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“Heaven on Earth” or Satan’s “Base” in the Pacific?

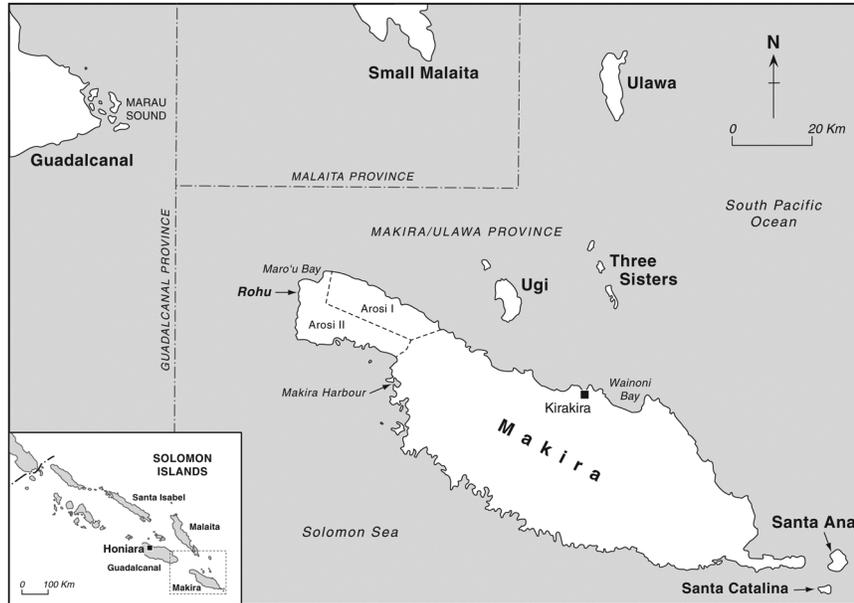
Internal Christian Politics in the Dialogic Construction of the Makiran Underground Army

MICHAEL W. SCOTT

In 2006, I spent eight months in Solomon Islands, primarily in the Arosi region at the northwest end of the island of Makira, investigating talk that Makira is the site of a secret subterranean army. As I followed receding leads from one interlocutor to another, I discovered the truth of one Arosi speaker’s insight that “these stories have no *ahui*”—no “growing core” or “base” to which they can be traced. Although virtually all Arosi (and many other Solomon Islanders) are familiar with stories about what they call *bahai nai ano* (under the ground), or *gao nai ano* (below the ground), this tradition has no original or master narrative. Nor is confidence—or even interest—in the reality of the underground uniform or consistent.

I interviewed half a dozen people who say—or of whom it is said—that they have been to the underground or encountered its agents. But even these people drew on preexisting discourses about the underground to “frame” (Goffman 1974) their otherwise baffling experiences. I met and heard of others who, although they claim no such experiences, pursue the stories of those who do and collect what they term “evidence” that the army exists. But their inquiries (and mine) are proliferating rather than accounting for ideas about the underground, becoming in turn the sources for other more tentative, puzzled, skeptical, and casual discourses.

Within this proliferation, it is difficult to assess whether or to what extent each contributor takes the underground seriously. I met only a few who seemed certain the army is real. Many more were intermittently hopeful. Strong critics of the idea can be heard too. For most Arosi, however, talk about the underground has become a popular genre that can be a stimulus to earnest or diverting speculations, a mildly exciting entertainment, or fodder for ironic quips.



Map 2.1. Island of Makira, Solomon Islands.

The underground is thus not an orthodoxy, not a consensus, and not a collective irrationality. Yet it is a definite phenomenon. It is generated by what language theorist Mikhail Bakhtin would describe as the “polyphonic” utterances of multiple speakers engaged in collaborative framings of heterogeneous discursive, incidental, and historical elements. It is an acentric, unfinished “concordance” (Bakhtin 1984: 289) of utterances in which “each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related” (Bakhtin 1986: 91). Bruce Mannheim and Dennis Tedlock have invoked Bakhtin to model cultures in general as “dialogically constructed worlds” that are “in a continuous state of creation and recreation, negotiation and renegotiation” (1995: 3, 8). As a particular cultural phenomenon well apprehended by this model, the Makiran underground may aptly be described as a dialogically constructed *underworld*. Taking this model of the underground as a premise and likewise drawing on Bakhtin, I explore in this chapter how talk about the underground is, furthermore, the non-obvious site of socially nonconfrontational but personally dramatic experiences of Christian politics.

Arosi has long been a context of Christian plurality, and it is possible—among the rumors, stories, claims, and theories that make up the Makiran underground—to discern discourses that carry denominational inflections of Christian ideology. Such discourses can entail, for example, denominationally informed invocations of Christian teachings, terms, tropes, narratives, proph-

ecies, and the labels of Christian plurality themselves. Accounts of the underground and denominationally colored articulations of Christian themes thus circulate together, often by means of unreconstructable social interactions. In this way, they have come to form a discursive world that, like Christianity itself, is constituted as a constellation of widely though differently understood points of reference (cf. Bakhtin/Medvedev 1985: 133–35; Garriott and O'Neill 2008). Necessarily, therefore, those who speak about the underground both presuppose at least some aspects of this denominationally plural discursive world and respond to those aspects—sometimes deliberately, but also unreflexively across time and space (cf. Bakhtin 1986: 91–92, 124).

Owing to these dialogical processes, many discourses about the underground exemplify what Bakhtin (1984: 195–97) termed “internal” or “hidden polemic,” but in this context the internal or hidden polemic is also *denominational* polemic. “Internally polemical discourse,” according to Bakhtin, is “the word with a sideward glance at someone else’s hostile word”:

In the hidden polemic ... discourse is directed toward an ordinary referential object, naming it, portraying, expressing, and only indirectly striking a blow at the other’s discourse, clashing with it, as it were, within the object itself. As a result, the other person’s discourse begins to influence authorial discourse from within. For this reason, hidden polemical discourse is double-voiced, although the interrelationship of the two voices here is a special one. The other’s thought does not personally make its way inside the discourse, but is only reflected in it, determining its tone and its meaning (Bakhtin 1984: 196).

Occasionally, Arosi discourses about the underground are marked by overt denominational polemic. More often, however, signs of denominational difference and debate are, as Bakhtin says of internal polemic, “within the object itself.” They are intrinsic to a particular speaker’s representations about the underground wherever these are conditioned by implied dissenting interlocutors. Shaped by various speakers’ internalizations of multiple denominationally inflected voices, talk about the underground condenses complex fields of denominational politics (cf. Bakhtin 1981: 283–84).

Excavating some of the details of this politics, I focus in this chapter on the ethnographic material that most alerted me to the role of denominational orientation in shaping references to the underground. This material consists in interviews I conducted with a middle-aged Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) couple I will call Agnes Sauniasi and Levi Orimanu, whose village lies in the area known as Rohu in northwest Arosi. By identifying consonances and dissonances between this couple’s accounts of the underground and those of other Arosi, I show how such accounts constitute denominationally conditioned reflexive ethno-theologies. That is, they are theological projects through which

people evaluate their ancestral traditions, lands, and themselves in relation to biblical depictions of “the nations” (e.g., Genesis 10; Isaiah 60) and the politics of sacred history (Scott 2005; 2007: 301–6). Two opposed reflexive ethno-theologies emerge from the ethnography. Most Arosi representations cast the underground positively as the locus of a supernormal army that will restore true Makiran *kastom* as a way of establishing what one man termed “heaven on earth,” lead the island to regional dominance, and even—according to some—fulfill the destiny of Makira to inaugurate the end times and fight for God at Armageddon. In contrast, Sauniasi and Orimanu’s Adventist-inflected discourses cast the army and Makira negatively as Satan’s “base” in the Pacific, destined to be the place from which the Antichrist emerges. Christian politics, it transpires, need not be located in sermons, institutional church pronouncements, public debates, campaign platforms, or national agendas. Seemingly localized idiosyncratic discourses can carry theologically rigorous internal denominational politics with far-reaching visions for national, international, and cosmic politics.

Sauniasi says that she has met people from the army who want to take her underground. Turning, therefore, to analysis of what her contacts have allegedly told her, I show how her discourses bring the emergent category “Makiran”—increasingly experienced by many Arosi as both an ethnicized identity and an autochthonous insular ontology—into conjunction with the categories of Adventist cosmology and ontology. I argue that her accounts integrate the Arosi category “Makiran” with the Adventist category “Roman Catholic”—the latter understood as Satanic apostasy—in ways that demonize both Makira and Makirans. Whereas the discourses of those who value the underground positively construct Makira as a holy land and Makiran-ness as a condition of special affinity with divinity, Sauniasi expresses a systematic moral inversion of this perspective. Her discourses innovate a negative reflexive ethno-theology of place with an attendant construction of Makiran-ness as tantamount to categorical demonic possession. What is ultimately at stake in this denominational politics, I conclude, is not so much Christian articulation of underlying social relations and divisions, competition for influence, disputes over resources, or even rival proselytizing, but the nature of the salvation required for the Makiran person, spatially set apart as instantiating either an exceptionally good or extraordinarily evil category of being.

The underground army as icon of Makira

This agenda requires exposition of the Arosi context, however. In this section, I support the proposition that discourses about the underground army are sites of internal Christian politics because the army is an icon of Makira.

Owing to historical and political processes that include the acceptance of Christianity, Arosi increasingly experience themselves as "Makiran," not only as an ethnicized category emergent among others in Solomon Islands, but also as an insular *ontological* category that coexists in potentially transformative tension with their territory-specific matrilineal categories of being. When attending to either of these scales (the insular or the matrilineal), Arosi experience the relevant categories (islands/regions in the Solomons or Arosi matrilineages in their territories) as more than social or classificatory; for Arosi, they are originary and cosmological—the fundamental kinds of existents that make up the world (Scott 2007). Indicative of an increasing shift toward the insular scale, the army is taking figurative shape as an icon of the new Makiran category, personifying it as the moral agency of a primordial power integral to the island and its truly autochthonous constituents (Scott 2011).

Since European missionaries arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, Arosi have participated in intra- and interdenominational debates about the nature and value of their pre-Christian past. These debates have focused on the nature and value of ancestral powers (*adaro*), recognized as the moral agencies of each autochthonous matrilineage in its land. Although the Makiran underground army is not conceptualized as made up of ancestral *adaro*, it is nonetheless an island-wide analogue to the ancestors as a place- and category-specific tutelary power. For this reason, older debates about the ancestors and the indigenous things of the past now shape discourses about the underground into sites of internal Christian politics.

Arosi experience and talk about their relationship to place in terms of narratives and tropes of matrilineally conferred autochthony. Their sense of themselves as inherently place-based amounts to an autochthonous ontology, one in which the relationship between a person and his or her place is participatory, or nondual. A "true" (*ha'amori*) Makiran person—that is, a member of one of the putatively autochthonous Makiran matrilineages—is a person in whom ancestral land is thoroughly ingredient and for whom such land is infused with matrilineal being and agency.

This experience of autochthonous ontology has usually involved denial of the possibility that all Makirans are homogeneously autochthonous to the island as a whole.¹ Mythic images of primordality, for example, exhibit, not the "complete absence of insularity" Carlos Mondragón (2009) identifies among Loh Islanders (Vanuatu), but the foundational displacement of an original wholeness that might otherwise unite all matrilineages in a single insular category. And in their everyday dealings with one another, Arosi tend to talk and live as though their matrilineages were heterogeneously autochthonous, each ontologically one with its own discrete territory. People's characterizations of their own and other matrilineages point additionally to a general assumption that each matrilineage exhibits distinctive physical and temperamental traits

(cf. Fox 1924: 13, 35) and that each has developed territory-specific traditions (*kastom*) as manifestations of a unique autochthonous ontology.

That said, a number of Arosi appear to be exploring the possibility that the island may be the source of a single common autochthony. Arosi appropriations of Christianity, especially, can easily move in this direction. Typical of past-affirming reflexive ethno-theologies are interpretations of the ancestors and the forms of *kastom* they established in their territories as vehicles of a divine revelation equal to the biblical revelation of God's law. These ethno-theologies assert that God placed his law in the land and appointed the matrilineages to be the custodians of it in their territories. Such formulations allow that God may have given each matrilineage certain unique privileges and taboos, but they also imply that, because all forms of ancestral *kastom* are consistent with the Bible, all must be to some extent alike. The island becomes the medium of a unified autochthonous pan-Makiran *kastom*. Likewise, past-renouncing reflexive ethno-theologies implicate the island in the communication of a single autochthonous *kastom*, but the Christian category with which they correlate this *kastom* is the demonic, not the divine.

Other factors too have encouraged Arosi to understand and experience themselves and their ancestral ways as "Makiran." Geographically, linguistically, and culturally diverse populations in Solomon Islands have long been developing a sense of themselves and one another as distinctive regional, social, and political entities, and have come—like the Arosi matrilineages—to essentialize one another as physical and psychological types (Allen 2009; Dureau 1998; Scales 2007; White 2001). Precolonial regional economies of gift, kin, and conflict exchange; colonial administrative divisions; mission and ecclesiastical rationalizations; and regimes of postindependence provincial organization have all tended to reify particular islands and island groups. At the same time, Euroamerican attempts to classify different islanders in terms of somatic and moral categories have articulated with indigenous idioms of alterity—such as the widely attested bush/coast dichotomy—to produce current island- and region-specific stereotypes (Bennett 1987: 187). Labor and mission discourses especially have fostered a gendered typology according to which the inhabitants of the island of Malaita are big, strong, warlike, and competitive, while other island-specific populations are small, weak, timid, and indolent (cf. Scott 2012).

Between 1998 and 2003 a period of civil conflict both manifested and intensified these processes of identity formation. Commentators debate the causes of this conflict, which Solomon Islanders as well as Euroamericans have labeled the "ethnic tension" (Kabutaulaka 2001; White 2001). The conflict has been so called in order to describe the two parties widely perceived as the principal antagonists: those who see themselves as customary Guadalcanal landowners and those they see as usurpers, especially economic mi-

grants from Malaita. Responding to grievances on both sides, two militant groups—the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) and the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF)—gradually formed up and, in the names of two entire islands, carried out a small-scale civil war, chiefly around Honiara, the national capital on Guadalcanal (Fraenkel 2004; Moore 2004). Despite violence on both sides, discourses about these hostilities have further entrenched the dominating-Malaitans versus meek-others dichotomy (cf. Kabutaulaka 2001). This period of overt civil conflict was brought to an end by an Australian-led regional military intervention.

Precisely in this context, Arosi began to speculate that there may be a secret subterranean army inside Makira. It would be simplistic to reduce Arosi discourses about the underground to either a collective wish or a strategic ruse that Makira harbors an army greater than the IFM and the MEF. Yet it seems clear that Arosi talk about the underground was and continues to be stimulated by “the tension,” which aggravated fears about Malaitans usurping land in Makira/Ulawa Province. A history of interaction and intermarriage with southern Malaitans notwithstanding, the Arosi with whom I work tend to reinforce the stereotype of Malaitans as belligerent, typically representing them as having instigated the problems on Guadalcanal. During “the tension” many Arosi were alarmed, I was told, by rumors that MEF militants wanted to bring the fight to Makira and by reports that Malaitans who had settled by marriage in Makira/Ulawa Province were MEF members dispossessing their in-laws with the aid of an influx of armed Malaitan relatives. In these circumstances, Arosi—and other Makirans—were drawn to the possibility that a mysterious army might be superintending their province. Some took comfort in this idea, some sought to frighten Malaitans with it, and some did both.

But discourses about the underground army draw on models older than the IFM and the MEF. They are updated versions of accounts according to which American servicemen deployed in the Solomons during and after the Second World War built a “town” full of modern infrastructure and manufactured goods inside Makira. These accounts have been familiar throughout Arosi since the time of the Maasina Rule movement, an indigenous alliance active in the central and southeast Solomons between the mid 1940s and early 1950s (Keesing 1978; Laracy 1983; Scott 2007). With aspirations similar to those of other postwar anticolonial projects, Maasina Rule included civil rights protest, tax and local ordinance resistance, labor advocacy, and calls for increased development and self-governance. Owing at least in part to the scale of US military operations on Guadalcanal and the reputation Americans acquired for camaraderie with Islanders and generosity with supplies, some Maasina Rule participants developed expectations that America would back them in their struggles against British rule by providing material and even military aid. In Arosi, and apparently elsewhere in the Solomons as well (e.g.,

White 1978: 250–51), these expectations included claims that Americans were already present and waiting with the necessary provisions in a secret subterranean base or “town.” The hope was that these allies would soon bring a vast storehouse of goods and machinery to the surface, initiate intensive development, and transform Makira into a wealthy and—as several Arosi put it to me in English—“civilized” place.

Renewed in the crisis of “the tension,” this Maasina Rule figure of an underground town has been elaborated into a high-tech urban-military complex inhabited by a multinational force. Despite its heterogeneous makeup, however, this force, along with the whole underground complex it serves, appears to stand for quintessential Makiran autochthony. Virtually all Arosi discourses agree that the underground army owes its strength and advanced, even paranormal, technology to creatures known as *kakamora*, dwarf-like beings said to be uniquely autochthonous to Makira. Analogous diminutive but potent autochthons are well attested in indigenous traditions throughout Oceania (Forth 2008), and the *kakamora* are undoubtedly elements of a precolonial Arosi folklore (Fox 1924). As elaborated below, these mythic aboriginals have always had the potential to reference the power of Makiran autochthony in its primordial insular integrity (cf. Scott 2008). Accordingly, the dependence of the army on their powers reveals that the underground itself is an ultra-modern transformation of this original condition and its efficacy. Moreover, by one logic or another, all Arosi discourses about the underground cast the Americans and other international army personnel as encompassed by and assimilated into the special ontology and power ascribed to Makira and the *kakamora*.

It makes sense, therefore, that the underground should be a medium of internal Christian politics. As a power identified with pan-Makiran autochthony, the army poses the same question as the *adaro* and the indigenous ways of the past: is God or Satan the agent behind these agents and their ways? The Christian politics evident in discourses about the underground constitute, in fact, a contemporary development of older denominationally configured debates, present since the arrival of missionaries, about the nature and value of the pre-Christian Makiran past.

Christian plurality on Makira

The history of mission activities on Makira has united Arosi in Christian identity and divided them among three main forms of Christian practice: Anglicanism, South Sea Evangelical Christianity, and Seventh-day Adventism. Until 1999, Arosi was partitioned into two council areas: Arosi 1 in the northeast and Arosi 2 in the southwest. This geopolitical divide mapped an older mission-

ary partition into spheres of influence. Arosi began accepting the Anglicanism of the Melanesian Mission in the 1850s, allowing European missionaries to establish village bases and schools, mainly on the north coast (Hilliard 1978: 82–85; Sayes 1976). Then, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the self-styled “nondenominational” South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) arrived and, avoiding competition with the Anglicans, established schools in the south and west that became the foundation for the present-day South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC) (Hilliard 1966: 351–54, 383–85; 1969). Seventh-day Adventism—largely coterminous with a small minority of villages—has crosscut this socially porous division since indigenous missionaries from the Western Solomons and Guadalcanal introduced it in the mid 1930s (Hilliard 1966: 448; Steley 1983: 75–76).

To backtrack, however, a fourth element must also be noted. Before the Anglicans, the SSEM, or the SDA reached Makira, Roman Catholics had been there first. In the mid 1840s, the Marist Fathers established a mission on the south coast at Makira Harbour (Laracy 1976: 17–22; O’Brien 1995: 50–70; Verguet 1854). Their station was situated on the indeterminate eastern fringes of Arosi, and some of the Marists made contacts with Arosi villages further west and north. Their efforts lasted only twenty months, however, and failed to create any lasting Catholic communities. A more successful mission, begun in the late 1910s, secured a Catholic presence in areas east of Arosi, but by then Arosi had become the mission field of the Anglicans and the SSEM (O’Brien 1995: 195–210). Today, as a consequence, there are no Roman Catholic churches in Arosi, yet many Arosi are aware of this history and, as explained below, attach divergent meanings to Roman precedence in their vicinity.

Among adherents of the three enduring churches in Arosi, Adventists have been the most past-renouncing, critiquing ancestral *adaro* and everything related to them as Satan’s deceptions (cf. Hess 2009; Jebens 2005; McDougall 2004). Embracing the global Adventist doctrine that the dead remain unconscious until the Second Coming (cf. Steley 1989: 195–201; E. White 1990: 309–15), Arosi Adventists ascribe a demonic ontology to all powers appearing as ancestral *adaro*. “We don’t believe in *adaro*,” Doaniho’asi of the Adventist village of Robo (Arosi 1) explained to me in 1993. “It is just Satan who makes those *adaro*. Satan can deceive us. God threw down a third of the angels, and it is those angels who lie that they are *adaro*.”

In contrast, Anglican and SSEC Arosi have been more likely to debate the ontology and cosmological position of *adaro*. It is true that, especially in the past, some of these Christians have renounced *adaro* as *devols* and stigmatized the pre-mission period as the “time of darkness” (Scott 2007: 172–89, 302), and historically, the SSEM was more past-renouncing than the Anglican Melanesian Mission. But today, relative to their SDA counterparts, Anglican and SSEC Arosi are more past-affirming, interpreting *adaro* as servants of God and

idealizing objectified ancestral values and practices as tantamount to an indigenous Christianity antecedent to mission Christianity (Scott 2007: 268–70, 301–6).

Discourses about the underground broadly reproduce this Anglican/SSEC versus SDA split. Yet it would be wrong to equate any discourse about the army with any Christian denomination. Even though accounts of the underground often carry significant Christian content, explicit stances toward the underground are not part of regular teaching in any Arosi church. In fact, many Arosi discourses about the underground resist clean denominational categorization, not only because they share content common to all Christianities, but also because ideas associated with the underground have always been shaped by interdenominational dialogue, especially the selective integration of SSEC and Adventist eschatologies. Furthermore, while no Anglicans or members of the SSEC with whom I worked ascribed negative value to the underground, I am aware of several Adventists who, unlike Sauniasi and Orimanu, view the underground positively.

Consonances: “They stay at the very place that is called Rohu”

The referential object known as the underground that I encountered in conversation with Sauniasi and Orimanu was descriptively consonant with the underground I encountered in conversation with other Makirans. In this section I indicate the extent of this rapport and highlight several themes that Arosi collaboratively frame as relevant to the possible existence of a Makiran underground. These include: unidentified air and sea craft; *kakamora*; prophecies that the end times will begin in Arosi; claims that a former Solomon Islands prime minister feigned his own death; and traditions about the area known as Rohu. Taken together, these themes develop a picture of the underground as a dialogically constructed reflexive ethno-theology of place.

Among the most avidly discussed phenomena that Arosi relate to the underground are alleged sightings of unfamiliar air and sea craft. Regardless of what they think about the idea of the underground, almost any Arosi person will tell you that, roughly between 1999 and 2003 and sporadically since, they—or someone they know—saw one form or another of remarkable air or seaborne vessel around Makira. With respect to air traffic, the people I interviewed—including Sauniasi and Orimanu—described a variety of vehicles, such as small and apparently unmanned drones with flashing lights, low-flying planes with visible pilots, and at least one spectacular group formation. Of the drones and low-flying planes, it was said that during some intervals, especially at the height of “the tension,” they passed over the island nightly and produced only a muffled noise like a rewinding cassette tape. With respect to ocean-

going traffic, there were supposedly many sightings of a "warship" patrolling the coast and bearing the English name "Motherland" (generally understood to refer to Makira), sightings of vessels that appeared and disappeared out of nowhere, and accounts of marine animals suspected of being submarines operated by unknown white men. "Those people can use sharks, turtles, big fish—those are their ships," said Sauniasi.

Skeptics and those inclined to accept the reality of the underground alike know that the agents behind these phenomena are supposed to be a coalition of Euroamericans and others who have enlisted the *kakamora* in building their extraordinary underground world. Multiple associations support an analysis of the *kakamora* as conceptually available figures of the primordial wholeness and essential power of Makira. As beings thought of as having been formed with the island, *kakamora* (also called *pwapwaronga* and *pwapwaangora*) are said to preserve the original language and *kastom* of Makira, which has become altered and depleted above ground. According to folktales and alleged sightings, *kakamora* are about three feet tall and have long hair that descends from their heads to cover their bodies. They live reclusively in caves and sink-holes but are wondrously strong and endowed with preternatural insight into events on Makira. They are also thought of as able to shape-shift and become invisible. Accordingly, some discourses assert that the underground army has developed cloaking devices, stealth airplanes, and telepathic intelligence techniques through collaboration with the *kakamora*. As Orimanu put it: "They—the people of the underground—use the power of the *pwapwaangora*. The *kakamora* can disappear, can't be shot. The people of the underground live with the *pwapwaangora*."

The underground is not about Makira alone, however; according to diverse discourses, it is the means by which Makira—and Arosi in particular—is destined to become the spatial and temporal turning point between the present and the post-apocalyptic world to come. Most Arosi readily define *arosi* as "completed" or "finished" and the related verb, *ha'arosi*, as "to complete," "to finish," "to make an ending." But from several SSEC consultants, I further heard that the place name Arosi conceals a prophecy that Arosi is "the end," the Omega of "the Alpha and the Omega" of Revelation 22:13; it is a special "boundary" (*tarihana*) between the end of this world and a new beginning. Inseparable from discourses about Makira as the "last island" (Scott 2007: 306; cf. Foster 2002: 132–33), this interpretation is part of a larger set of discourses according to which the development of Arosi, the last place, will signal the completion of human history. These discourses portray the army as safeguarding raw materials and wealth inside the island that will one day be released, triggering economic transformation. In west Arosi especially, people are well acquainted with allegorical decodings of certain *kastom* stories, place names, and landmarks as clues to the presence of resources—such as gold and other

minerals—or as predictive of coming infrastructure—such as airports and roads. As the event that will unleash this denouement of development, the epiphany of the army will be the onset of the end times.

Sauniasi and Orimanu too are cocreators of this reflexive ethno-theology of Makira as the last island.

Orimanu: Those people below will come up. ... This is the last island; it wasn't to develop, and the world will end. ...

MWS: This island is the last one?

Orimanu: This is really the last one, the last development. ...

Sauniasi: Makira isn't yet. All the other islands already have done the things we try for. The things they wanted to do they have done. This island hasn't. There's only an airport up there [at Kirakira, capital of Makira/Ulawa Province]. ...

Orimanu: It's absolutely in line with the "program" down [underground] there. ... We know it will happen because development is afterwards. They want to develop the island, and the world will end. All the preparations that they've made for the island they haven't used yet. When they start to use them it will be toward the end of the world.

Another theme widely framed as relating to the underground is the allegedly falsified death of Solomon Sunaone Mamaloni. Born in 1943 and raised in and around Rumahui village (Arosi 2), Mamaloni achieved renown in Solomon Islands as the first chief minister prior to independence, prime minister of three governments, and leader of the opposition while member of parliament for West Makira (Moore 2004: 38–63). Since his death in January 2000, an assortment of supposedly suspicious circumstances surrounding his final moments and funeral has coalesced into a conspiracy theory—subject to much doubt and inquiry—that Mamaloni fabricated his own demise. Discussions of this theory often intersect with allegations that the still-living Mamaloni has gone into hiding underground. As one of several people noted for claiming to have spoken with Mamaloni since his official death, Sauniasi emphatically told me: "Mamaloni is with them down there. We story that Mamaloni is still alive." To this, Orimanu added, "They deceived us when they were burying Mamaloni—but no!" Such discourses often include suggestions that, while in office, Mamaloni smuggled weapons and money to the underground in preparation for a time when he would join the army, lead it to the surface, and establish a reign of plenty.

The greatest consonance among Arosi discourses about the underground, however, lies in their reiteration that Rohu is the place where the army is most active. If Arosi in general is the "boundary" marking the spatial and temporal

end of this world, Rohu is the precise location of this boundary, which is simultaneously a threshold between the underground and surface worlds. Many of the stories about strange air and sea craft depict these vessels coming and going at Rohu via hidden openings on the limestone plateau, inside coastal caves, or under the sea. The majority of prophecies about hidden resources and wealth likewise pertain to landmarks in this vicinity. And there is furthermore a tradition according to which "Rohu" is a corrupted form of an original name, Rome. "The island [i.e., local] name is Rohu, but it is Rome," Orimanu asserted. "They stay at the very place that is called Rohu ... That's the place called Rohu, but it is Rome."

To begin to unpack what this Rohu–Rome equation means to Sauniasi and Orimanu is to begin to track the ways in which their discourses about the underground diverge from the rest.

Dissonances: "Satanic Cult Movement Invisible Soundless"

Attention to the dissonances between Sauniasi and Orimanu's representations of the underground and those of other Arosi reveals how the underground is a new register in which preexisting debates between denominationally informed past-affirming and past-renouncing reflexive ethno-theologies evolve as internal Christian politics. In this new register, however, what is debated is not the nature and value of the Arosi matrilineages, with their territory-specific powers and practices, but the nature and value of Makira as a whole, with its powers and practices cast as pan-Makiran *kastom*. In this section I show how different interpretations of the Rohu-Rome equation correlate with inverse evaluations of this pan-Makiran *kastom* and how these, in turn, correlate with inverse visions of the political and cosmological future of Makira.

Discourses that value the underground positively often articulate variations on the idea that the army and the *kakamora* preserve the original Makiran language and *kastom* that, if properly held to, ensure harmony and prosperity. Some Arosi have developed a mystical linguistics, ascribing magical efficacy to this archaic Makiran language as corresponding with the autochthonous ways of Makira or even as the Adamic language (cf. Eco 1997). Similarly, characterizations of primordial *kakamora kastom*, sometimes referred to as the *baronga goro* (the good disposition or character), cast it as simultaneously indigenous and one with God's law. I heard many intimations that, if the *baronga goro* of the *kakamora* were recovered, Makira could bring peace to Solomon Islands. One man even suggested it could restore prelapsarian immortality.

A corollary to this theme of ideal original language and *kastom* is the idea that both have become corrupted above ground by a long history of "mixing" with "waves of people" said to have migrated to Makira. The Rohu–Rome

equation seems, moreover, to function in such *kastom*-affirming discourses as a glyph for this history. Several older consultants recalled that a principal innovator of this equation and the migration theory it supports was John ‘Araubora, an SSEM village school teacher and influential Maasina Rule leader who died around 1964. Their recollections suggest that ‘Araubora’s theory was based on his interpretation of Arosi *kastom* stories and place names in relation to the Bible and mission history lessons on antiquity and the peopling of the Pacific. He is said to have taught that Hawa’a is a trace of where Hawaiians once lived in Arosi, and that Niuasia—interpreted as a deformation of New Asia—is where Asians had formerly settled. But Rohu, he apparently emphasized, is one of many indicators that Arosi was “ruled by the Roman Empire” during New Testament times.

This theory that Arosi was a Pacific outpost of Rome was probably also informed by assertions—referencing the Marist mission of the 1840s, or even the exploratory incursion of Catholic Spaniards in the 1560s (O’Brien 1995)—that Rome “was here before.” Two discursive practices in ‘Araubora’s milieu may have helped to elide the distinction between classical and ecclesiastical Rome. Non-Catholic mission leaders, often with polemical intent, referred to the Catholic Mission as the “Roman Mission” or simply as “Rome.” At the same time, Adventist interpretations of biblical prophecies, which characteristically assert continuity between imperial and papal Rome, were entering Arosi.² In 1945 one of the earliest SDA villages in Arosi, Hangataru, was established at Maro’u Bay near ‘Araubora’s SSEM village just as he was organizing a school there ([Barrow?] 1945). Significantly, the headman of this new village was Orimanu’s father, who became ‘Araubora’s close associate. Accounts of ‘Araubora’s teachings indicate that he appropriated and localized aspects of Adventist eschatology, and it is likely that his relationship with Orimanu’s father was a source of his knowledge of Adventist ideas. Today, however, despite its apparent mixed SSEC and Adventist parentage, ‘Araubora’s Rohu–Rome etymology serves in many *kastom*-affirming discourses as the master trope for all corrupting alien influences that the army will one day eliminate.

A currently developing theory expressed by some Arosi argues that, although a history of mixing has diluted true Makiran *kastom*, this *kastom* remains latent and accessible in Makirans of authentic autochthonous descent (Scott 2011). Some of the most elaborated discourses about the underground, which are often vehicles of this theory, furthermore assert that a main objective of the underground army is to lead Makira to greater autonomy as either a federal or independent state governed by the restored *kastom* of the *kakamora*. When Mamaloni leads the army above ground, these discourses predict, there will be a war to cleanse Makira of foreign ways and reinstate the obscured *baronga goro*. Then the Makiran state—the “Motherland”—will gain dominance and bring peace and prosperity to the whole Solomons region. But this final

"coming up" of the "last island" will signal the onset of apocalyptic crisis in which the army will be allied with God.

Sauniasi and Orimanu's discourses indicate that they too view the underground as a survival of the true things of Makira, but with the distinctively Adventist twist that the true things of Makira follow not the way of God, but the way of Satan and his instrument, the Roman Catholic Church. Whereas other Arosi anticipate the army's restoration of *kastom* as something akin to the inbreaking of God's kingdom on earth, Sauniasi and Orimanu dread this restoration as Satan's attempt to lead them astray. The error into which they fear the army will try to lead them, however, is not return to the ways of the pre-Christian past but observance of Sunday worship, an apostasy they appear to regard as indistinguishable from lapse into ancestral practices:

Orimanu: They will bring the final persecution. Therefore we have to tell out the good news quickly. ... The last fight will start here. ... If the SDA aren't plentiful they will be attacked and "Sunday law" will be enforced. ... That's what they're prepared for. They'll kill rich people and will take their money. They were behind the sinking of the Titanic so that they could take money from all the millionaires. They do all these attacks that keep going. There will be the last attack and then the persecution.

MWS: Why not pray on Sunday to avoid punishment?

Orimanu: Because if they kill us we will go to heaven, but if we change to Sunday we will not. That's why lots of people will join us at that time. ... The underground will discipline you. ... It's a church that will bring the end of the world.

In global Adventist teaching, "Sunday law" refers to legislation prohibiting activities on Sunday (Bull and Lockhart 2007: 195–98). Because such laws criminalize people who do not rest on Sunday (cf. Tomlinson 2009: 166–68), Seventh-day Adventists, for whom faithfulness demands rejection of Sunday in favor of Saturday Sabbath, regard any promulgation of Sunday law as inspired by Satan in his campaign to tempt people into sin.

As we spoke, Orimanu handed me a booklet—A. Jan Marcussen's *National Sunday Law*. In this tract, Marcussen (2004) sensationalizes Ellen G. White's foundational Adventist theology according to which Sunday Sabbath observance is the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16–17) that will distinguish the apostate from the faithful when Christ returns. Summarizing White's *The Great Controversy*, Marcussen asserts that Satan, acting through the Pope (the first beast of Revelation 13), perverted what is conventionally thought of as Christianity by changing God's law and moving the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Unwittingly, according to this reading of Christian history, all of

post-Reformation Christianity (excepting Seventh-day Adventism) has followed Rome into this error, making itself into “the image of the beast” (Revelation 13:13–15). From the Adventist point of view, this means that the whole of the rest of Christianity is nothing but one great apostate Roman Catholic Church (cf. Bull and Lockhart 2007: 42; Jebens 2005: 120). Increasingly, Marcussen warns, states will collude with “the great corrupt, Christian coalition of the world ... to decree that those who will not go along with the Sunday law should be put to death” (2004: 64–65), leading to the “time of trouble”—what Orimanu termed “the final persecution.” At the close of this ordeal, only those who have the “seal of God,” the observance of Saturday Sabbath, will inherit the new earth.

Why does it make sense to Sauniasi and Orimanu that an army inside Makira, empowered by the *kakamora* and maintaining the true Makiran language and *kastom*, will impose Sunday law, the practice of the Roman Church in thrall to Satan? It seems that, for them, the Rohu–Rome equation innovated in their parents’ generation is not only the residuum of mixing with merely human others, but is also evidence of a primordial and transformative Satanic infiltration of Makira—a superordinary fall of Makira beyond the fall in Eden. Probably informed, like ‘Araubora before them, by the fact of Catholic precedence, Sauniasi and Orimanu appear to suppose that Makira is an ancient stronghold of Roman Catholicism, a label they treat as synonymous with a worldwide system of outposts claimed by Satan in his bid for cosmic dominion (cf. Jebens 2005: 137–38). Long ago, they seem to reason, Satan got hold of Makiran autochthony and made it Catholic.³

“There’s a ‘primary workshop’ down there,” Orimanu said. “That’s where they developed the plane we saw. They are in Australia, America, and the Philippines.” Makira, he specified, is a key “city” or “base” within a “movement.” Referring again to the nearly noiseless aircraft sighted during “the tension,” he gave this global network an English name: “The movement can be called Satanic Cult Movement Invisible Soundless, an *adaro* power.” Just as non-Adventist Arosi tend to regard pre-mission Makira as created by God and always already infused with God’s way, so Sauniasi and Orimanu seem to regard pre-Adventist Makira as claimed by Satan and immemorially infected with Satan’s Roman way.

And this Makiran Rome has its own Pope: Solomon Mamaloni, who is now, according to Sauniasi and Orimanu, head of the underground as “Anti-christ” and “Black Pope”:

Sauniasi: Mamaloni replaced the Pope who died last year.⁴ The brother [*sic*] of the Pope, the new one, replaces the Pope who died last year. Mamaloni is the “second” to the new Pope now. He is the “second” of him and he lives down here. The “Black Pope” is ours in the Solomon Islands.

still there. They attacked the Pentagon and that was the “second last.” The last one is still to come.

MWS: That’s in the book?

Orimanu: They tell about it in that book, from when it began up to this day: Titanic, and the presidents who died, and all the things that happen at present. So, they aim to destroy America—that’s the “second last.”

MWS: And the last?

Orimanu: The last is still to come.

Only later did Orimanu identify “the last one.” “It was that which Mamaloni went to prepare,” he said. “The badness will begin in this island.”

“We’re Catholic”: Denomination as ontological category

Sauniasi and Orimanu never used the English word “denomination” or any Arosi rendering of this concept, nor is the church to which they most frequently referred, the Roman Catholic Church, a significant presence in Arosi today. What, then, does the Christian plurality conventionally termed denominational difference mean to them? Analysis of Sauniasi’s accounts of encounter with underground personnel shows, I suggest, that she conflates the denominational category “Roman Catholic” with the underground army and—via the army—with the category “Makiran.” This conflation, I furthermore suggest, reveals that, for her, “Roman Catholic” refers not only to an empirical church, but more fundamentally to an ontological category grounded in and one with “Makira.”

Sauniasi says that a young Malaitan man visible only to her has repeatedly approached her to recruit her to the underground. This figure has become, I suggest, like an anti-guardian angel. The man has told Sauniasi that he was taken by the underground as a child and lives inside Makira with scores of people taken from other islands in the Solomons. “We’re Catholic,” he has revealed. “We want you to join with us.” Because Sauniasi and Orimanu’s son works in Honiara, they make frequent trips to Guadalcanal, and it has often been there, Sauniasi reports, that this Malaitan has intercepted her. He has taken her several times up to Holy Cross Cathedral, the seat of Catholicism in Solomon Islands, where she says Mamaloni has attempted to lure her to the underground.

Those who have been “taken” by the underground, Sauniasi explained, are no longer able to appear to people of their home islands; they live instead

inside Makira from where they are sent to entice people of other islands to join the underground. Her accounts imply, in fact, that to be taken by the underground, to become Catholic, and to become Makiranized are identical:

Sauniasi: When that person [the Malaitan] was small he was canoeing on the sea, and these people underground took him. It was going toward the evening and his mother and father couldn't find him. He had stayed with them and grown up with them until then. Now, if he comes to them he won't show out. They won't see him ...

Other Islanders in the underground had similar stories:

Sauniasi: As we went [to Holy Cross] a woman came down. She was from Guadalcanal. ... They [the underground] had taken that woman when she was small and reached that height [indicating the height]. Until today she hasn't appeared to her relatives. That Malaitan won't appear to his relatives. They'll only appear to different people.

Sauniasi's Malaitan contact has also disclosed to her some of the underground's methods and aims:

Sauniasi (quoting the Malaitan): "Around Makira there are twenty women that we've gone to—you're the twentieth. Thirty men. All the islands: Malaita, forty men, thirty women; Guale [Guadalcanal] the same as well; Santa Ana the same as well; Isabel the same as well. We're working, we're doing our work. It is we who are coming up for the last fight. We're Catholic and we'll rule there. We are the ones who live underground at Makira where you live."

The social map of the underground that Sauniasi has received from her Malaitan informant shows that, even within Satan's worldwide network, the ethnicized insular categories coming into being in Solomon Islands remain relevant. In Sauniasi's experience of being pursued by a Mephistophelian Malaitan, the insular moral, political, and ontological distinction most relevant to Arosi today—the Makira-Malaita opposition—is reproduced. At the same time, however, these multiple insular ontological categories are ruptured and unified in the underground by the denominational category Roman Catholic, itself equivalent to the single autochthonous ontological category Makira.

Using imagery that implicitly compares the seizure of a child's shade by powers known as *adaro ni matawa* (deep-sea *adaro*) to Catholic baptism, Sauniasi represents being taken by the underground as an abduction-cum-conversion. It is a transformation that separates people, not only from their relatives, but also from their originary island categories and re-grounds them in Catholicism as Makiran-ness:

Sauniasi: He [her Malaitan contact] said to me: “My mother and father cried and cried for me and now I don’t appear to them. ... I won’t appear to them. No. I will appear to you Makirans, you people of Isabel, to you people of West [Western Province]. Your people [Makirans] who have disappeared appear to Malaitans, people of West, Rennellese; they won’t appear to you Makirans. That’s how we are.”

Such separations of people from their home islands seem often, according to Sauniasi, to occur on the water and/or to befall children. The Malaitan was taken as a boy out canoeing: “They capsized his canoe and he fell into a big opening and now he stays with them.” After mentioning that the Guadalcanal woman she says she met at Holy Cross was taken “when she was small,” Sauniasi speculated that the army does not take old people but preys instead on children who have “sunk at sea.” Still, despite being in her forties, she expressed anxiety about travelling unaccompanied by boat between Makira and Guadalcanal for fear of being lost at sea. “These people, the people below, steal people,” she said.

The manner and consequences of this people-stealing recall those associated with shade-theft by deep-sea *adaro*, one of several kinds of nonancestral elemental powers.⁶ Many Arosi of all Christian denominations assume that *adaro*—whether they are understood to be elemental, ancestral, or diabolic—occasionally capture the shades of humans, especially those of children who, out of ignorance, have offended them. Such shade-theft induces an illness known as *sigi nunu* (shade separation), a condition in which the body of the afflicted becomes increasingly cut off from human sociality (e.g., is unable to eat) while her or his shade becomes increasingly integrated into the realm of the *adaro* (e.g., is fed by *adaro*). One remedy is to send a dream-curer to retrieve the shade, which is said to be “blocked” (*ha’abwarasi*) by the *adaro* who hold it captive (cf. Fox 1924: 243–45). Deep-sea *adaro* are thought to stalk the shades of people at sea, typically young men out fishing for bonito (cf. Fox 1924: 124–29; Ivens 1927: 199–207). In 1993, I interviewed an Anglican dream-curer who described the condition of one *adaro ni matawa* victim he had rescued in a dream. The shade of the child had acquired a bonito-like grayish-white hue. It sat at the shoreline covered in foam that seemed to fetter it there. “The *adaro* of the sea made him crazy,” the curer said. “They blocked him; they didn’t allow him to come ashore; it’s his shade (*nunu*) that they blocked there.”

Sauniasi’s accounts of how people have been taken by the underground also evoke, I suggest, the sacrament of baptism, constructing a parallel between shade-theft by deep-sea *adaro* and an implicitly perverted form of the Christian conversion rite. Of the Malaitan who pursues her she said, “That person didn’t tell me his name. They said that they had changed his name.” This combination of themes—immersion in water, children, and name chang-

ing—seems to draw, perhaps unconsciously, on the model of baptism as a fundamental transformation, an often socially fractious death and rebirth into another category (Romans 6:3–11; cf. Jebens 2005: 142). It may also entail “within the object itself” (Bakhtin 1984: 196) an internal polemic against Catholic (and Anglican) infant baptism, a practice Adventists reject as perpetrated on uncomprehending children without their commitment.

But if being taken by the underground is a form of Catholic baptism that is analogous to shade-abduction by *adaro*/fallen angels, it is also a process of Makiranization. In one way or another, all Arosi discourses about the underground army represent it as comprising people from diverse parts of the world. Yet they identify the underground with the primordial nature and power of Makira and with a true pan-Makiran language and *kastom*. Given this apparent tension within the constitution of the underground, different speakers attempt to account for how people from elsewhere can become one with something essentially Makiran. Some theorize that underground agents originating from elsewhere, especially Euroamericans, are the returned descendants of Makiran women taken from the island in the colonial past (Scott 2008). Others tell how Euroamericans in the army have become like true Makirans through either instruction from a *kakamora* or acquisition of a *kakamora* stone, the removable external organ where the power of a *kakamora* resides. Although Sauniasi values the nature and power of Makiran autochthony negatively, her accounts similarly supply a mechanism whereby the underground blocks those within it from their originary categories and assimilates them to the Makiran insular category. In Sauniasi's version of the underground, it is an abduction redolent of both shade-theft and baptism that effects this separation and integration. By reason of this sea change, Sauniasi's Malaitan contact “knew the language of this island.”

The nexus that Sauniasi constructs between the denominational category “Roman Catholic” and the emergent insular category “Makiran” discloses that, for her, these are both fundamentally *ontological* categories. Her model of the underground constitutes a project of interpreting these categories in terms of one another, a project that leads to their mutual transformation. For her as a Seventh-day Adventist, the Roman Catholic Church tends to take on the character of a transhistoric category synonymous with all beings who, following Satan, have chosen apostasy (cf. Jebens 2005: 137–38).⁷ At the same time, however, for her as an Arosi person, there is no duality between one's moral disposition and one's autochthonous place. The two are aspects of a single ontological category, one that is still modeled as matrilineal and territory-specific but also increasingly as Makiran and insular. Thus, Sauniasi's conflation of the Adventist view of Roman Catholicism as an apostate ontology with her Arosi experience of Makiran-ness as an autochthonous ontology has two consequences. First, to the extent that she represents the underground as essentially

both Makiran and Roman Catholic, she territorializes the Adventist category of Roman Catholicism qua apostasy; she gives Catholicism a particular emplaced substance. But, second, by virtue of this same conflation she demonizes Makira and Makiran ontology.

Negative ethno-theologies of place

Anthropologists have moved beyond models of Christianity as a force that necessarily deterritorializes believers (e.g., McDonald 2001; Jorgensen 2005). Increasingly, we recognize that Christianity can lead, as Debra McDougall states, “to the articulation of novel types of social groups and new mythical connections to territory” (2009: 8). The contrasting discourses I have presented here well illustrate how different Christianities can impinge on people’s relationship to place. Just as there can be what Joel Robbins terms “negative nationalisms” (1998), there can be negative or place-demonizing ethno-theologies that articulate the presence rather than the absence of such a relationship.

Arguably, the foundational link between Seventh-day Adventism and ideologies of American destiny inscribe a negative nationalism and the demonization of a particular place (apostate America) at the heart of Adventism (E. White 1990: 242–51; cf. Bull and Lockhart 2007). In ways that parallel Adventist identifications of America as the second beast of Revelation 13, the couple profiled here identifies the Makiran underground army—and thus Makira—as a power in the service of the dragon (Satan) and the first beast (the Pope/Church of Rome). But for these Arosi Adventists, place-demonizing ethno-theology is further complicated by a locally autochthonous ontology that can be freed from Satanic power only when Christ returns to purify the earth of apostate elements and bequeath it to the faithful.

Sauniasi’s experiences highlight this Arosi Adventist dilemma dramatically, revealing continuity with the premises of Arosi autochthonous ontology even at the heart of a strongly past-renouncing reflexive ethno-theology.⁸ Agents from the underground have told her, she says, that her home lies on their “border,” the place where they come and go. Not only her Malaitan contact, but other beings and visions besiege her there, and she fears that she is going mad. “I’ve seen these things ... and my head is mental,” she said. Her torment is a manifestation of demonic possession, not of an individual but of an island—of Makira as the ground of her being (cf. Keller 2005: 158–59). And her experience of the place where she lives, Rohu, as an area where the army is intensively present expresses her sense that her essential Makiran being is intimate and inescapable. It is as though the very ground in which she is rooted is trying to open up and swallow her.⁹

Sauniasi’s identification of Rohu as a “border” semantically engages those discourses that characterize Arosi as the “boundary” (*tarihana*) between hu-

man history and the end times, but it may also, I suggest, voice the language and sense of a passage by Ellen G. White, much quoted in Adventist literature: "The people of God are nearing the borders of the eternal world" (2005: 148).¹⁰ For Sauniasi, however, as for other Arosi, Rohu is both the spatial and temporal limit of this world and a passage that connects the surface with the underground. The image of a border, accordingly, also conveys her experience of living at an anti-type of Bethel, the place where Jacob saw angels coming and going between heaven and earth (Genesis 28:10–17).¹¹

Curiously, although Sauniasi clearly suffers genuine distress from her experiences, both she and Orimanu derive a paradoxically grave glamor from what amounts to their autochthonous bondage to the underground. The couple is well known throughout Arosi for their accounts of the army, and they seem to take pride in the terrible privilege of belonging to an unholy place. Sauniasi almost boasted: "My husband is a really senior mature man. People run to him from Arosi 1, people from down here, out there—they ask him about his stories. It's like he lives with them [the underground] down there." And Orimanu himself said: "Lots of people ask me. Those things are with us, the true core of that thing is with us. It isn't at another place."

Despite the eschatological orientation of their Adventist faith, Sauniasi and Orimanu do not experience themselves as in Makira but not of it, and they are, as much as others, ethno-theologians of place in the dialogic production of the Makiran underground. They too are narrating Makira as a chosen land, but one chosen by Satan. Many apocalyptically oriented Christians, it is true, regard the whole of creation as given over to Satan, "the prince of this world" (John 12:31). Yet Sauniasi and Orimanu are saying that, within his anti-kingdom, Satan has further singled out Makira as his base in the Pacific. The island is consequently an anti-type of Israel, and Makirans are an anti-type of the elect, a doubly fallen people autochthonously vulnerable to Satan's deceptions. Such data confirm that place-demonizing ethno-theologies are not always indications of Christian territorial detachment or the means by which detachment from land advances; they may instead be new—sometimes disturbing—ways of experiencing place-based being and relationship.

***Kastom* mysticism versus denominational possession: Christian politics within the Makiran person**

I have argued that the dialogic construction of the underground carries on, as hidden polemic, longstanding Christian debates about the nature and value of the pre-Christian past. And I have pointed, more specifically, to how this hidden polemic constitutes denominational politics concerning the nature and destiny of Makira. It further remains to identify in these dialogic processes a Christian politics concerning the value and salvation of the Makiran per-

son. Just as the majority of Arosi discourses about the underground are past-affirming and exhibit positive constructions of Makira, they are also affirming of the autochthonous Makiran person. In fact, they elevate the Makiran person above others as not merely *on*, but *of* sacred ground and as intrinsically one with a holy power that God has placed in Makira. But the Adventist-inflected discourses of Sauniasi and Orimanu, which assess the pre-Christian past and Makira as the work and abode of Satan, necessarily assess the Makiran person as deluded and possessed by Satan.

Those Arosi who value the idea of the underground positively experience the autochthonous ontology of Makiran personhood as a privileged condition that they seek to embrace and activate in themselves. They look forward to a time when the army will purge Makira of alien influences and restore true *kastom* to its original force. In anticipation of this time, and in order to hasten it, they desire to revitalize Makiran *kastom* not only by codifying what elders remember, but also by incubating its return within themselves. Developing an approach to *kastom* that I have elsewhere described as *kastom* mysticism (Scott 2011), these Arosi assume that any member of a truly autochthonous Makiran matrilineage enjoys continuity of being with the island and with the primordial power instilled in it by God. Accordingly, they hope that the Makiran *kastom* with which they are fundamentally one will renew itself by sending them dreams or insights into prophecies or even encounters with agents from the underground. They hope, in other words, to realize their core Makiran natures, their inner underground.

This goal of the Arosi *kastom* mystics to be, in effect, reduced to their unadulterated Makiran-ness is, I suggest, the inversely valued analogue to what Sauniasi says becomes of Makirans taken by the underground. Sauniasi appears to assume that, whereas people from other islands become Makiranized when taken by the underground, Makirans become reduced to their core Makiran autochthony rather than assimilated to another island category. It is furthermore because Makirans on the surface remain mixed with people from elsewhere that they cannot see Makirans who have been taken.¹² The *kastom* mystics' eschatological hope of returning to Makiran purity is Sauniasi's worst nightmare. Those who wait eagerly for the underground to restore the primordial wholeness of Makiran language and *kastom* see such a state of unalloyed oneness with their island as salvation. Sauniasi sees it as the road to annihilation.

Far from being the foundation for a *kastom* mysticism, unity of being with Makira is, for Sauniasi, a predisposition to demonic possession—a condition she experiences as being “mental.” This madness-inducing demonic possession could also be described as denominational possession. Sauniasi experiences her Makiran ontology as subject to Satan, but subject to Satan by reason of a deep-seated Roman Catholic presence in and control over her island.

As an autochthonous Makiran, she is possessed by Satan insofar as Makira is possessed by Rome. And this denominational possession is the source of agonizing competition between her Satanic Roman Catholic ontology and her faithful Adventist aspirations for a redemption that will remove Satan from Makira and thus from her. In Sauniasi, the image of humanity as a battleground between God and Satan takes on new meaning (cf. Keller 2005: 160). She is a microcosm of Makira as that ground of battle, with Rome and Satan in current occupation of the field. Her situation shows, finally, that because denominational categories can in some contexts also be ontological categories, Christian politics can be a dynamic within the person as much as across institutional church lines.

In sum, the Christian politics that inheres in Sauniasi and Orimanu's discourses about the underground and in themselves as autochthonous SDA Makirans is a Christian politics with a difference. Their predicament of being essential Roman Catholics against their will directs anthropological attention to the fact that the terms of Christian plurality can have different meanings in different contexts. It also reveals unexpected dimensions of what denominational competition can be about and where it can be located. As well as constituting, perhaps, social friction by another name, or contention for influence, or proselytizing rivalry, it may also condense existentially critical theological debates about the moral quality of certain kinds of persons and the nature of the salvation they require. Are Makirans less fallen than others and thus capable of realizing an inner godly being? Or are they more fallen than others and thus susceptible to realizing their inner affinity with Satan? And what—this internal Christian politics ultimately asks—needs to be added to or subtracted from autochthonous Makiran persons in order to make them acceptable to God?

Notes

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1. This paragraph and the next condense analyses developed in Scott 2007.

2. Such interpretations are central to Adventist Bible study and are reiterated in literature used in Arosi today. I interviewed several Adventists who had completed a seminar series that teaches: “Pagan Rome’s power and authority was taken by Papal Rome” (Revelation Seminars n.d.: Lesson 21; cf. Marcussen 2004).
3. For examples of colonized people assimilating recent historical to cosmogonic events, see Errington and Gewertz 1994; Scott 2008; Turner 1988.
4. Pope John Paul II died on 2 April 2005.
5. Mamaloni was not Catholic; his earliest religious education was in the SSEC, but he later joined the Anglican Church of Melanesia.
6. I thank Ben Hall for prompting me to recognize these similarities. Sauniasi’s fears of harassment at sea by demonic agents who want to compel her to forsake her Adventist faith also resonate with narratives of early SDA converts in Marovo Lagoon (New Georgia, Solomon Islands) accosted at sea by “spirits” who threaten to kill them if they do not renounce their new religion (Cormack 1944: 161).
7. Ellen G. White analyzes creation, and Christendom within it, as “divided into two great classes” (1990: 251), the faithful and the apostate. There is, moreover, a tendency within some Adventist literature to assimilate the latter to the Roman Catholic Church, treated as Satan’s transhistorical dominion.
8. Similarly, cultural rupture is often legible in strongly past-affirming reflexive ethno-theologies, recommending a both/and approach to the question of continuity and rupture (Scott 2007: 303).
9. Sauniasi’s experiences parallel in mood and imagery the persecution narratives found in American Adventist “time of trouble” novels (e.g., Egbert 1999; McLeod 2005). To my knowledge, Sauniasi has not read such novels; her experiences represent a distinctively Arosi expression of a general Adventist anxiety.
10. I interviewed Sauniasi on 25–26 July 2006. It may be significant that this passage is quoted in Lesson 1 (24–30 June 2006) of the quarterly Bible study guide distributed to SDA members (Goldstein, ed. 2006: 9).
11. Whereas Bethel is a passage between heaven and earth, I found no warrant for inferring that Sauniasi and Orimanu regard Rohu as a trapdoor to hell. They said nothing to suggest that they conflate the underground with hell. This may reflect their adherence to Ellen G. White’s annihilationism, her teaching that God will destroy rather than eternally torture Satan and his followers (1990: 300–5).
12. It may therefore be the case that Sauniasi’s reports of having seen Mamaloni (a Makiran) reveal that, in those moments, she understood herself to have been effectively though temporarily taken by the underground. Alternatively, her experience of being able to see Mamaloni may be a manifestation of her fear that her mental condition is an indication she is succumbing to the state of exclusively Makiran ontology to which *kastom* mystics aspire.

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