

Preface: Why, how, and for whom

In early 2012, when I visited Theodore (Ted) Schwartz at his home in Del Mar, California, he had recently finished digitising audio recordings of interviews he had conducted with Manus people in Papua New Guinea (PNG) from 1953 through 1995; the annotated catalogue went on for many pages.¹ Ted gave me an audio tour and we listened to Paliau, his supporters, and his detractors talk about the Paliau Movement, Paliau as saviour, Paliau as betrayer, and topics ranging from the politics of local-level Movement leadership to when the dead ancestors would return to life. There was more than enough material here for a book that would not simply update Ted's early-career monograph (Schwartz 1962), but replace it as the primary scholarly source on the Paliau Movement. A lot had happened in the Movement since the monograph was published, and much of the data Ted had collected since the 1950s called for thinking again about Paliau and the events described in the 1962 volume. By early 2013, Ted and I had decided to collaborate on a new book on the Paliau Movement. I don't remember exactly how we reached that decision, but it was obvious that we would regret not writing the book and writing it was clearly a two-person job.

We knew that such an intimately detailed record of so many decades in the life of a social movement in the Pacific Islands—or almost anywhere—was rare, and we felt that making it widely available was virtually an obligation. Also, although his failing vision made it difficult, Ted had been reading some of the recent anthropological literature on cargo cults, of which the

1 These recordings and Schwartz's other original research records are now housed at the Archive for Melanesian Anthropology at the University of California, San Diego, library ([library.library.ucsd.edu/research-and-collections/collections/special-collections-and-archives/collections/melanesian.html](http://library.ucsd.edu/research-and-collections/collections/special-collections-and-archives/collections/melanesian.html)). The archive provides a searchable online catalogue.

Paliau Movement provides dramatic examples. I had been doing the same and I agreed with Ted that many anthropologists were entertaining ideas about cargo cults and millenarianism that needed firm rebutting.

We also agreed that neither of us could write the book alone. It would require analysing decades of Ted's still-raw data and reviewing literature in several fields. But Ted's vision was going from bad to worse and he was feeling his 80-plus years in painful and limiting ways. Similarly, I couldn't interpret Ted's data on my own. Even though I spoke the language of Ted's cache of interviews fluently, I couldn't hear in them all that he could.² Every time we listened to an interview, Ted broke in frequently to add remembered details or draw my attention to something that I hadn't noticed but that leapt out at him because of his long familiarity with the people speaking and the larger context.

In 2013, I had just finished a third book about my work in Kragur (Smith 2013) and I was free to start another major project—preferably, one that would stretch my abilities as this one surely would. I was also flattered that Ted regarded me as a worthy collaborator. I first met Ted in 1970, when I entered the PhD program in cultural anthropology at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), where he was a faculty member. I quickly gravitated towards studying with him and I served as his teaching assistant whenever I could. That led to him offering me a position as one of his three research assistants in Manus Province, PNG, from mid-June through early September 1973.

This was my first time in PNG and a major event in my life. That year I had been seriously wondering if I really wanted to pursue a university career—the amount of sitting indoors it entailed was one mark against it—but by the time I returned from Manus I was eager to get back to PNG to do my own research, whatever I might do next. With Ted as my adviser, I went back to PNG (in 1975–76), did research in a village called Kragur in East Sepik Province, wrote my doctoral dissertation, and got my degree.

I knew from Ted's example that doing research in PNG could be habit forming, and this proved true for me as well. Although my PhD did not lead me to a university career, I found ways to go back to PNG several

2 Most of the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Tok Pisin, the major lingua franca of PNG, about which we provide more information in 'Spelling and pronunciation of Tok Pisin words and Manus proper names'.

times while making a living outside the academy. I moved in university circles only fitfully after leaving UCSD, but I kept in touch with Ted, who was always more interested in my last trip to PNG than in how I was earning my keep. He encouraged me to keep visiting Kragur whenever I could, despite excellent reasons for putting this interest aside and concentrating on paid employment. For this I will always be grateful. And because of this, in 2013 I could share Ted's passion for getting a more complete Paliau Movement story on record and for having a say in related anthropological debates.

That is why we decided to collaborate on this book. Here's how we wrote it. One of the first things we did was listen to dozens of the recorded interviews at Ted's home in Del Mar. This entailed a lot of sitting down indoors while the sun shone brightly outside. From this we both needed the relief of conducting some of our discussions while pacing the long driveway between the pens where the goats, sheep, chickens, rabbits, and a Vietnamese pig live, and the paddock that belongs to Arturo the wild burro and Tiny the miniature horse, with a final turn on the paths through Ted's large collection of bonsai.

The interviews were our richest source of data, and many of the most important had been transcribed years ago. But we listened to these again, as Ted commented and I took notes. We initially ignored the transcripts so we could base our thinking as much as possible on people's words in their own voices, with their original emphases and inflections. This engages the recesses of memory and stimulates questions of interpretation better than reading the most precise written records. In early working sessions we also had long conversations about what topics the book should address and what we should say about them. We recorded these and had them transcribed.

Between visits to Del Mar—where I travelled from my home in Silver Spring, Maryland (just outside Washington, DC)—I continued delving into the relevant literature. Drawing on this work, Ted's theoretical writings, transcripts of our discussions, sections of the 1962 monograph, and notes on the interviews, I began drafting and expanding book outlines and chapter summaries. As these took shape, I returned to Del Mar where I read them to Ted, we discussed them, and I made notes for revising them. We proceeded in this way more or less chapter by chapter with a lot of circling back to revise all that had been written before. Ted's health

problems prevented him from typing or even writing by hand as well as from reading, so composing and revising fell to me. But the reading aloud and critique of my efforts that we conducted together was intense.

Unfortunately, by the time we reached the concluding chapter, Ted's health had deteriorated so much that he could no longer take part in this process. We had discussed many times the issues this last chapter addresses and I believe that what I wrote continues the trajectory of the book's analyses and arguments and that Ted would not raise any significant objections. Still, I bear more responsibility for the final chapter than does Ted. (Similarly, I wrote the note on spelling and pronunciation of Manus proper names that follows this preface without Ted's knowledge of linguistics or the languages of Manus.)

The 'whom' in this preface's title is primarily anthropologists who focus on social change in PNG and other Melanesian locales.³ But we also commend it to scholars in any field who are interested in millenarianism—the hope for and pursuit of a miraculous, supernaturally mediated transformation of the world—wherever it occurs. As we argue, millenarianism is almost always a timely topic, but it may be unusually relevant now, because—as Ted has argued with great force—millenarianism inclines people to embrace highly implausible explanations for events and reject explanations for which there is sound evidence. It is no coincidence that this is also the kind of thinking characteristic of conspiracy theorists and to which they incite their audiences.

I am writing this at my new home in western upper-lower Michigan, where in normal times social distancing means staying clear of bears emerging from hibernation, hungry and grumpy. But the COVID-19 pandemic has changed that. The effects of this novel coronavirus on physical health are horrifying. But the way in which people in many parts of the world are reacting psychologically to the pandemic is also chilling. Just as though they were caught up in millenarian fervour, they are cutting loose from reasonably sober everyday logic. They are denying things for which there is overwhelming empirical evidence—for example, that there really is a virus that is killing people at a great rate. Simultaneously, they seize on the idea that reports of such deaths are part of a massive conspiracy to, for example, undermine national economies or impose totalitarian regimes. Here in the United States, conspiracy thinking—

3 We explain the Melanesian label in Chapter 1.

the shadow side of the millenarian mind—is undermining civic life. Perhaps the most malignant conspiracy fiction (spread by outgoing President Trump, among others) is that the Democratic Party candidates, Joseph Biden (President) and Kamala Harris (Vice-President), won the 2020 presidential election only by conspiring to carry out nation-wide election fraud. Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, thousands of Trump supporters reacted by attacking the United States Capitol on 6 January 2021, flaunting racist and anti-Semitic messages and symbols and causing several deaths. Although Biden and Harris have assumed their offices, the irrational belief that dark forces conspired to steal the election continues to infect American life. I am sure Ted would join me in hoping that this book will encourage readers to ponder the roots of such outrageous credulity; to recognise how common it is, even in better times among ordinary people; and to be alert to the ways in which it works against improving life in virtually all human societies.

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