Annelin Eriksen, Debra McDougall, Suzanne Oakdale, Krista Ovist, Knut Rio, Alice Street, Katherine Swancutt, and *JRAI*’s anonymous reviewers. Periods of fieldwork were funded by the Wenner-Gren, the London School of Economics, and the Economic and Social Research Council (Grant No: RES-000-23-1170).

¹ By ‘the anthropology of ontology’, I mean the now widely recognized but non-unified dialogue among anthropologists interested in questions of being (see Scott 2013; 2014b; cf. Kohn 2015).

² Meyer (2016) misreads my analytical review of these two ontologies (Scott 2013; cf. 2014b) as endorsing both a view that they are the only possible ontologies and the idea that Cartesian dualism should be jettisoned in favour of relational non-dualism. That aside, her theorization of routinized ‘sensational forms’ as authorized methods for producing awe within religious traditions is compatible with the thesis argued here. My approach would further ask of these wonder practices: what ontological premises do they challenge, and do they also perpetuate those premises as their necessary preconditions?

³ Arosi poly-ontology has much in common with totemism as re-theorized by Descola (2013).

⁴ People in the north and east of Arosi are predominantly Anglican, while people in the south and west belong primarily to the non-denominational South Sea Evangelical Church. A few villages in both these areas are Seventh-day Adventist.

⁵ For fuller analyses of these ethnogenetic processes, see Scott (2012; cf. Allen 2013: 173-7; McDougall 2016: 188-218).

⁶ Like Mr Parrot, the underground and the *kakamora* specialize in seeing without being seen. Compare Lattas’s (2010) analyses of how discourses in New Britain (Papua New Guinea) elide the sense-extending and revelatory capacities of modern technology with powers ascribed to folkloric beings.

⁷ For analyses of Maasina Rule on Makira, see Scott (2007: 105-29; 2012); for a political history of the movement on Malaita, see Akin (2013).

⁸ One close relative of Mamaloni said that, although she explained to people that the body looked different because it was embalmed, this did not convince them he was dead.

⁹ Delayed development has become what Trompf (2004: 307-8) terms a 'negative marvel', a sign that an eschatological 'Grand Realization' is yet to come.

¹⁰ In Burridge's terms, a change in assumptions about the 'sources or principles of power which are regarded as particularly creative or destructive' (1969: 5) has entailed a change in the processes whereby people seek to achieve 'complete release from obligation' (1969: 13).

¹¹ Compare Timmer's (2015) analysis of the All People's Prayer Assembly (APPA) among the To'abaita of north Malaita. Timmer argues that, like Arosi, To'abaita have relocated power from territorially specific descent groups to an encompassing unity, but this unity is global. Identifying To'abaita as a dispersed remnant of Israel, the APPA aims to reverse the effects of the fall of the Tower of Babel by recovering the intrinsic relatedness of all people and fulfilling the biblical vision of eschatological completeness: the in-drawing of all nations to Jerusalem.

¹² Some Melanesians – especially in Papua New Guinea – relate their ritual performances to the displays of birds. Anthropologists informed by Strathern's relationist model of Melanesian personhood have analysed these performances as means by which people reveal to others the relations of which they are composed (e.g. Hirsch 2013; Strathern 1997). By contrast, the figure of Mr Parrot suggests an image of Makirans as people who conceal themselves from others while striving to reveal themselves to themselves as essential Makiran-ness.

¹³ The Arosi Angkan priest Aram Oroï (2016) has recently analysed the 'press button' idiom in relation to the concept of *mena*. Compare also Ryniker (2012) on the 'silent missiles' of Guadalcanal.

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Être de Makira, c'est voir comme M. Perroquet : anthropologie de l'émerveillement aux îles Salomon

Résumé

Le présent article expose une thèse générale pour l'élaboration d'une approche ethnographique comparative de l'ethnologie de l'émerveillement. Il suggère que l'émerveillement est à la fois un indicateur des présupposés ontologiques existants et un moyen de les remettre en question. A partir d'un dialogue analytique avec le thème de l'émerveillement dans la philosophie occidentale ainsi que l'anthropologie de l'ontologie, il élargit cette thèse pour y inclure la corollaire que des prémisses ontologiques différentes donnent naissance à des émerveillements différents. Du point de vue ethnographique, cet article étaye ces affirmations par l'analyse des discours de l'émerveillement chez les Arosi des îles Salomon. Il avance que ces discours répondent aux transformations ontologiques tout en les favorisant, dans un contexte où les prémisses en jeu ne sont ni celles du dualisme cartésien habituellement associé à la modernité, ni celles du non-dualisme habituellement assigné à « l'autre » ethnographique de l'anthropologie, mais celles d'un pluralisme non cartésien que l'on peut appeler poly-ontologie.

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