

# 9

## The Cemetery Cult revealed

Here is the story of the Cemetery Cult, as assembled by Schwartz and Shargo through interviews, impromptu conversations, and direct observation of the events unfolding around them. In Chapter 10, we will focus on differences between the Noise and the Cemetery Cult, in particular why adherents of the latter (whom we will sometimes call Cemeterians) were more cautious than participants in the Noise. We will comment on why the Noise spread more rapidly and apparently more evenly than the Cemetery Cult. This detailed account of the Cemetery Cult will make it possible to appreciate the many factors shaping a distribution that looks jagged compared to the distribution of the Noise.<sup>1</sup>

During Schwartz's second bout of field research in Manus, in 1963–66, he lived in several villages outside the Paliau Movement and became convinced that it was impossible to explain why some Manus people joined the Movement or the cargo cults but others did not in terms of cultural differences within the Admiralty Islands or even differences in the nature of European contact or local experiences of World War II. Schwartz's and Shargo's observations of the Cemetery Cult revealed a number of factors that shaped commitment to the cult that were quite unrelated to simple

---

1 This chapter describes in concrete detail events that illustrate a process Schwartz (1976a: 170) has described abstractly as follows: 'Cult membership took on the status of "property" to be matched by contrasting property held by rival groups or leaders. The effect of this pattern of interaction was the spotty distribution of cults and the production of blocks of pro- and anti-cult villages, as well pro- and anti-cult factions within some villages. It is not necessary to assume that cultists and non-cultists were psychologically and situationally differentiated and that such differences accounted for the pattern of distribution of cult occurrences. In the larger areas of social interaction in which many distinct, often culturally differentiated groups were interlaced by lines of self-differentiation and identification, cult and anti-cult must be perceived as being locked into a single system of functional and emblematic contrast'.

attraction to cult doctrines. Among these were past relationships among villages and hamlets, longstanding antagonism between the Usiai and the Titan, and local contests for leadership. Kampo of Lahan provides a prime example of this latter factor. He had been one of the leaders of the Noise among the Usiai, but he publicly opposed the Cemetery Cult. He even argued publicly against the premise of magical access to the cargo to which he had himself committed during the Noise: ‘Nothing simply materialises!’ he proclaimed. ‘Everything comes from hard work!’ It is possible that the utter failure of the Noise convinced him that the ancestors were not waiting impatiently for the living to clear the way for their return bearing cargo. But the simplest explanation of his position is that he set himself against the Cemetery Cult because, as described in this chapter, he had forfeited his chance to be one of its leaders.

Participants in the Cemetery Cult expended vast amounts of time and energy in cult activities, neglected gardening and fishing, and they strained or broke social ties, including ties with nuclear family members. But they stopped far short of destroying canoes or throwing valuables into the sea. They also forbore from committing to a specific Last Day, something that had brought nothing but disappointment during the Noise. Some in the Cemetery Cult spoke boldly of being prepared for martyrdom, as had participants in the Noise. Most participants, however, were probably significantly more concerned about upsetting the Australian administration than adherents of the Noise had been. This was probably in part because they were anticipating getting a Native Government Council (NGC) embracing the south coast and they feared that pursuing the cult could cost them that opportunity. Their appetite for martyrdom was weak.<sup>2</sup>

---

2 In fact, throughout the history of the Paliau Movement, appetites for martyrdom were weak in comparison with the Biblical martyrdoms with which Manus people may have been familiar. A stint in the Lorengau jail—the most common punishment for those who aggravated the administration too much—could not have been enjoyable. But the experience pales against that of non-mythical Christian martyrs and Christian minorities martyred at the hands of the Catholic Church. Thirteenth-century Cathar ‘heretics’ in what is now France voluntarily submitted to being ‘dumped on piles of dray faggots, and burnt alive’ en masse (Oldenbourg 1961 [1959]: 361). Their passion was rooted in part in the intense political feelings intertwined with different versions of Christianity in that time and place. Still, in comparison, participants in the Noise and the Cemetery Cult seem to have exhibited great good sense.

We will not see much of Paliau in this chapter. During the events described here, Paliau was deeply involved in his duties as president of the newly established NGC headquartered on Baluan Island. But although Paliau enters the picture late in the events described in this chapter he dominates the events that follow, which we will describe in Chapter 11.

## The ghost of Thomas

If the Cemetery Cult had a prophet, it was the ghost of a young man of Johnston Island named Thomas, who died 24 December 1952. According to all accounts, the ghost's appearance in the village of Tawi initiated the cult. Tawi was the westernmost of the Titan villages, built over a south coast lagoon. The people of Johnston Island had once been part of Tawi, but they moved to Johnston Island after the Noise. They had participated fully in the Noise while still in Tawi, but in its aftermath they wanted to be closer to the centre of the Movement—which was on Baluan—and to build a New Way village, for which even tiny Johnston Island was better suited than a lagoon.

Thomas was an avid gambler and just before his death he went to Johnston Island to borrow money to finance this pastime from male kin there. He knew they had recently won a large sum at cards and he hoped they would lend him a share. They lent him £5 Australian, much less than he had expected. He went away angry, but he kept his anger to himself. Soon after, he got sick and died. In terms of New Way doctrines, his unrevealed anger had simmered in his *tingting*, causing the illness that killed him.

On 24 December 1952, all the men and women of Tawi went to church—that is, the Paliau Movement church—in Peli, an Usiai village on the mainland near Tawi, to celebrate Christmas Eve. A single old man stayed behind to keep watch. During the night the sound of people moving around the village woke him. He cautiously looked out of the house where he slept and saw men climbing the ladders into one house after another and then coming down again. They seemed to be looking for something. Although it was dark, he recognised some of them as men of Tawi who had died, some a long time ago and some recently. They left as mysteriously as they had come, but then another man, dressed completely in white, appeared briefly among the houses. The voice of the old man's dead father entered his mind, not through his ears, but directly into his

thoughts. His father told him that the man dressed in white was Thomas of Johnston Island. Frightened, the old man hid beneath a canoe sail until other villagers returned.

Thomas did not appear on Johnston Island itself until January. Three women had gone to Kalopa, a small island on which they had gardens and coconut palms. They realised, they later recounted, that Thomas was there. They did not see him, but they heard him whistle and smelled the talcum powder anointing his dead body. When they returned to Johnston Island, they could feel the presence of Thomas in their canoe. That night—in the house of Kamanra, a Johnston Island man—Thomas made his presence on the island known by whistling. Hearing the whistle, Kamanra asked: ‘Who is it? Are you Thomas?’ There was an affirmative whistle. Kamanra’s wife, Sapa, had been seriously ill, but after this incident she became, as people put it, as if she were dead. Many agreed that the ghost of Thomas now possessed her. Kamanra went to the council of Johnston Island with this news of Thomas’s manifestation. The *kaunsil* said that they should test the spirit that possessed Sapa: ‘If he is good he can stay; if not, we will get rid of him’.

A seance was arranged and everyone crowded into Kamanra and Sapa’s house while the Movement *kaunsil* questioned the ghost. When the *kaunsil* asked the ghost ‘Are you bad?’, there was no reply. When he asked ‘Are you good?’, Thomas whistled, indicating ‘Yes’. The *kaunsil* then asked Thomas, by posing a series of questions, what had caused his death. When he asked ‘Did you die because of anger at your brother?’, Thomas said ‘Yes’. He also said yes when asked if the woman he possessed would recover from her illness. As in many seances Schwartz attended, an outside observer could easily have assumed that the interlocutor controlled Thomas’s messages to the living. But no one seemed to doubt that they were hearing directly from Thomas. And not merely from Thomas but from Jesus, for they regarded the *kaunsil* acting as interlocutor as a passive agent receiving messages from Jesus, who had chosen to communicate through Thomas. Audience members had suspended all scepticism. They found it satisfying that when the *kaunsil* repeatedly asked Thomas: ‘You are incapable of lying to us, aren’t you, being a ghost sent by Jesus from the Sky?’, the answer was always unhesitatingly affirmative.

A vital message from Thomas was that Jesus had sent him to Johnston Island because of all the Movement villages this one had drifted furthest from the ideals of the New Way. Their village was rotten with

sin. Their island would be capsized into the sea unless they returned immediately to the way of God under the tutelage of Thomas. The *kaunsil* ran through the days of the week, waiting for Thomas to whistle, to find out if and when he would come again. In this way, he determined that Thomas would come every Friday night. In expectation, villagers built a special room for him in Kamanra and Sapa's house.

Schwartz and Shargo got the impression that the people of Johnston Island were not entirely surprised to be fingered as conspicuous sinners. Like others in the Movement, they had not figured out how to cope with the less-restricted sexual mores that the New Way recommended. Adultery—a form of sexual liberty that went beyond New Way loosening of the old strictures of male-female relationships—was notoriously prevalent. Movement adherents on Johnston Island had facilitated adultery by building four small houses distant from the main settlement, exclusively for assignations. Even the people of villages where adultery was only slightly less prevalent thought this went well beyond the ambivalent permissiveness of the New Way. In Tok Pisin, people called them the *haus pamuk* of Johnston Island. In that era, this Tok Pisin term referred to a house wherein some Usiai people supposedly practised a type of communal sexual licence. Today—especially in urban Papua New Guinea—it means simply a house of prostitution, a connotation it may already have been acquiring in the 1950s. The aim of the New Way, however, was not to encourage sexual licence but to ease attitudes towards adultery and thus to diminish its explosive effects on marriage and the family. One of Thomas's first commands was to destroy the lovers' hideaways.

Sexual licence was not the only issue on which Thomas had views or regarding which he conveyed the views of Jesus. At public meetings in Bunai, Schwartz had been hearing a lot of talk about the alleged decline of the New Way since 1950. Thomas also addressed this theme. He, like the ghosts that would appear in other villages before the Cemetery Cult ran its course, was particularly concerned about the declining authority of village leaders. Again and again in seances, ghosts denounced the prevalence of *bikhet* (that is, too much individualistic pride), the failure to *harim tok* (to obey leaders and the general will), and the growing tendency to *sakim tok* (to ignore leaders and the general will).

Thomas and the ghosts who became the guides of other cult villages often contrasted what they saw as the present condition, in which each person followed his or her own desires, with the now-fabled unity and

coordinated action of the early days of the Movement. This often required the ghosts' interlocutors to elicit complex messages from binary questions and responses. Fortune (1965 [1935]: 29–30, 35) described the whistling of ghosts, via mediums, in the seances of the old Titan culture as elaborate and discursive rather than binary. Most other means of divination he described, however, relied on binary indicators. As we will see later, the ghosts of the Cemetery Cult occasionally indulged in non-binary whistling that required considerable interpretation. The cult interlocutors provided this and listeners generally accepted their interpretations.

Through single whistles and occasionally more elaborate compositions, the ghosts described the society of the dead in the Sky as an example for the living. There were, the ghosts agreed, three places: Earth, Sky, and Heaven. (We are translating the Tok Pisin term, *ples dawn*—literally, place down—as Earth for simplicity. We are capitalising it not because it is a planet but because it is one of the three major entities of cult cosmology.) Only one road leads from Earth to God in Heaven. This is the road of the *tingting*. But living man does not have direct access to God. The dead and Jesus, who is their *kaunsil*, are intermediaries between man and God. The dead live with Jesus in the Sky, not in Heaven. The Sky was a place somewhere near America. (In one of his communications, Thomas is alleged to have asserted that 'the dead are with the Americans'.) These ideas are in accord with those circulating at the time of the Noise, but the ghosts added some details to the picture of the Sky.

In the Sky, Thomas conveyed, the dead responded immediately to every bell that called them to meetings. They did not drift in late or stay home as the living did when called to meetings. They 'heard the talk' of the boss, Jesus. He had only to say a thing once and the dead obeyed. They never missed church in the huge building where Jesus conducted services. Periodically, Jesus enlarged this building merely by thinking. There were three courthouses in the Sky through which all people had to pass when they died. In each, judgement was more severe than in the preceding court. There was also a prison and those whom the courts found guilty were sentenced to one, two, or three years in a Sky prison. The description of Heaven that Thomas conveyed was much like that associated with the Noise. Heaven was perfectly flat, as Paradise was before the Fall. There were broad roads, good houses made of galvanised iron, many automobiles, and flowers growing everywhere. The dead had learned good ways. They were *orait finis*—that is, completely all right or perfected. When they thought of the living, they cried in sorrow. They would have liked to

rejoin the living to teach them, to make them all right too, but the road was blocked by all the sins of the living. Now, Jesus had sent Thomas, the first of a number of teachers yet to come. Each of the 33 villages that had joined the Movement was to have its own ghostly teacher, sent by Jesus and chosen from among each village's own dead. First, however, it was necessary to accept Thomas and to begin to carry out his commands.

Thomas conveyed that the ghosts were angry at their treatment by the living. When Movement members built their new villages on the beaches they also built new cemeteries. But they left those who had died before the move in scattered graves in the bush, in old locations on the beaches, or on the small islands where the dead of the lagoon villages of old Tawi and old Pere were buried. This, the dead conveyed through Thomas, was a serious obstacle to reunion with the living. The dead were to arise from their graves, but this could not happen until the bones of the dead were gathered into the new villages, placed in graves arranged in straight rows in good sand, with the bones of the dead laid out properly in each grave. Accomplishing this was the major project that Thomas ordered. He pointed out that when Jesus died, his bones had not been scattered and forgotten. He had been buried in a grave out of which he arose after three days. The cemetery was to be the opening between Earth and Sky, which was something the white men knew about. Had not the Americans exhumed all their war dead for reburial in proper cemeteries in America?

Early in 1953, Johnston Islanders began work on the new cemetery. According to the accounts Schwartz and Shargo obtained, this activity and the many revelations attesting to the validity of Thomas's message quickly boosted village morale. People again briskly carried out collective routines as they had in the early days of the Movement. Everyone lined up in the morning to receive a work assignment and accepted it without question, and everyone went to bathe in the sea together. As Schwartz saw on his visit to Johnston Island in November, the church was crowded twice a day for lengthy services. Everyone attended meetings, which people began by singing the songs sung during the Noise. The islanders also revived the marching and drilling of the early Movement, a practice supported by the discovery one morning of the footprints of ghosts who had marched as a group in the village at night.

Leaders pressed constantly to rid the village of all bad thought and action. Public confession was revived in daily assemblies to, in Tok Pisin, *stretim ol rong*, that is, to straighten or correct all that was wrong in the

village. Thomas assisted. In seances, he identified sinful acts or hidden anger or jealousy that required confession. The villagers involved then publicly confessed and shook hands. It was assumed that sickness or other misfortune would punish those who refused. Kamanra's wife Sapa augmented the *kaunsil* as a medium for Thomas. Through these two, people called on Thomas to identify the sin or anger causing any illness. A new way of ferreting out sin also appeared. Occasionally, crosses in the new graveyard fell over during the night. Thomas said the ghosts whose graves were marked by the fallen crosses did this to call attention to sin in the deceased's living family. Thomas then helped to discover what the sin was so that it could be rectified. He also predicted the best places to look for fish or turtles, and people said that there was food in unprecedented abundance. All this is reminiscent of Fortune's description of how the Titan used household ghosts in 1928, but cult adherents did not see these practices as revivals. Rather, they were—at last—the true, revealed, Christianity to be practised under Jesus's almost constant supervision.

As people built the cemetery and collected their ancestors' remains they felt—they said—the presence of the dead all around them. One man found 10 shillings on his table that allegedly had appeared out of nowhere. This caused much excitement. It was tangible proof of the wealth that was to come. (This almost duplicates incidents in Patusi during the Noise.) Even the materialisation of several sticks of tobacco—a rather pathetic treasure—was accepted as a sign of the imminence of fulfilled promise.

The difficulty of finding old graves and, in many cases, identifying the occupants complicated the bone collecting.<sup>3</sup> Thomas helped. Sometimes people asked him where to dig or, when they found an unidentified skeleton, whose it was. With and without the ghost's help, Johnston Islanders gathered more than 100 skeletons. To do so, they often had to travel by canoe to and from the mainland, Tawi, or other burial places along the south coast. The night before such an expedition, Thomas would predict the next day's weather and wind. Often, when people returned to the village at night with the skeletons of their dead, the ghosts of these dead appeared to them or made some sign that they had come to Johnston Island along with their bones. As in the past, caring for the bones of

---

3 There had long been both government regulations and mission injunctions that the dead be buried in European-style cemeteries. Old burial places had been abandoned when villages moved to new sites. The Titan said that when they decided to adopt Christianity they threw the skulls of their household ghosts into the sea. They probably buried many of these, however, as indicated by the number of such skulls recovered for reburial during the Cemetery Cult.

the dead now helped assure that their ghosts would guard the health and general wellbeing of the living. People attributed several illnesses that occurred during this period to failure to bring in some overlooked skeleton or to the improper state of mind of those handling the bones.

Once gathered, the bones had to be washed with a fragrant soap, smeared with Vaseline, sprinkled with talcum powder, and wrapped in new or at least good cloth, in the same way people had begun treating corpses since such goods, purchased with hard-earned money, had become available. Then they laid the bones out in small wooden boxes, for there was no room in the cemetery for larger coffins. Later in the cult, Schwartz suggested that the relatively small graveyards wouldn't be able to accommodate any more burials once all the bones had been gathered. A cult adherent in Bunai replied that this would not be a problem because when the present work was completed and the Last Day (in Tok Pisin, *De Bihain*) arrived, there would be no more deaths. But until the cemetery was ready, people kept the boxes of their ancestors' bones in their houses, in places of honour, surrounded by flowers in bottles of water. For this interval at least, the skulls of the dead had returned to the Manus houses.

Behind all this was the same promise the Noise had failed to fulfil. One adherent's statement of that promise is typical:

This is what the dead told us: 'If you are strong, Jesus told us and it is true, if you do well all the work of the way of the *tingting*, then whatever you desire will appear. As with Adam and Eve before, in the place where God put them, there will be again the First Order of God. If you straighten out your *tingting*, we can send things to you. If you are not strong and you continue to follow all kinds of evil ways, we will not be able to come near you. Whatever you like, it is not difficult, we can give it to you. Now you work hard to make money. You buy things in the store. All these things, if you are all right, we can give you. The only difficulty is in your own minds. It is you who are in the wrong'.

This adherent continued:

Cargo [in the original Tok Pisin, *kago*] is things, like what we see in stores. We think like this. We work hard, work hard, work hard until we die to get one shilling to buy a little something. In a short time it is used up. Now we think that it is true. All these things that we desire are near now if we hold fast to what they [the dead]

say. They say it is not hard. We only have to clear our *tingting*. Money, too. They say if they want to give us money, they can. They showed us a bag of money.

Some said that Thomas himself had appeared to them holding a bag of money. And, one night, after the new cemetery on Johnston Island had been completed, people heard the sound of an approaching car intermingling with Thomas's whistle.

As the cult spread beyond Johnston Island, many regarded such events as firm evidence of its promise. But although scepticism was now in retreat, it still had its uses. All those who told Schwartz and Shargo that they believed in the Cemetery Cult said that they had doubted its truth at first. Unlike the swift contagion of the Noise, recruits to the Cemetery Cult came to it more slowly, perhaps struggling with the doubts left by the failure of the Noise. One young man from Tawi even devised and carried out a way to test cult claims. He concealed himself under Sapa's house at one of the early seances. When, inside the house, the *kaunsil* called Thomas's name, the sceptic under the house whistled. But then he heard another whistle coming from inside. A group of Tawi visitors agreed that Thomas had exposed the sceptic, rather than the opposite.

The promise of lavish rewards for people's labours on behalf of the dead was joined to a threat of destruction if they rejected Thomas's message. This was their last chance, Thomas told them. Jesus was extremely angry that they continued to ignore his will after the pain he had suffered for them. In June 1953, when a volcano erupted in the sea between Lou and Baluan, Thomas said that it was a sign from God, a final warning. The seance in which he conveyed this message was unusual. The *kaunsil* asked Thomas: 'Do you have something to say about this fire between Lou and Pwam?' 'Yes', whistled Thomas. 'Was this sent to burn up one village?', the *kaunsil* asked. Thomas was silent. The *kaunsil* then asked, 'Was it sent to destroy all of us together?' Thomas then began to whistle at length. Everyone was confused except the *kaunsil*, who translated as follows: 'This fire is a sign of this work we are doing. We forgot about the work of 1946, but now we want to pursue it again. Thomas said that if we do not do this, this fire will destroy all of us. If some join in this work and some do not, this fire will appear under the villages of those who do not join. The fire will eat away beneath these villages and people will be astonished to see their villages go under'. Then Thomas said good night in his usual way, whistling three times. On the third whistle everyone said, 'Good night, Thomas'.

From the first, Thomas urged people to hurry, but he never fully explained why. Some of his acolytes speculated that Jesus had lost patience with them and that they had to hurry to stave off their destruction because the Last Day was imminent. When the Last Day came it would affect the whole world, whites as well as blacks, but it would come first to Manus, because the long-deprived black man was the last work of Jesus. On the Last Day the entire world would be thrown into darkness. All people would be thrown down to the ground in a *guria* that would make that of the first Noise seem insignificant. When it was over, all people would be subject to divine judgement, and the world would be made over. The sea would become dry land, and the land would be level, traversed by broad roads on which automobiles passed by good houses, bordered by flowers.

Thomas made it clear that his mission was not only to Johnston Island, but to all the villages within the Movement. He asked that people from other villages come to speak with him, and the *kaunsil* of Johnston Island did his best to carry out this wish. Johnston Islanders hosted anyone who came to attend the seances. Like the Mok canoes gathering materials for the Baluan meeting house in 1946, the Johnston Islanders going back and forth to the mainland to gather the skeletons of their dead relatives spread the news and aroused great curiosity. At least a few people from every village in the Movement came to Johnston Island. Some who returned to their villages advocating building better cemeteries made only oblique reference to the full cult context of such public works. Others returned openly excited about Thomas's promises and warnings.

Johnston Island cult leaders told visitors that once they began building a cemetery in their village and gathering, cleaning, and anointing the bones of their dead, a ghostly teacher would appear. There were to be 33 teachers, one in each Movement community, with Thomas at their head. When other ghostly teachers began to appear, they confirmed everything that Thomas had said. Each village or part of a village to 'come inside' the cult had its own medium, sometimes several, and each medium had his or her interpreters. Although each medium pronounced some minor variations on or additions to cult practices and doctrines, their core teachings were substantially the same. Believers saw the similarities among these direct, local revelations as strong evidence of their truth. But they also valued their independent access to truth. Although Johnston Island was clearly the centre of the cult and Thomas and his Johnston

Island acolytes its leaders, it was clearly important to the people of other villages that they had their own teachers and were not in thrall to either the Johnston Islanders or their tutelary ghost.

## The Cemetery Cult in Tawi

Tawi, where Thomas made his first appearance, was part of the cult almost from the beginning. Villagers said that on the deads' initial visit to inspect the village they noted with disapproval the lack of an adequate cemetery. The people of Tawi then worked closely with their relatives on Johnston Island to rectify this and Tawi and Johnston Island completed their new cemeteries simultaneously. Thomas had instructed people to gather only the bones of their own kin. But given the many close kinship ties between the people of the two locales it wasn't always clear which of the two cemeteries should receive whose remains. It was soon agreed, however, that the closest direct living descendants had first claim on ancestral bones.

Nonetheless, for almost a year no ghostly teacher appeared for Tawi. There were signs of the presence of the dead, but no one like Thomas who came to speak regularly. So, Kisakiu, *kaunsil* of Tawi, and many others sailed back and forth between Tawi and Johnston Island to attend Thomas's seances.

Many of those who came to Johnston Island to hear Thomas stayed to play cards for money, often all day and all night. No one seemed to find this inconsistent with efforts at moral elevation. The *kaunsil* of Johnston Island and Tawi were both avid gamblers, as Thomas had been in life. It was while men from several villages were in Tawi for a marathon card playing session that Tawi finally received a visit from a spirit mentor, the ghost of the former *luluai* of Loitja, Ponowan. Suluwan, the leader of Bunai's Pomatjau hamlet, was among those gambling in Tawi and saw the ghost first. Suluwan had lost heavily and was returning to Kisakiu's house to sleep when he saw the ghost of Ponowan. The ghost followed him into the house, where Kisakiu also saw him. The ghost said nothing, but he came back after everyone was asleep and woke Suluwan to ask him about his gambling luck. Suluwan said he had only £1 left. Ponowan told him to return to the game with his £1, and he would win. Suluwan did as he was told, playing through the night and the next day and winning £40.

Ponowan began to appear to Kisakiu frequently, waking him at night with a whistle. One night, Ponowan woke him from a dream about a dying woman and emitted a long series of whistles which Kisakiu could not understand. He interrupted to ask questions in the hope that Ponowan might be the teacher for whom Tawi had been waiting. He asked Ponowan if he had gone before God when he died and now had been sent down to them. He asked if he had died because of someone's wrong. He asked, 'Did you die because your *tingting* had been disturbed because when you spoke to your people about the ways of God and right thinking, they did not listen to you?' Ponowan whistled 'Yes'. After more questioning, Ponowan said that he had come to do the same work that Thomas did on Johnston Island. He promised to come back regularly.

Suluwan left Tawi on Good Friday, 1954. Before he left, he witnessed the first two days of a new way of observing Easter. Thomas had instructed the people of Tawi and Johnston Island as follows: 'On Thursday Jesus is with God. On this day you must pull out and lay down all the wooden crosses in the cemetery. On Friday, when Jesus was nailed to the cross, you must stand up all the crosses on the graves. Jesus will be with the dead on Saturday. On Sunday He will arise. On Sunday, flags must be placed in all the cemeteries. Jesus has won. All the dead too, they will have won. All will come back. If you do not obey, there will be an ordeal put upon you'. In Tawi and on Johnston Island people carried out these instructions. Many people fervently hoped that on Easter Sunday the dead would arise and Jesus would return. They were, of course, bound to be disappointed.

## The Cemetery Cult in Nuang and Kapo

Most of the people of the coastal Titan village of Patusi and the two Usiai villages that had relocated adjacent to it, Nuang and Kapo, were inclined towards the cult. There was, however, significant opposition in Patusi, which we will describe below. But in Nuang and Kapo, as in Tawi and on Johnston Island, there was little or no overt opposition. On the contrary, the people of these two Usiai villages, led by their respective Movement *kaunsil*, Pokanau and Nakwam, supported the cult fanatically.

In their old locations, Nuang and Kapo had enjoyed close relationships with Malei and Lowaya. The four villages had originally been located inland, near each other and not far from the south coast. Malei and Lowaya later came down to the beach to join the amalgamated New Way

village at Bunai. But the close relationship between Nuang and Kapo and their former inland neighbours, Malei and Lowaya, had survived their relocation and the Cemetery Cult came to Malei, Loyawa, and other Usiai people in Bunai from Nuang and Kapo.

In 1954, Pita Tapo of Lahan, who had been the main prophet of the Noise among the Usiai in 1947, left Bunai to stay in Nuang and Kapo to learn about the Cemetery Cult and attend seances. Here, he was again able to have the kind of influence he had enjoyed during the Noise. Men of Malei and Lowaya had also come to Nuang and Kapo to learn about the cult and attend seances. In the seances, two ghosts conveyed instructions through a female medium and the *kaunsil* of the two villages, all three of whom provided extended interpretations. The content of the teachings closely resembled what people had heard from Johnston Island. In Kapo, as in Yiru, a man had allegedly died and returned to life. Transported to the Sky, he had remained there from six o'clock in the evening to six o'clock the next morning. On returning, he reported experiences much like those of Ponram and of Kampo's wife. In Heaven, the Kapo man shook hands with thousands of the dead and passed through two of the three courts before the recently deceased *komiti* of Kapo took him aside and sent him back to the land of the living again, warning him that he was not ready to pass the third court. If he did not pass, either his throat would be cut immediately or he would be jailed. The Kapo man reported that he had been sent back as a warning to others.

In the Nuang and Kapo seances the ghosts added to the usual description of the perfect meetings held in the Sky. Unlike the meetings held in earthly villages, those in the Sky always followed the rule that discussion and action on one proposal had to be completed before other subjects could be introduced. This rule, to which the ghosts now lent their imprimatur, was one that Paliau had repeatedly tried to impress on Movement meetings, but with little success. The two ghosts also explained that they could not be expected to remain in the village all the time. They would come to the village only when some new work was beginning. The rest of the time, they would be attending meetings in other villages or reporting to Johnston Island. And the ghosts also warned Pita Tapo against accompanying those who exhumed skeletons. Women, men with large families, and men with many wrongs still in their *tingting*, such as Tapo, would sicken if they engaged in this work. Young people, because of their supposed innocence, were preferred.

## The Cemetery Cult in Malei and Lowaya

While Pita Tapo was soaking up the Cemetery Cult in Nuang and Kapo, the cult came into the open in Bunai. While in other Movement villages the cult encountered significant opposition, on Johnston Island and in Tawi, Nuang, Kapo, Malei, and Lowaya most village leaders actively supported it. Zeal for the cult, however, was exceptional in Malei and Lowaya. They were the only hamlets in Bunai in which virtually everyone participated in the cults—or, at least, in which the opposition kept remarkably quiet.

The people of Malei and Lowaya, although their hamlets stood at opposite ends of the Usiai section of Bunai, were informally allied. The people of each hamlet had been affiliated with the Lutheran Evangelical Mission, in contrast with the people of other sections of amalgamated Bunai who had been predominantly Roman Catholics. But this did not prevent Malei and Lowaya people from assimilating readily to the Movement doctrines, despite those doctrines' debt to Catholicism. The younger Movement leaders of these two hamlets were exceptionally literate, thanks to schooling provided by Lutheran Evangelicals. But such younger men as Pondis of Malei and Pantret of Lowaya functioned more as figureheads while older, more experienced and aggressive men held the real power. Within his hamlet, Pondis was leader in name only. In the other hamlets of Bunai the older men had accepted secondary positions as the Movement took hold. But in Malei, the old *luluai* Kilopwai retained actual authority and relegated to Pondis the function of representing the hamlet at meetings, wearing his best European clothing. In Lowaya, Pantret had been selected as Movement *kaunsil* for his literacy and supposed greater sophistication. But he was painfully self-conscious about his lack of tradition-derived legitimacy. He was a *lau* (the lower rank of the two-rank system of *lau* and *lapan*), but several men of his age were *lapan* and the sons of *luluai*. Petrus Popu, the old *luluai*, had dropped this colonial-era position to become a *komiti* in the Movement and he led from this position despite Pantret's titular higher Movement rank. In fact, it appeared that Lowaya owed its cohesion to Petrus Popu's leadership. Lowaya was an assemblage of fragments of former villages that Petrus Popu had drawn together as a single unit with a single government census book.

Malei had been on the margins of the Noise. Since joining Bunai, however, at least one event there had foreshadowed the Cemetery Cult. In 1952, a 13-year-old boy, Lapun, had gone into the bush with several

other boys of his age to get sago. As they began to work, Lapun saw a tall man with a white beard approaching him. Lapun fell down. His whole body shook violently. Songs came to his lips. The tall man told him that he would give him a book. The man, whom Lapun later realised must have been Jesus, told him about three trees in which they could catch many opossums. Lapun sent his companions to the trees, where they caught nine opossums. The tall man also told them that if they continued to work on the sago palm they had cut, which they thought was nearly exhausted, they would get eight additional bundles of sago. This miracle also happened.

The next day the tall man came again to Lapun. This time he instructed him in the proper ways of marching and drilling and kneeling with the head bowed. Returning to Malei, Lapun told everyone of his experience. Most were convinced of its significance, except Kilopwai. For several days the adolescent Lapun led the village in singing songs he said Jesus had revealed to him and marching according to Jesus's instructions. But within a few days Kilopwai challenged him, saying that if he had really been visited by Jesus and not by a *masalai* (Tok Pisin for a dangerous or simply mischievous bush spirit), as Kilopwai suspected, he would be able to recite the entire 'Long Story of God'. Lapun was shamed, for he knew he could not. He immediately abandoned his attempts to lead and thereafter remained silent about his alleged encounter with Jesus.

'The mark'—that is, the affirmation of the cult—appeared in Malei towards the end of March 1954. For two months prior, villagers had been preparing for the coming of the promised ghostly teachers. During February and March, they met almost daily to rid their hamlet of everything that was wrong. Any bad interpersonal feelings had to be aired in these meetings, regardless of their overt insignificance or how far in the past their genesis. Also during this time, Malei cult enthusiasts visited Nuang and Kapo, where ghostly teachers had already appeared and the cult was more advanced, although still operating in ostensible secrecy.

In Lowaya, on 7 March, Nasei, the wife of the village *tultul*, fell down in such violent convulsions that she had to be restrained. At first she raved incoherently, but she gradually became more comprehensible and eventually conveyed to her audience that she had not only seen Jesus, but also that she was now possessed by the ghost of Ponau, a former *luluai* of Lowaya. Further, Ponau wanted her to convey to the people of Lowaya that all that had been revealed to the people of Johnston Island was true.

Ponau said the day was imminent when there would be no more sickness or death and all the dead would return to join the living. First, however, Lowaya must build a cemetery separate from the common village graveyard and sections in the new cemetery were to be provided for each of the old village fragments (equivalent to clans) of Pwa, Lesei, Ponro, Nrakopat, and others. A meeting was held at which Lowaya villagers spoke with the dead through Ponau with Nasei as his medium. Old men representing nearly extinct clans told their dead forebears how difficult their lives had become. They complained that strangers were using their land and that their descent lines, created by God at the beginning of time, were in danger of dying out. The dead answered that they longed to return, but the sins abiding in the *tingting* of the living blocked them. Also, they had no physical point of contact with the village. Before the dead could return, their descendants had to gather their bones, still scattered near all the old village sites in the interior, in a special place in the Lowaya hamlet of Bunai.

The words of Ponau's ghost entered Nasei's mind directly, people said, and Nasei spoke them. Ponau asked: 'Soon your cargo will appear. The cargo that we sent before, did it arrive or not?' Nasei answered, 'No, we didn't receive any cargo'. Then the dead *luluai* said, 'Long ago we sent plenty of cargo'. Nasei responded: 'It came, but the Australians confiscated it'. Ponau continued: 'Did you get the aeroplanes we sent? Did you get the battleships?' 'No', replied Nasei. 'Now we will have to make war against the Australians', Ponau said. Ponau continued speaking through Nasei, saying that white men and black men were alike, but the white men had hidden the truth from the black men. Now that the light of God had come, the dead could arise and all would be made right.

Everyone who told Schwartz of Nasei's visitation said that her *guria* had been severe because she was a particularly wicked person. She was notorious for her many adulteries, for lying, bad temper, and stubbornness. For the Lowaya seances, a room in Nasei's house had been divided in half (as in Sapa's house on Johnston Island). Nasei sat on one side and the older men and women sat on the opposite side. Pantret, the *kaunsil*, attended Nasei, carrying her messages to the others and asking questions. As on Johnston Island, no one appeared to suspect the interlocutor of making any personal contribution.

The work of ‘clearing the *tingting*’ continued in a series of ‘wrong-straightening’ meetings. Then, several days later, Pomak, an adolescent, underwent a death and resurrection that he later related to Schwartz. He said that he had been to Heaven and seen God, whom Pomak described as looking like his pictures in mission books. Pomak had seen the three places—Heaven, Sky, and Earth—connected by a straight line. This was the road of the *tingting* and of the dead. Pomak’s revelations paralleled all others in most respects. Many of them included messages pertaining to the separateness of the body and the *tingting* (sometimes called ‘something of Caesar’s’ and ‘something of God’s’, or ‘the road of the council’ [here, probably meaning the NGC] and ‘the road of the cemetery’). Pomak warned against the dangers of thinking constantly about women, taro, sago, and fish (that is, of focusing on the body) and he said that it was wrong to think all the time about cultivating their gardens (recall that the Usiai traditionally were gardeners, unlike the Titan), for this was false worship and in conflict with the way of the *tingting*. But having gained people’s attention as a prophet, Pomak soon forfeited his credibility. Several trivial quarrels with his brothers left him in a sullen rage. He stopped prophesying and talked bitterly about running away to work for the whites.

Pomak, however, had a successor, another adolescent, Joseph Nanei. About 16 years old, he became the next conspicuous leader of the Cemetery Cult in Lowaya. In his role as prophet he changed from an inarticulate boy into an arrogant leader who exerted nearly dictatorial command over others. Even respected elders obeyed his orders. He was the son of Kekes, a surviving *lapan* of the almost extinct village of Lesei. Kekes claimed all the land on which the village of Bunai was located and had argued his claim incessantly for years. From exposure to this, Joseph Nanei had absorbed unusual knowledge of his genealogy. When he began to see ghosts, he saw most of the ancestors whose names he had learned from his father, some going back around 10 generations. This impressed his audience. He soon, however, made a more important contact. This was the ghost of a young man only recently dead, and this neophyte ghost declared himself the cult teacher for whom Lowaya had been waiting. He would be the hamlet’s independent channel for cult secrets and forces. With this legitimation, Joseph Nanei began conducting wrong-straightening meetings and directing the gathering of the remains of the dead.

Two teacher-ghosts appeared in Malei in March. The ghosts of both Pokowas and Liamwin entered Namu—a Lowaya woman who had married into Malei—as sensations travelling up each leg into her body and she became their medium. Her spirit guests passed in and out of her body freely, but they never left her for long or wandered far. Pokowas tended to stay in her body more than Liamwin. They usually spoke through her by whistling in reply to questions. Again, the people of Malei insisted that the whistling did not come from the mouth of the medium.

During the time that she hosted the teacher-ghosts, people said that her *tingting* became clear, like that of a white man, because the ghosts had purged her of all her sins. She became sensitive to any unexpressed disturbance in others' *tingting* and was able to bring disturbed relations among the people of Malei to light in the wrongstraightening meetings. Namu thought she had been selected because she was a virtuous person lacking the faults of other women. (Nasei of Lowaya was said to have been selected for just the opposite reason.) Both ghosts were her close kin. She called one brother and the other uncle. She had nursed Pokowas on his deathbed. She also counted Joseph Nanei of Lowaya and his tutelary ghost as close relatives.

After a week as medium for her ghosts in Malei, Namu announced that they had directed her to go to Lowaya to collaborate with Joseph Nanei, who had also received ghostly instructions to collaborate. Namu and Nanei held joint seances in a single room in a Lowaya house divided into Malei and Lowaya halves. The two mediums also stayed in the same house, to which villagers delivered their meals. People were appointed to stay by them constantly and Pantret was assigned to remain nearby to write down everything the ghosts revealed. People compared Pantret and the others to the apostles of Jesus.

Although Malei had begun to clear a cemetery of its own, the ghosts announced through their respective mediums that it would be better if the two hamlets built a single cemetery adjoining Lowaya. This led to a serious quarrel between the two hamlets. The tendency within the cult was for each village or hamlet to build its own cemetery, for people wished to guard against the possibility that not all communities would merit the blessings of the dead. The ghosts themselves settled the quarrel. They called a meeting of the dead of both places. As transmitted through Joseph Nanei and Namu, the dead favoured building a single

cemetery in Lowaya. But the living residents of the two hamlets reached a compromise—dividing a single cemetery into two sections, one for each hamlet, separated by a path.

The dead also manifested to people other than the mediums for the teacher-ghosts. An incident that received particular attention involved Petrus Popu, the *komiti* of Lowaya, and Sayau Bombowai, the *komiti* of Katin. One afternoon they were fishing together near the site of the new cemetery. As the sun went down they saw many men dressed in white in the cemetery. They approached to hear what they were saying. The dead were speaking a language they could not understand, but it was clear, they reported, that this was some sort of meeting. They recognised the chairman as Petrus Ndroi, the dead brother of Samol of Bunai. By the time the two fishermen could bring others to see this meeting of the dead, the ghosts were gone. Petrus Popu felt, however, that another event validated the report. At about the same time, two young Usiai boys had met the ghost of one boy's mother and that of the other's father. When they asked the ghosts where they were going, the ghosts replied that they were going to a meeting of the dead in the cemetery.

The people of Malei and Lowaya reached the height of their cult activities within a few weeks after 'the mark' on Malei. Under Joseph Nanei's direction, they revived the more rigidly routinised New Way practices. People rose to a bell. At a set time they bathed together in the sea (and so provoked the Bunai Titan to accuse them of sexual impropriety). They marched together to morning services in the Bunai church. They lined up every morning for work assignments and accepted them without complaint. People seemed grimly determined to be ritually perfect in every detail, as they had been when the New Way returned after the Noise.

Much of the communal work was explicitly cult related, such as collecting the bones of the dead, marching, and preparing the men's marching uniforms. They called the latter—shorts and undershirts dyed dark blue—their 'black' uniforms, which were like those cult participants wore in Nuang and Kapo and on Johnston Island for exhuming bones for reburial as commanded by the ghosts. Cemeterians in all locales spent many of the daylight hours travelling to old village sites to gather the skeletons of the dead. Schwartz and Shargo often watched them return by canoe from the river that took them part way to the old villages inland. The men sat in a circle around the boxes of bones on the canoe platform. The pilots poled slowly through the lagoon along the length of the village,

passing the Titan section without turning their heads. They pretended to themselves that no one knew what they were doing. Then, according to Joseph Nanei's directions, they cleaned the bones in boiling water, anointed them with perfumed Vaseline hair tonic, and wrapped them in cloth for boxing. The impressive seriousness of these activities seemed to subdue the usually boisterous and disobedient children. Their parents sent them fishing, for the hamlet was extremely short of food. People had neglected the gardens for weeks and they had almost stopped trading for fish with the Titan.

Until Namu's possession, cult adherents had met secretly in family houses at night. But after the arrival of their teacher-ghosts the people of Malei built a special outdoor space for their meetings, unlike any Schwartz saw in a Movement village. It was a square formed by four long benches with backs, surrounded by a railing. Some places on the bench were draped with cloth and left empty for the convenience of the ghosts. Schwartz attended the third meeting there, held in the afternoon rather than at night. Everyone in Malei from the oldest to the toddlers formed a line to march from the main path to the meeting place, which was about 50 yards back from the path. Though they were still within easy sight and hearing of anyone passing, the distance from the main thoroughfare signified secrecy to both the Cemeterians and the uninvited. When they arrived, attendees marched through the gate and circled the square clockwise before sitting down. One man arriving late also marched solemnly around the square before taking a seat. The meeting was conducted in utter solemnity, marred only by the playing of the very youngest children.

Throughout the afternoon, one man after another rose as he felt moved to speak. (Although women attended the meeting, they seldom if ever spoke.) By this time, cult adherents had been meeting for some two months. Everything anyone said had already been said hundreds of times. There was no disagreement on any point. Yet each man spoke as if he had to persuade the rest. Each stood bolt upright, talking out into space, a style of public speaking also typical of the Movement. Speeches were formulaic self-denunciatory catalogues in which each man accused himself of every vice recognised by the New Way: 'I am stubborn. I lie. I am hot tempered. I am selfish. I give nothing to others. I have bad feelings about all of you'. Then the speaker would say that he would no longer indulge in any of these vices, listing them again one by one. These nearly identical confessions were emotionally neutral. Only one man had a specific grievance. He said

that he had returned from plantation work to build a house for his father. He finished it, but his father complained that the house was no good. The young man confessed that he was angry. He had not worked with his father or spoken to him for two months. Now, he declared, his anger was finished. He and his father would shake hands.

The men expressed approval of each other's speeches. Each said: 'All this is true, now we must change. We must go back to the good ways we had in 1946'. (Malei did not join the Movement until 1948, but Malei people identified with its entire historical span.) After interminable, earnest, and repetitive speeches, the meeting ended late in the afternoon. The attendees marched to Bunai for the evening church service, after which they marched back to the square to continue as before.

Schwartz and Shargo obtained some of their first accounts of the atmosphere in Malei and Lowaya from women of Lahan or Yiru who had married into the more enthusiastically cultist hamlets but who retained strong ties with their hamlets of origin. They told the anthropologists that within Lowaya in particular they were treated as outsiders and not trusted. In fact, Schwartz and Shargo ascertained, some women who had married into Lowaya from Yiru did report everything that transpired at cult meetings to the Yiru *kaunsil*. They also reported insults to Yiru they overheard, which on a few occasions nearly fomented fights between the two hamlets.

It was unusual for women to speak at the cult meetings, even though men urged them to use the privilege of public participation the New Way prescribed. In the meetings Schwartz attended, such encouragement failed completely to convince women to speak up. If the women already felt less involved in the cult than men, the men made things worse in a series of wrong-straightening meetings in which the ghosts demanded that each woman reveal her lovers. The women declined to do so. The men promised by acclamation that that they would not become angry if the women did so. The women argued that, regardless of the promise, men would use the information against them in the future, and most continued to defy the ghosts' demand. Some of them eventually accepted a compromise; they named the villages or hamlets from which their lovers came. As they had predicted, their men used this information against them soon afterward and several women left Lowaya and relocated to their home hamlets, one claiming that she had been expelled from Lowaya.

Marching was extremely important to the Malei and Lowaya Cemeterians. They marched grimly, with their heads high, their fists clenched, stamping their feet as they followed the leader's commands. They explained to Schwartz that Jesus had ordered the marching but no one was certain about its meaning. Many were also uncertain of the object of their manifest defiance, but some identified the Titan and all those opposed to the cult. The marchers did not object to the anthropologists observing them, for they were Americans and only wanted to watch, not to interfere. Some marchers clearly appreciated Schwartz and Shargo as an audience. They wanted to be photographed; they wanted their efforts documented.

They marched to drill commands that had been revealed to Joseph Nanei in a dream. Some of the commands were those used in the native constabulary. Others had only the meanings Nanei assigned them. People often sang while marching, and the songs were as cryptic as the drill commands. Nanei and Pantret asked Schwartz to record a song that, they said, the ghost had instructed them to sing when they carried the bones of the dead. Neither the meanings of many particular words nor of some entire songs were clear to Schwartz, and Nanei and Pantret declined to do more than sing them and show Schwartz their own transcription of the words as revealed by the ghosts. The songs, however, did contain many intelligible references to Jesus, Earth, the Sky, angels, and '*win*'. It appears from the albeit murky context that in places one could translate '*win*' from Tok Pisin as either a verb—to be victorious—or as a name for a state of incorporeal being. Marchers also sang songs important during the Noise that mixed Tok Pisin vocabulary with words of a language said to be unknown to the singers, although some Cemeterians thought Schwartz might know them. He did not.

## **Enthusiasm, opposition, and exclusion in Malei and Lowaya**

Each of the hamlets comprising Bunai developed its own relationship with the cult. The social contexts within the hamlets and the prior relationships among the hamlets help explain the patterns of support and opposition to the cult and the roles different actors adopted or for which they competed. The case of Malei and Lowaya is especially interesting because they apparently adopted the Cemetery Cult with little or no internal dissension and with exceptional enthusiasm.

Their experiences of the Noise had helped stir Malei and Lowaya to come down to join the composite Movement village on the beach. But they had been peripheral participants in the Noise and, unlike the leaders of Yiru and Lahan, the leaders of Malei and Lowaya did not have the prestige accorded those martyred by the jail sentences meted out to some Noise leaders. Further, they joined Bunai later than the other hamlets. They were novices to be tutored. The Titan people of Bunai had taken the lead in tutoring them in the New Way. The Malei and Lowaya people accepted this subordination to Titan mentors because the Titan had been the leaders in the Movement. It also appeared that Malei and Lowaya people still deferred to the Titan assumption of their superiority to Usiai people in all things. But the Usiai deference masked resentment. Many of the Malei and Lowaya people hoped that as the first hamlets within Bunai to join the Cemetery Cult they might improve their position and tutor the people of Lahan and the Titan of Bunai in the ways of the new cult. Malei and Lowaya people at least recognised a common interest, which they demonstrated by merging into a single cult congregation.

In contrast to the enthusiasm in Malei and Lowaya, the Bunai hamlet of Katin remained aloof from the cult and the people of Yiru opposed it. We do not know enough about the situation in Katin to speculate on why it remained indifferent to the cult. But we know enough about Yiru's relationship to Malei and Lowaya to suggest reasons for Yiru's friction with the cult hamlets, Lowaya in particular.

Schwartz and Shargo saw no signs that opposition to the cult in Yiru had much to do with disapproval of the ideas and promises of the cult per se. As described in Chapter 8, Yiru was the scene of Ponram's death and resurrection, an event the Yiru people who observed it found highly credible. Sayau Bombowai, the *komiti* of Katin, had been Ponram's principal interpreter in that incident. He also had seen the meeting of the dead in the new Malei–Lowaya cemetery while fishing with Petrus Popu of Lowaya. Yet Yiru did not become a part of the cult and Sayau Bombowai was the only Katin resident whom Schwartz knew to be sympathetic to the Cemetery Cult. In Yiru, even though Ponram had dramatically conveyed Heaven's request that his people build a new cemetery and a design for the gate, no one took up this task. Rather, the people of Yiru were not merely indifferent to the Cemetery Cult, they denigrated its pursuit in Lowaya and Malei. This clearly did not disturb Lowaya, however, and Lowaya leaders made it known to the people of Yiru that they would not be welcome in the cult anyway.

This is not mysterious in light of the general state of relations between the hamlets. Yiru's *kaunsil*, Bombowai (not to be confused with the Katin *komiti* Sayau Bombowai) was at the centre of the conflict with Lowaya. Bombowai had led Yiru since before the Noise. He was a *lapan*, though not an eminent one; he had been the *luluai* before the Movement had introduced its own council system and he had been a charter member of the Movement. He had also been at least marginally involved in the Usiai Noise, having received instructions to destroy village census books and the hats that were a symbol of the office of *luluai*. It is unlikely he was opposed on principle to collaborating with the dead to bring about miraculous change. But he was a weak and indecisive leader in an unruly hamlet, and this brought him into conflict with Lowaya.

Yiru had a reputation as the least orderly hamlet and the hamlet with the least respect for its leaders. Most of its younger men had little interest in the Movement or the New Way. Rather than bringing them closer in touch with the New Way, the move to the beach had allowed them to become more independent of their elders. One group of these young men moved freely in and out of the village, going away to work and returning to loaf and gamble. Another group—the young men the anthropologists nicknamed the minstrels—neither went away to work nor worked in the village. They spent much of their time playing ukuleles and guitars. Most of them were unmarried, often beyond the age when they should have been married. Their idleness—punctuated occasionally by casual affairs—constantly annoyed their elders and upset the peace. They had no interest in the cult except to mock it, as they mocked most everything that more solid citizens took seriously. Their habit of lounging near the Cemeterians' marching ground irritated cult adherents. Like other cult hamlets, Malei and Lowaya had forbidden secular and frivolous music, loud talking or joking, and non-ghostly whistling, all of which were favourite minstrel pastimes. Complaints about the minstrels from both within and outside Yiru usually ended with complaints about Bombowai's inability to control them.

Other matters also hopelessly compromised Bombowai's authority and aggravated Yiru relations with Lowaya. Bombowai abandoned his wife, a woman of Lowaya, for a woman named as a party to several other disruptive affairs. Bombowai induced her to leave her aged husband and he cast out his own wife. Even more unthinkable, in a society in which children are so highly desired and so hard to keep alive, he allowed his wife to take their four children with her when she returned to Lowaya.

His behaviour appalled the people of his own hamlet, Yiru, especially in times that demanded that leaders speak from morally superior positions. But the people of Yiru also took amiss Lowaya people's denunciations of the morals of all Yiru people. Several Yiru women who were married into Lowaya brought back reports of Lowaya slanders against Yiru, and they complained that their Lowaya husbands mistreated them because they were from Yiru.

All this was more than enough to ensure that Lowaya would want to keep Yiru out of the cult, perhaps from spite but perhaps also to try to maintain the high moral standards the ghosts demanded. In turn, Yiru people were in no mood to follow in Lowaya's footsteps in any endeavour. Keeping the pot boiling, Bombowai took to complaining about Lowaya's slanders against Yiru in meetings of the people of all the Bunai hamlets, and he annoyed Cemetery Cult adherents when possible by revealing to all and sundry what he could learn of the content of cult seances.

## **Lahan and the importance of leadership**

In Lahan, the hamlet's movement towards commitment to the cult was intimately interwoven with a contest for leadership. Among the rank and file, some were inclined towards the cult but unable to act on that inclination without a strong leader.

From the first, the people of the Lahan hamlet wavered regarding the Cemetery Cult. What course they took depended largely on Kampo and Pita Tapo. Kampo was one of the most intelligent of all Movement leaders. He was the most outstanding Movement leader among the Usiai Movement adherents and many treated him as their primary spokesperson. His influence among the Usiai, however, declined as the Movement drifted during the early 1950s. Kampo himself had ambitious but workable ideas for the Usiai, emphasising producing more food in their gardens, expanding their capacity to do their own fishing, and moving more of their products to more distant markets by canoe. He set an example by gardening more assiduously than most others and he learned to handle and build canoes better than any other Usiai. He was also the only literate person in the village who used his literacy for private purposes as well as in public roles. Like Samol, the leader of the Titan core of Bunai, he kept a journal. But Samol (of whom we will hear more below) confined his entries to official public matters while Kampo kept

a record of the Movement and his role in it for his son. More than any other person of public consequence in Bunai, he found himself faced with choosing for or against the Cemetery Cult. In contrast, Samol was firmly committed to the gradualist wing of the Movement, while Tjamilo—also of Titan Bunai—was just as firmly committed to the Cemetery Cult.

Kampo and Tapo had led the Usiai Noise. After consulting with Noise adherents in Titan Bunai, Kampo had returned to Lahan to try to bring the Noise home, building a church and organising communal work and worship. His prominent role in the Noise, which included burning *luluai* hats and census books, earned him a year in jail. After his release, he devoted himself to the Movement program and placed his hopes in the prospect of an officially recognised NGC, cooperatives, and schools. It was clear that he could continue to be a leader in the Movement if he wanted to, but he never made up his mind about the validity of the Noise. The Movement did not question that at some time Jesus would come again. But perhaps the Noise had been a deception—a trial sent by God or Satan, leading people astray by setting a definite time for the Second Coming? Or, had the cargo, the dead, and Jesus failed to materialise because people had not shed fully their sinful ways? Such were his doubts. Kampo was also determined to believe that fully realising the European way of life was possible within his own lifetime.

Partly because his own Lahan people were a small and indecisive constituency, Kampo thought on a Movement level more consistently than most other leaders. And he worked harder and gave more of himself to the Movement than most other local leaders, except Samol. But what he saw as the Movement's slow progress was discouraging. Even though the anthropologists were impressed by all that had changed since 1928, the pace *was* slow when measured against Movement adherents' goals. By the early 1950s many Movement members were convinced they were losing ground. They had lost the feeling of excited mass participation that had prevailed during the move to the beach and their first year there and they were bored with repeating the practices of the New Way that remained intact.

All this troubled Kampo and he worried about its causes obsessively. He often said that the leaders were entirely responsible. Using a Tok Pisin idiom, he spoke of how the leaders should be 'carrying' the others. But he also spoke of how the burden was a heavy one. He became moody and seesawed between intense activity and abject inactivity. When

active he was ubiquitous. He appeared at meetings throughout the Usiai Movement area; he made long trips by canoe—to Baluan, to Lorengau, and to the north coast; and he went frequently to his gardens in the bush. During periods of such obsessive activity he always appeared in public clean, shaved, and well dressed. In his inactive state, he was depressed, pessimistic, lethargic, and withdrawn, and he wore his oldest clothes and stopped shaving. During those periods he spent much of his time in Schwartz and Shargo's house, leafing through copies of *Life* magazine, sighing over the marvellous lives of the Americans pictured there, but also readily answering the anthropologists' questions at length. Otherwise, he stayed in his house and slept.

Kampo had been in this latter mood for some time before Schwartz and Shargo recognised that the Cemetery Cult was all around them. Kampo, of course, had known of it from its beginning, but his years of identification with the Movement kept him from falling in with the Cemeterians. He felt that unless the entire Movement could take it up, he should oppose it. But the excitement of the cult emanating from Malei and Lowaya was stirring up his own hamlet of Lahan, dispersing people's boredom and lethargy. Here perhaps was an opportunity for a leader to step in and direct people's energy. Kampo's ambivalence about the cult, however, all but incapacitated him as a leader for or against it.

In March 1954, when 'the mark' on Malei (Namu's possession by her two teacher-ghosts) appeared and the cult became more public, Kampo was not in the village. He returned to find that the cult, still a work in progress when he left, had crystallised. He also found that he was excluded. Circumstances had made his decision for him. Pantret and Pondis, now openly supporting the cult, realised that if Kampo took a role within the cult, they could lose their own new authority as cult leaders, which they valued highly. They chose to reckon him hostile to the cult. And by excluding him they ensured his hostility. Kampo, like everyone else concerned with these manoeuvres at the time, had his spies. He knew just what was happening. Thus, on the night of 'the mark' on Malei, Kampo, who had just returned to the village, held a conspicuously public meeting in Lahan at which he attacked the cult. At this meeting he said: 'Nothing simply materialises. Everything comes from hard work'. Whether his doubts about the millenarian promise of the Noise were truly resolved or not, his exclusion from leadership in the Cemetery Cult had driven him to advocate a resolutely contrary position.

The following week, Kampo began walking through all the Usiai hamlets, making the Cemeterians in Malei and Lowaya uncomfortable by his presence. Like Schwartz, if he went near cult meetings, he sensed that the discussion had just changed abruptly to the predictable pious speeches of a New Way gathering. His anger grew. He was hurt that people he had brought into the New Way were now turning him away. Even so, his indecision about the truth of the cult persisted, making him ineffective as an opposition leader. His own hamlet of Lahan had not yet joined the cult, and he might have ensured that it did not. Instead, as Lahan interest in the cult increased, Kampo withdrew more and more.

As Kampo abdicated leadership, Pita Tapo returned to Lahan from Kapo and Nuang where he had been learning the ways of the Cemetery Cult. Pita Tapo told Schwartz that Schwartz could now learn about the Noise from watching the Cemetery Cult. It was, he said, exactly what he had been advocating. Long after Lahan people had come to Bunai, he said, he had kept up the call for building a better cemetery and collecting the bones of the dead but no one had heeded him. He told Schwartz that he had not felt physically well for a long time. But now, for the first time in years, he felt strong again.

Tapo had come to Schwartz asking for medicine in September 1953. He complained that he suffered from constant itching on the back of his neck and he constantly imagined—he knew it was not real—things crawling there. He told Schwartz about his role in the Usiai Noise and said he thought he was sick because he had failed in the mission God had given him. God had told him to keep teaching his people all that had been revealed. But when he came out of jail, people showed little interest in his revelations. Lahan people were building their hamlet in Bunai and enjoying the novelty of life on the beach; their lives were full without him. But the Noise had been the most meaningful and exciting experience of his life. He had suddenly become important. Even Kampo had consented to follow his lead. Tapo tried to lead again when he came back to the Lahan settlement on the beach in 1948. But people found his talk of revelations incompatible with putting the New Way into practice in a new kind of village. People did not dismiss him as deluded, for most had never actually repudiated the doctrines of the Noise, but his timing was bad.

Angry at everyone in his hamlet, Tapo went to Ndropwa to work on the copra plantation. He came back obviously troubled. He diagnosed his condition as the result of both the hard work on Ndropwa and abandoning the way of the *tingting* to pursue material concerns. Now he suffered from chronic weakness that kept him from working and he had spells of unconsciousness, although these did not bring him visions. His *tingting*, he said, was 'stuck' (in Tok Pisin, *pas*). God had cut him off because he had abdicated his duties as prophet; God was testing him.

During the first months of the anthropologists' residence in Bunai, Tapo had been an almost pathetic figure in the village. He lived in a shack on the beach and complained that he was too weak to build a house. For six months he remained in the village, attending to his children like a mother, while his wife worked in the bush, gardening or producing sago. Other residents of his hamlet regarded him as insane. Indeed, on one occasion, his wife ran out of the shack shouting that Tapo had grabbed an axe and was going to kill her and everyone else. In his defence, Tapo said that the minstrels had driven him to fury with their incessant guitar playing.

After this incident, he spent several months in Nuang and Kapo, attracted by the Cemetery Cult. When he returned his health was much better. For the first time in years he spoke at meetings. But he was too late to carry his hamlet into the Cemetery Cult. The cult leaders of Malei and Lowaya had shunned Kampo, but—for reasons that never became clear to Schwartz—they welcomed Tapo into their cult activities. Within Lahan, he continued trying to nudge people towards the cult, using a tactic like that Tjamilo was using in Bunai. That is, he became a vigorous advocate of building a new cemetery, citing all the mundane arguments he could use in public. He did not speak of the role of cemeteries in the cult; everyone already knew this. But Tapo thought that if he could persuade Lahan to build a cemetery, an open commitment to the cult would follow. He was right. He found that the Lahan people were ready to pursue the cult, but they needed a leader, and they finally accepted Tapo.



**Figure 9.1: Pita Tapo became a strong advocate of the Cemetery Cult in Lahan, an Usiai hamlet of Bunai.**

Here, in 1954, he addresses a meeting for revealing and resolving interpersonal grievances, a step in making Lahan ready to receive the cargo.

Source: Theodore Schwartz.

Kampo had already made himself ineligible to lead the cult in most people's eyes, but Tapo's resumption of leadership was the final blow. Kampo stayed away from the meetings in Lahan, while Tapo initiated the process of wrong-straightening, which many agreed was long overdue. Even visitors from Lowa on the north coast who had been close to Kampo began to take part in Tapo's meetings. Kampo began to spend all his time with Samol, the leader of the Bunai Titan and an opponent of the cult. He took no action against the cult, however, until Lahan people began to build their cemetery and go into the interior to collect the bones of their dead. He then went to Lorengau to get permission from the district commissioner to build a new cemetery and move the bones of the dead. He told the district commissioner that he just wanted him to know what he was advocating in case Usiai people from the interior reported that Lahan had resumed cannibalism or told other wild stories. His intent, of course, was to draw the administration's attention to the cult activity in Lahan and his opposition to it in case the authorities decided to intervene.

## Titan factions in Bunai

In the Titan section of Bunai the cult situation was distinctive. Malei and Lowaya had entered the cult together. Yiru openly opposed it. Lahan was beginning to move towards it. Among the Titan, a faction led by Tjamilo aimed at recruiting a majority to the cult, but Samol, the *kaunsil*, opposed this.

Although others also took sides in this conflict, Tjamilo and Samol were the principal contestants and the leaders of their factions. Samol was the protégé of the old paramount *luluai*, Kisekup. He had been a storekeeper, a Catholic catechist, and a leader of a pre-Paliau local movement. He had missed the Noise, having withdrawn with a small group of followers to form a new settlement. When the Movement regrouped after the Noise, Paliau gave him a prominent role. In the years preceding the Cemetery Cult, many had come to see Samol as second only to Paliau within the Movement. He was Paliau's close follower and he took Paliau as a model, rather than a rival. Samol was a calm, quiet, and competent leader, more skilled in everything, from understanding the Bible to canoe building to gardening, than most of his Titan contemporaries. People clearly respected his knowledge. This latter was vital, for he was neither a forceful nor a very aggressive person. But he was skilled in managing a fickle public and the fragile links among the various groups within the Titan population of Bunai. He was especially good at keeping disputes from boiling over and preventing people from taking irreversible positions that would split the Bunai Titan. These were the skills he brought to opposing the Cemetery Cult, which threatened everything he had worked for throughout his years in the Movement.

Samol had worked with the Movement *kaunsil* organisation for years, living with the uncertainty of exercising only informal power, waiting for the de facto council organisation to be converted into an NGC. This day was very close now. It looked like many who pursued the cult felt they were in a race against the success of the official council, which would undermine the leaders of the cult and maybe alienate its ghostly guides.

In 1953, Samol had known of the cult for over a year. He had taken no public action, but he had watched it carefully. For example, he had made a record of every trip Tjamilo made to Johnston Island. When the time came to use this information in a speech attacking the cult leader, he was able to give each of the dates exactly, using his literacy to support his

authority, as was his custom. (Within the Movement, citing dates gave a speaker's argument greater strength, a practice that persists in today's version of the Movement.) Meanwhile, preparing for the official council kept Samol busy. He made repeated trips to Baluan, visiting Paliau to obtain the latest news. This took him out of the village several times a month.

Tjamilo took advantage of each of Samol's absences to advocate for the cult in village meetings. In some ways Tjamilo was comparable to Pita Tapo, for he was almost exclusively concerned with aspects of the Movement he could read as millenarian (as opposed to an understanding in which establishing an NGC was an appropriate goal on its own terms). He had moved from youth to adulthood simultaneously with the Noise. Like Tapo, the Noise had made him a leader and a teacher, although not a prophet. Unlike Tapo, Tjamilo denied ever having had a vision or seeing Jesus or the dead. But he believed in others' visions and he was far from a passive channel of communication. He gave everything a mystical meaning, sometimes sounding almost paranoid. He had virtually no formal education, but his memory for the spoken word—for people's speeches and accounts of supernatural revelations—was phenomenal. This, however, did not command the respect people accorded the notebook and pencil Samol always wielded on public occasions. To assert his claim to leadership, Tjamilo had only his moral righteousness and his single-minded devotion to the millenarian implications that he and others had found in Movement ideology and which had energised many early adherents. He was a self-appointed reminder of these elements in the Movement's origins. In 1946, he had eagerly repudiated the past. Now his vision was frozen in 1946 and 1947, when his life had taken on a meaning he wanted to perpetuate. Yet he was able to manoeuvre flexibly as he sought to restore the spirit of that time.

His influence, like that of Pita Tapo, had dwindled during the years of Movement innovation and building. He had, however, maintained a position in village affairs as a Movement *komiti*. For the most part this was a minor position. Typically, older men who gave up authority as traditional leaders to make way for younger New Way leaders became *komiti*. As *komiti*, Tjamilo represented only his own clan, but—atypically—he was younger than most such minor Movement functionaries and aspired to greater influence. He was unwilling to accept the limits of his role. A *komiti* was supposed to transmit the orders of the *kaunsil* (which ideally were arrived at communally at New Way meetings) to his clan or

hamlet. He was responsible for maintaining order in and guarding the morals of his group. When he was unable to handle a situation beyond the routine, he was to bring it to the New Way court to be heard by the *kaunsil*. Tjamilo performed these duties zealously. He was constantly alert for moral transgressions, not only in his own clan, but wherever they appeared. It was from this position that he attempted to bring the Titan of Bunai into the cult.

Tjamilo had travelled often to Johnston Island and other villages where the cult was active. But he broached the subject in Bunai cautiously. When he did, he referred only obliquely to the return of the dead and the arrival of the cargo. His approach was the model for Tapo's effort in Lahan to edge people towards fuller involvement in the cult by getting them to build a cemetery and collect the bones of the dead. He was confident that if he could get these tasks started he could begin to work on straightening wrongs, as the ghosts required, but which he could do surreptitiously in the name of the principles of the New Way. Then, he reasoned, a ghostly teacher would appear to the Bunai Titan and inspire others to turn to the Cemetery Cult. Talimelion, another Titan *komiti*, and Alphonse Kanawi, the *tultul* of pre-amalgamation Bunai, plus a number of women and about eight young men, were Tjamilo's only open followers. Among the young men was Markus Pwatjumel, who had dreamed of his dead father and of the plan for the new cemetery. Pwatjumel, however, was torn between his emotional leaning towards the cult and loyalty to Samol, his brother-in-law. Had it not been for Samol's opposition, many other Titan probably would have followed Tjamilo as well. Only Samol and a few others strongly opposed Tjamilo's plan to build a cemetery. The complexity of the situation, however, was considerable.

In the dual-level discourse typical of the meetings at which people discussed the cemetery proposal, the struggle over the cult went on just below the surface. Tjamilo made speeches calling for moral reform and emphasising specific steps for improving the present Titan cemetery, such as cutting the palms that grew among the graves. Samol argued that without these trees the sun would 'cook' the graves. Tjamilo, of course, wanted more than he made explicit, and those who supported his cemetery-improvement plan were implicitly consenting to its cult rationale. At the time, not even Samol was ready to bring the submerged argument to the surface. He still felt that he could contain and stop the cult before it came to the attention of the Europeans and discredited the Movement.

Through his eloquent use of dual-level discourse, however, Tjamilo gained more support than he could have through explicitly advocating the cult. Many people found the pretence that the surface level was the only level convenient. Those who were bored with Movement routine, those attracted to the emphasis on the ghosts—a link with the past—in the new cult, and even those whose commitment to the Movement made it hard to admit that the cult intrigued them, could consent to a program of cemetery improvement for overtly pragmatic reasons. But Samol did not rely solely on veiled debate. He tried to keep a flow of projects constantly before the meetings that decided on community work. Supposedly, Tjamilo could not command community labour for his projects—such as new burial grounds built to cult specifications—unless such meetings approved them. Against Samol's tactic, he was forced to openly refuse to put the meeting decisions into effect.

Things did not come to this pass until the Bunai Titan were already sharply divided in their views of cult developments in Malei and Lowaya. Before even these Usiai hamlets had started a cemetery project, Tjamilo had organised his procession to the pre-cult Bunai graveyard with skeletons retrieved from previous village sites, marching through the Usiai section with flags, coffins, crosses, and flowers, singing 'John Brown's Body'. But now he embarked on building a completely new cemetery for the Titan alone, just as Malei and Lowaya were initially determined to build their separate graveyards.

But when Bunai Usiai support for the cult came into the open, Tjamilo's cemetery project became more, rather than less, difficult. He could no longer maintain even the pretence that his purposes were hygienic and logistical. And the conspicuous Usiai display of cult enthusiasm led many Titan people of amalgamated Bunai to oppose the cult simply because of their customary contempt for the Usiai. To proceed, Tjamilo had to defy Samol more openly, with the active support of about 10 people and the tacit support of an indeterminate number of others.

Tjamilo and his faction ignored the projects Samol assigned. They refused, for example, to help produce Bunai's quota of sago palm leaf thatch that assistant district officer James Landman had requested for one of the new school buildings on Baluan. Samol denounced Tjamilo for blatantly opposing the Movement program, but not yet for advocating the cult. The cult hamlets of Malei and Lowaya were also refusing to take part in community projects, and Samol accused them of leaving the Movement, but without mentioning the cult.



**Figure 9.2: The gate to the graveyard Tjamilo and his followers built in Bunai in 1954.**

Thomas, the tutelary ghost of the Cemetery Cult, instructed his followers to transfer the remains of their deceased kin from previous burial sites to such specially designed cemeteries. Tjamilo's, however, was the only such cemetery completed on the south coast. Source: Theodore Schwartz.

Tjamilo now moved quickly. He sent Alphonse Kanawi, the Bunai *tultul* (who, as *tultul*, was still technically an administration-appointed official within the village—in fact, the only one since Kisekup had resigned as paramount *luluai*), to Ndropwa to ask the plantation manager if the Bunai Titan could use land just behind the village belonging to the plantation for a new burial ground. The manager gave his permission. Within 10 days, Tjamilo and his supporters had cleared, levelled, and built railings around a plot of ground. They followed the Johnston Island design, but added a turnstile like the one allegedly shown to Ponram during his death and resurrection. Pwatjumel allegedly built the cemetery's two gates according to his own dream, although they were identical to those on Johnston Island. However, Samol's followers took this as confirmation of the validity of Pwatjumel's dream. While this work was going on, Schwartz went to Tjamilo's house to visit and he found Tjamilo's verandah filled with wooden crosses ready for the reburial of the skeletons collected earlier.

Tjamilo now tried to assume leadership of the cult for all of Bunai, but with limited success. The Usiai still wouldn't take him fully into their confidence. In his conversations with Schwartz, Tjamilo spoke as though he were aware of everything connected with the cult everywhere. When conversing with Schwartz following the appearance of Malei's teacher-ghost, Schwartz mentioned this event, assuming Tjamilo knew about it. Either he did not know or he gave a remarkable performance of a man who was startled. He left Schwartz immediately to go to Malei and Lowaya, where he spent much of the next week.

At the end of March, Samol and Kampo called a Bunai-wide meeting. Although all village residents were invited, of the Usiai only the leaders attended. Before the meeting, Samol, Kampo, and Schwartz discussed the cult. Kampo was depressed and angry. He said: 'The word of God is of two kinds, his true word and the word with which he tempts and tests us. The first belongs to Jesus and the second to Christus'. (Christus appeared to be Kampo's transformation of the idea of the Antichrist.) If the cult really represented the word of God, Kampo reasoned, it would be available to everyone, not only to Malei and Lowaya.

The meeting went poorly for Samol and Kampo. At first, Samol did not allude to the cult. Instead, much to Schwartz's embarrassment, Samol told the Usiai leaders he had called them together to ask why they no longer invited Schwartz to their meetings, something Schwartz had mentioned to Samol only in passing. The Usiai said that, yes, they were at fault in this

respect. Sayau of Yiru, a younger man who had spent much of his early life on a plantation and who had been decorated for his military service in the war, rose to answer Samol's original question. He said: 'It is our leaders who must call them. We men and women can't come call them for nothing. What will we tell them? About all of our stinking ways?' Sayau, a thoughtful man, said he was revolted by the state of his own hamlet's indolence and apathy, something Schwartz had heard him speak of before.

Kampo then spoke of the division in Bunai, but—again—without mentioning its cause; that is, the cult. He said he had heard that some villagers wanted to go to live in Kapo and Nuang and warned them not to because they would have to pay double the taxes when the NGC came because their names would then be in two census books. This was in fact an empty threat. But Kampo almost mentioned the cult, saying he had heard about something going on in Nuang and that if it had anything to do with God, then people shouldn't hide it.

To this point in the meeting, no one had accused the Usiai of anything, but they had come ready to defend themselves. Pantret, Pondis, Kilopwai, and Petrus Popu spoke for the Usiai. They asked who had accused them of worshipping or praying to a piece of wood or something that whistles. They denied it (although no one had openly made such accusations). Pantret made a speech inviting martyrdom, of the kind so common during the Movement's early opposition to government officers. He also said that he knew nothing about Malei, but all that was happening in Lowaya was his own idea. He had simply decided to revive all the good, cooperative, and obedient ways of 1946. Let them punish him or put him in jail for it, he declared. Pondis of Malei denied that there was anything for the meeting to discuss; nothing they were doing in his hamlet was the least bit new.

But Bombowai and Kisekup continued their roundabout attack on the cult. Bombowai announced that they were now going to engage in *tok bokis*, Tok Pisin for hiding your meaning in metaphor or other kind of indirect discourse. People were always alert for this, especially from public speakers, but announcing one's intention in this way was highly unusual. Bombowai apparently wanted to be extra clear that he meant the opposite of what he said, although announcing this mitigated any diplomatic advantage gained by not speaking his mind directly. 'Lowaya is all right', he pronounced. 'They are virtuous, but Yiru is completely depraved.' To further obfuscate, although very conspicuously, Bombowai

and Kisekup included themselves in the accusations they aimed at others. So Kisekup, who was not inclined to favour the cult, said: 'This thing that we have been hearing about, you and I think that it is good, but think well. The council [meaning the administration-sanctioned NGC] is coming'.

Kilopwai finally threatened to take Malei out of the village because of the false accusations against them. Samol and Kampo immediately became conciliatory. The threat of withdrawing from a community had been an effective one even in Fortune's and Mead's day. Kilopwai was using it now for the second time within months. (Earlier in the year he had threatened to take Malei out of Bunai over a land dispute.) He and several other Usiai Cemeterians had dissimulated repeatedly at this meeting, putting on a show of injured innocence. Yet it looked to Schwartz like they were genuinely angry and resentful, perhaps at having their commitment to the cult questioned even implicitly. Samol backed off. He said that nothing was wrong, but that it was his responsibility to watch for sores (the painful skin ulcers that in the deep tropics often develop from even the smallest cuts) before they burst and suppurate.

In April, there were many more wrong-straightening meetings in the Usiai cult hamlets. Tjamilo spoke frequently at these meetings, urging moral regeneration and pointing out how people's behaviour was falling short of New Way standards. At one meeting he said he feared that none of the younger men who would someday replace him and Samol cared about anything. They took little interest in village affairs, he asserted, but in this they were only following their parents' bad examples. He complained that families were disintegrating and described several recent violent quarrels between husbands and wives. Tjamilo's speeches in these days were full of threats. On one occasion, after scolding the women for their indifference, for their barrenness, and for their poor care of the children, he shouted from the meeting space to the surrounding houses: 'All of you women who have run away from the meeting, you never say anything but you can't escape this. It will sleep with you in your houses. It will make you sick. It will make you die'.

In March, news came to Bunai that Paliau was in jail again. This time it sounded non-political. Paliau had been to Rambutjo to investigate reports of the Cemetery Cult. He was to have proceeded to Bunai. But when he returned from Rambutjo, his son told him that in Paliau's absence his daughter had married a man of whom Paliau disapproved. Paliau ran from

the beach to the couple's house, pulled his daughter out, and struck her several times. She pressed charges and Paliau served a month in jail. Samol announced to a meeting in Bunai that Paliau's arrest was a good lesson—that the arm of the law extended to all regardless of rank or prestige. Later, Paliau claimed that his imprisonment had been a political attack, that his offence was too trivial to deserve more than a reprimand. At any rate, it kept him out of Bunai in April. Samol continued his indirect, scolding speeches throughout the month, but he had decided to wait for Paliau before taking stronger action. He was confident that Paliau would put an end to the cult. For their part, the cult leaders expressed confidence (although they were not truly confident) that Paliau would back them and tell them what they had to do after they finished building the cemeteries.

Easter passed, with its ceremony of the crosses on Johnston Island and in Tawi, but Jesus did not return. Meetings to purify the people's *tingting* and correct all wrongs continued, but nothing happened. The teacher-ghosts continued to manifest through their mediums, but they brought no new revelations or prophecies. Cult adherents became more and more anxious.

## Bunai in the balance

Opposition to the cult in Bunai had at least prevented it from flourishing among the Titan people of Bunai. Only a small group wanted to take part and they were having little or no success recruiting reinforcements, nor could they take their enthusiasm to Malei and Lowaya, for these Usiai hamlets apparently valued exclusivity over forging a wider coalition. Among the Usiai hamlets, Yiru was definitely against the cult, while Lahan was making a belated start.

Schwartz and Shargo learned that among cult adherents, some—despite their regular participation in cult activities—were concerned about the cult's obsession with the dead. During the Noise, people sought the return of the dead bringing cargo, but they left their bones alone. In 1954, some who longed for the cargo were nevertheless uncomfortable with practices little removed in many ways from the past. Their hopes were mingled with doubts.

To the best of the anthropologists' knowledge, all the Cemetery Cult participants with whom they were familiar were more cautious about committing themselves to the cult in front of the entire village than

participants in the Noise had been. Vivid memories of the dramatic failure of the Noise may well have accounted for this as well as for the failure of the Cemetery Cult to spread ‘like fire’, even within one community, albeit amalgamated Bunai had become a single entity only relatively recently. Perhaps most telling, in stark contrast to the Noise, during the Cemetery Cult no one ever named a date for the Last Day, when the dead would return in company with Jesus to transform the world forever. But although this saved adherents from rapid—perhaps repeated—disappointment, they also had to bear the stress of constant readiness. In addition, the administration had announced that the officially sanctioned NGC would be installed in May and James Landman had already visited Bunai to prepare for electing officers and collecting taxes. This new channel for people’s hopes for change must certainly have weakened the cult’s appeal.

Even so, although the cult had stopped growing, those already committed remained dedicated. Hopes of a miracle aside, many clearly enjoyed the thrill of defiance and the satisfaction of excluding people who they assumed saw them as inferior. Yet the Cemeterians also had become accustomed to being part of the Movement and to thinking of its 33 villages as a unit. It quickly became obvious that the cult would not become the new face of the Movement. It would remain a minority occupation including very few of the Bunai residents of highest status. Only two things might save it. Jesus or a few ships laden with cargo could finally show up or Paliau could come out in support of the cult. But Paliau was in jail and in his absence both sides claimed him.

The administration probably would have heard some news of the cult even if Schwartz and Shargo had not become friends with Landman, who had asked the anthropologists about rumours of events in Bunai. They told him of the ongoing contest between cult adherents and opponents. They knew Landman was sympathetic with Samol’s request that there be no outside intervention. Around the same time, Samol had also told Landman a little about that contest. Samol held that the cult was under control, but he told Landman that he would let him know if there was any trouble he could not handle. Samol knew that if news of the cult reached the European community, most of whom did not understand local events as subtly as Landman, the whites would pressure the administration to postpone initiating the NGC. Hostility to the government had reached new heights within the cult, but many cult opponents felt that supporting the administration’s program was in their best interest.

## The Cemetery Cult in Patusi and Pere

In other Titan villages within the Movement area but outside Bunai, the cult had made little headway. Pere and Patusi exemplify this situation, but neither had any Titan people on Baluan or Mok people started building new cemeteries. Villagers on Rambutjo Island, the scene of Wapei's prophecies in 1947, had built a new cemetery and some had visited Johnston Island, but they had gone no further. Some even assumed the role of reformed cargoists, warning others of its dangers. They had, indeed, seen how wrong things could go; many had seen Muli mutilate his brother Wapei on the beach with a bush knife. Mok people, under the leadership of Lukas, took a similar stance. Some had warned the Johnston Islanders that they were inviting trouble. In the last week of April, a delegation from Mok also visited Bunai, where Lukas made an outspoken and direct speech warning the Cemeterians of their folly. The Cemeterians listening said nothing, but when they marched again their attitude was especially defiant.

In contrast, led by the still-influential *luluai* Tjawan, the rank and file in Patusi, on the south coast, were eager for the cult. Patusi had started work on a new cemetery almost simultaneously with the people of Johnston Island and Tawi. Sapa, the woman who served as a medium for Thomas, was from Patusi, and several groups from Patusi had attended the seances on Johnston Island. In January 1953, a group of Pere people went to Patusi to learn more about the cult, just as they had sought knowledge of the Noise in 1947. Patusi had cleared ground for the cemetery. Villagers had collected a number of skeletons from the old graves, adorned them, and placed them in their wooden boxes on verandahs. But for months there they stayed, waiting for people to finish the cemetery. When Schwartz and Shargo left Manus, the Patusi cemetery was still unfinished, and by then Gabriel Pokekes, the *kaunsil*, had stopped the progress of the cult almost single-handedly.

Pokekes had believed in the Noise in 1947 when the Ndropwa plantation manager sent him to investigate reports from Tawi. The appearance of Popei's ghost and the seances had impressed him, but the outcome had been a bad disappointment. In spite of his youth (only young men had gone to work on the Ndropwa plantation), Patusi later chose him as its *kaunsil*. He took his work seriously and commanded real authority, but he had permitted the Cemetery Cult to start collecting bones of the dead without comment. When this activity failed to lose momentum on

its own, he held a meeting at which he simply declared that as *kaunsil* he forbade any further work on the new cemetery or any other cult activities. He told people plainly that he feared the cult would lead to trouble as had the Noise and he reminded people of Wapei's murder.

As noted above, even some cult participants in Bunai were nervous about its similarities with pre-Christian treatment of the dead. Pokekes raised this issue in Patusi publicly and far more explicitly than anyone had in Bunai. Pulling no punches, he called the cult seances *tilitili*—the Titan word for communication with household ghosts of the kind Fortune (1965 [1935]) described. This probably touched a nerve with some who wanted the cult in Patusi. They wanted, as Schwartz and Shargo knew, to try again what had failed in 1946, but they professed no desire to go back to the pre-Christian past. Some cult proponents addressed such fears by arguing that the Cemetery Cult followed the model of the whites—for instance, the pomp and ceremony with which the Americans treated their war dead—not the ways of their own ancestors. Yet the whistling of the ghosts was vividly reminiscent of older times.

Patusi cult opponents accused cult proponents of thinking more of the ghosts than of Jesus or God. But proponents had in effect modernised their ancestors to make them compatible with the New Way. The ghosts they spoke of were not the malicious wandering ghosts or the undependable household guardians of the past. The ancestors the cult envisioned were beings who lived lives of virtue in the Sky with Jesus. Younger people may not have noticed this contrast, but some of those old enough to remember the old days purveyed to Schwartz a cosmetically enhanced picture of the past. In the very distant past, some told Schwartz, people had been good. There had been no warfare and no cannibalism. That golden age had eventually ended, but even in the subsequent times, some said, there had been a few men who would have met New Way standards. Perhaps so. But the benevolent ancestors of cult doctrine had little in common with either the Titan of 1928, as Fortune described them, or with those portrayed in the reminiscences of old men who quietly scorned the Movement—men unrepentantly nostalgic for, in their eyes, the more exciting and heroic times of raiding, trading, and flaunting their prowess in exchange.

But cult proponents preferred ancestors who looked down on them from the Sky, ready to remake their lives. And Pokekes's efforts failed to sway many of them in Patusi. Finally, realising that efforts at suasion were

pointless, he invoked his authority as *kaunsil* for Patusi and announced that Patusi people must not participate in the cult. Instead of simply ignoring him and continuing cult activity, as Tjamilo responded to Samol in Bunai, Tjawan flew into a rage and then withdrew from public activity. At the end of a month, he appeared at a village meeting and shook hands with Pokekes, signifying that he accepted his judgement. A Patusi youth continued for some time to see his father's ghost, whom Thomas had declared Patusi's ghostly teacher, but few villagers paid him any attention.

Pere people watched the floundering Patusi cult from the sidelines for several weeks before dipping into it themselves. Several months before Schwartz and Shargo arrived in Manus, Pere men going to the market at Patusi came on a group of Patusi men gathered in a private house discussing the cult. The Patusi men allowed the Pere party to enter and told them, as reported to Schwartz: 'You men of Pere. You don't want to do this work [i.e. of the cult]. But your fathers, your children, your women who died before, where will they arise? You don't know very well where they are buried. You must go dig them up and bring them together in your own place'. Not long thereafter, a number of Pere people began to transfer the bones of their dead from scattered graves to the cemetery they had built close to the beach when they moved the village there in 1948. In a week they moved more than 100 skeletons from the graves they could find easily. The 1948 graveyard was already too crowded and even before the cult Pere villagers had discussed building a new one on land which—like the land behind Bunai—belonged to a plantation. But the Pere *luluai* convinced the plantation manager to deny permission.

Mead, living in Pere, apparently either did not notice this activity or chose to ignore it, and Pere people were careful not to mention it to any of the anthropologists. When Schwartz and Shargo later learned of the Cemetery Cult activities in Pere, they also learned that in spite of the energy expended gathering the skeletons, many Pere people who were interested in the cult were nevertheless cautious about it. They were suspicious of its source in Johnston Island and its popularity among Usiai people, both in Bunai and the inland villages of Nuang and Kapo. Some Pere villagers were sceptical of the cult to the point of ridiculing cult activists and openly mocking the people of Johnston Island.

One highly influential young man, however, found the cult irresistible. He visited Johnston Island repeatedly and took part in a seance with Thomas. This was the schoolteacher, Prenis Tjolai. Prenis, then in his late

twenties, commanded more respect than usual for one so young. In 1948, Pere had selected him to go to Baluan to be trained as a Movement leader. Prenis had no formal schooling, but he had organised a school where he passed on his limited knowledge of reading and writing in Tok Pisin, some scraps of English, and some elementary arithmetic to the adolescent boys and girls of Pere. His limited knowledge frustrated him, but he said his school would suffice until the government started a real one.

Although he was considerably younger than the other Pere leaders, he was of *lapan* status and the son and grandson of Pere *luluai*. Older leaders treated him as a respected equal and he had a voice in most meetings on village affairs. But all his adult experience was within the Movement, and its more metaphysical aspects—the spheres in which it most resembled a cargo cult—aroused his greatest interest.

Prenis's brother, Akustin Seliau, who lived in Patusi, had attended Thomas's earliest seances on Johnston Island, but he didn't tell Prenis about them until early in 1953, several months before the anthropologists arrived. Akustin also told Prenis of an event not long after Christmas 1953 that in his view confirmed the truth of Thomas's revelations. Akustin was fishing at night near the old lagoon site of Pere when he heard a whistle. He assumed someone buried near the old village was trying to contact him. He said aloud the name of his younger brother, Pomat, who had died as a child, and heard an answering, affirmative whistle. Undoubtedly influenced by Thomas's messages, he decided Pomat was probably asking to be reburied, and hurried to Pere to tell Prenis about it. The brothers asked others whether Pomat was actually buried on the small island near which Akustin heard the whistle. On hearing that he was, they became thoroughly convinced. Akustin spent that night in Prenis's house in Pere. Prenis later told a few others in Pere, from whom Schwartz heard the story, that during the night, the ghost of Akustin's daughter, a little girl, Kisolel, appeared to him. She confirmed—no doubt through a series of queries and whistled replies—that Pomat had indeed called to Akustin, and that she, too, wanted to be reburied.<sup>4</sup>

---

4 Kisolel was the only ghost anyone reported seeing in Pere in connection with the cult. Akustin wanted to rebury Pomat and Kisolel in Patusi, but Prenis was vehemently opposed to reburying their kin anywhere but in Pere. Akustin and Prenis belonged not only to Pere village but to the Pere clan that gave the village its name. Within the cult, Prenis's attitude probably reflected more than clan pride. We can see here both the common cult conviction that it was through one's own ancestors one was most immediately linked to God and fear that people of other villages might fail to meet the moral standards the ghosts required and scuttle the hopes of one's own village.

Prenis was excited about this but he decided to ask Kisakiu, the Johnston Island *kaunsil*, whether Paliau approved of the Johnston Island seances. Kisakiu told him that he, Sapa (the medium for Thomas), and Thomas himself had gone to Baluan and spoken with Paliau and that Paliau had approved what they were doing. Thus encouraged, Prenis started attending the seances. Like numbers of others, Prenis told Schwartz that he was sceptical at first but came to accept that Thomas was genuine. It probably helped that in the first seance Prenis attended Thomas mentioned Pere, saying Pere must begin work on the cemetery and that there was much wrong with Pere that its people had better hasten to rectify.

Prenis convinced at least some Pere people to begin collecting the bones of their dead and he brought news from the seances back from his visits to Johnston Island. Most Pere people remained indifferent, yet Prenis persevered. He attended the celebration of the new cemetery there that Schwartz, not yet knowing of the cult, had found inexplicably curious. In one of the seances Prenis attended on this occasion, Thomas named Pere as a place where people mocked his revelations. When Prenis and the young men he had brought with him left Johnston Island after that event, their canoe was swamped when crossing the reef to the open sea. This was a difficult passage and many canoes had trouble there, but Prenis was convinced that his mishap was a warning against mocking Thomas further.

Prenis told Schwartz that when he returned to Pere he called a meeting at which he told his fellow villagers that he knew they mocked him behind his back, but God would be the judge of his actions and of the Johnston Islanders. No one rose to the defence of the alleged mockers, but obstacles to Prenis attracting a following abounded. Schwartz knew, for instance, that many Pere people held that following Johnston Island or Tawi in anything made no sense. A number of influential men rebuffed Prenis largely because they found repugnant the thought of any kind of subordination to Johnston Island or Tawi.<sup>5</sup> As one man, Pius Selan, said: 'Never mind Thomas. This isn't his village. Thomas doesn't belong to Pere, he belongs to another village. You can't bring his ways in here'. John Kilepak, Bopau, and Lokes told Schwartz in private that they

---

5 This is an example of a phenomenon Schwartz (1975: 117) calls competitive diffusion or cultural totemism, common in Melanesia but by no means confined to that part of the world. In his words: 'To seize upon incipient differences for their emblematic value appears to cause, as much as to reflect, social differentiation ... Cultural totemism is not only a form of ethnic recognition and categorization, it is an ethnicizing process—a mechanism of cultural speciation'.

agreed with Pius Selan completely: ‘We have plenty of ancestors who died’, one said, ‘why can’t they come speak to us, why just someone from another place?’

Not long after Prenis’s failed meeting, some Pere men said they wanted proof that Thomas was real. Prenis had testified that he saw and heard Thomas with his own eyes and ears. He meant, of course, that he had attended the seances and heard the whistles. He added that many others there had also heard the whistles.<sup>6</sup> But even seeing and hearing in company didn’t satisfy these sceptics. John Kilepak and Lokes said they wanted some tangible manifestation, a request Kampo had also made—in private—to the Cemeterians in Bunai. Neither in Bunai nor in Pere, however, did anyone ask for such proof in an open meeting. But in Pere, Kilepak made himself perfectly clear to Prenis in private: ‘If Thomas appears, we want him to bring something that we can hold in our hands. Then it would be true and we could believe in him. We think about everything that happened in 1946. All of these things appeared to people, but there was not one thing that we could actually hold in our hands. That’s what some of us said among ourselves’. But pathetically small tangibles were not enough. Ten shillings had materialised (allegedly) on Johnston Island, and some said that 10 shillings and some tobacco had materialised in Malei; but, as Kampo said, nothing really substantial—no warships, no aeroplanes. Prenis testified to his experience with Thomas, but he had neither warships nor even 10 shillings to show for it.

During the 1953 Christmas celebrations on Baluan, Prenis spoke to Paliau, with Pokanau and Lukas Bonyalo as witnesses. Paliau made another statement about the cult ambiguous enough for Prenis to interpret as support. Paliau allegedly told the three men to work to correct the serious wrongs that existed in Pere, such as the many divorces and remarriages when a former spouse was still living. In January 1954, Prenis and Pokanau tried to carry out the instructions they said Paliau had given them, but it is possible that the suggestion was not as specific as reported. It would have been typical of Paliau merely to recommend that Pere people straighten out misconduct in their village. This was his usual

---

6 The Pere people who heard of this incident from Prenis, and later told Schwartz of it, understood that both Prenis and Akustin had seen Kisolel. But Prenis later told Schwartz that he did not actually speak to or see Kisolel; only Akustin did. He apparently believed Akustin so implicitly that he initially told Schwartz in all sincerity that he and Akustin both saw the ghost. Such participation after the fact may be behind some other cases in which more than one person reported the presence of a ghost, though it would not apply to the formal seances on Johnston Island itself.

evasive tactic when people tried to get him to confirm or deny the truth of the cult. In any event, Prenis's and Pokanau's effort to crack down on marital laxness failed.

Prenis, Pokanau, Stephan Tjamuko (the newly elected *komiti*), and the *kaunsil*, Petrus Pomat, proposed publicly that the six marriages in Pere involving divorced people should be broken up and the partners should return to the original spouse. Pokanau, Pomat, and Tjamuko argued that they should do so at once, because the NGC would come soon, and when it did anyone who had committed this sort of sin would be punished. In Bunai, as well, some had argued for taking measures recommended by cult ghosts on the grounds that there had to be a moral house cleaning before the NGC arrived.

This argument reflected concerns not confined to Cemeterians. The perceived frequency of divorce resulting from adultery and followed by quick remarriage troubled numbers of villagers. But opinion was sharply divided. Some of the men involved in these marriages were popular and respected. And all the specific remarriages to be dissolved were at least two years old. Further, this attempt to undo subsequent marriages of divorced people was not based on New Way dicta; rather, it appeared to hark back to earlier Catholic teachings.

But orators harassed the parties to such marriages at meeting after meeting. They proclaimed that their marriages were the worst sins in the village, God was angry, and—if God's anger wasn't frightening enough—that they would get into trouble when the NGC arrived. Schwartz, taking unusual but understandable liberties as an anthropological observer, suggested at one meeting that perhaps everyone would be satisfied if church weddings were held to formalise the second marriages, or perhaps they could ask the assistant district officer for some kind of administration validation. Prenis Tjolai, the most vehement cult enthusiast, denounced this idea sharply. But Karol Manoi made a highly emotional speech to the effect that people should remember that they were all brothers; they should cease harassing these men before they either left the village or were driven to suicide. Prenis Tjolai and Petrus Pomat replied that they could not force these men to break their marriages, but it was their duty as the village leaders responsible for Pere's moral condition to continue to pursue this matter. 'God will find out these marriages of theirs', one of them pronounced. 'If he wants to break them with death, he can.' Eventually, the zealots were content to leave the matter in God's hands.

Prenis Tjolai now waited for Paliau and made no further visits to Johnston Island. He had failed to get Pere to listen respectfully to Thomas. He had failed to obtain a site for a new graveyard, even though most villagers were willing to build one. He had failed to convince other villagers to enact the moral reforms he advocated. But he had not given up. He still hoped Paliau would endorse the cult unequivocally and he determined to wait for that.

## Desperate measures in Bunai

As the Cemetery Cult proceeded haltingly in Bunai, a few adherents, eager to bring their work to fruition, tried a new tactic. Some were still not certain that Schwartz and Shargo were completely trustworthy. And they knew that when pressed for their opinions the anthropologists discouraged people from taking up the cult. At times, however, in private conversations with Schwartz, adherents hopefully implied that Schwartz really knew more about the cult than they did. A few went beyond this. As their efforts dragged on without an end in sight, several cult enthusiasts, acting independently of each other, approached Schwartz to broach the possibility that the United States might intervene on behalf of the people of Manus. Some believed that the whites had attained the First Order, that the way of the *tingting* was the secret of the whites' power and wealth, and that Americans would be especially sympathetic to the plight of the Cemeterians. A more common idea within the Cemetery Cult was that the whites had attained only a superior form of the Second Order. Hence, some suggested to Schwartz that, by helping the blacks, by sharing their secret knowledge, Schwartz and Shargo might also gain the First Order and surpass even their present level of wealth and power. But events would overtake these and all other cult plans while Schwartz and Shargo were still on the scene.

This text is taken from *Like Fire: The Paliau Movement and Millenarianism in Melanesia*, by Theodore Schwartz and Michael French Smith, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

[doi.org/10.22459/LF.2021.09](https://doi.org/10.22459/LF.2021.09)