Chapter 5

HUMAN SACRIFICE AND
CARGO CULT IN NEW IRELAND

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On central New Ireland’s Lelet plateau, with its broken relief rising to an altitude of 1200 metres, four villages are home to some 500 persons from the Mandak linguistic group: this is the last remaining population of mountain-dwellers on the island. During my stay, from 1983 to 1984, several informants told me that, before the missionaries’ arrival, at the beginning of the century in other words, one clan in a coastal Mandak village at the base of the plateau sacrificed a succession of young children in the hope of obtaining European goods. If I spontaneously believed in the existence of this cargo cult — which featured themes common to a number of similar movements — conversely, I did not lend credence to the child murders. I had never heard of human sacrifices being attested in the framework of millenarian movements in this part of the world, and the fact that the victims mentioned by these mountain-dwellers were children — whose murder is spontaneously repellant — made me to think that these sacrifices were merely the echo of old rumors rehashed by missionaries and administrators concerning the ‘abominable’ practices of the cargo cults. By repeating these false rumours, I told myself at the time, the plateau Mandak were probably trying to dissociate themselves from the Mandak groups on the coast. Since unfavourable weather and the imminence of the celebration of some rituals in the mountains had made me put off and finally abandon my plans to visit the village in question, which was hard to reach from the plateau, my information on this cult unfortunately remains limited to these brief snatches.

Nevertheless, in spite of the incomplete and indirect nature of my sources, I would like to show, in the present text written several years after the fieldwork, how analysis of the traditional human sacrifices practised in New Ireland on the occasion of funerals — a custom of which I was aware at the time but whose reflection I had not recognised in the cargo cult — actually lends credence to the existence of these child sacrifices. Such sacrifices most probably attested the New Irelanders’ desire to acquire rights to the goods and secrets possessed by Europeans. In support of this hypothesis, to which I will return in the final section devoted to the cargo cult, I will examine first of all the material on traditional sacrifices, which leads us to explore certain features of the land-holding system, the
representations associated with filiation in these matrilineal societies and rights in the famous malanggan objects. After which, we will be prepared to understand the surprising role of human sacrifice as a way of obtaining European manufactured goods. To my knowledge, this role does not yet feature in the inventory of the variants of the Melanesian cargo cult.

Foreign influences

The Bismark Archipelago, of which New Britain and New Ireland are two of the principal islands, suffered the painful effects of European mercantile interest and proselytism at an early date, both manifesting themselves in the 1870s. English and German merchant vessels in search of trepangs and copra crossed those of the first labour recruiters, working at the time for the sugar-cane plantations in the remote Pacific, while new Wesleyan converts (Methodists), originally from Fiji, were beginning to evangelise the local populations.

In 1881, ten trading stations had already opened at the northern end of New Ireland and on the nearby islands, a region that, with its dense coconut-palm cover, natural harbour and no lack of spots to drop anchor seemed an ideal location to merchants and traders. In spite of repeated attacks on the ships and the trading posts, followed by punitive expeditions and ending notably in the death of eleven white people between 1881 and 1895, the almost total disappearance of the stone axe, observed in the north of New Ireland from the late 1880s, indicates that the local populations had quickly begun to trade with Europeans on a massive scale. At the end of the nineteenth century, certain northern villages were, it seems, bulging with goods from the West, following a spate of competitive trading which in the space of a few years sparked a 300 per cent increase in the going price for copra. The villagers even sold Europeans specially produced carvings, bearing strange designs unrelated to those dictated by tradition; some of these probably even stand in our museums and are held to represent genuine manifestations of malanggan art.

Often using a combination of subterfuge and violence to fill their ships with cheap and easily exploited labour, the recruiters for plantations in Queensland, Fiji or Samoa enrolled some 2,500 inhabitants of the Bismark Archipelago in 1883 alone, one year before the annexation of the archipelago and northeast New Guinea by Germany. With the plantation economy developing apace in these newly conquered regions, and notably in New Ireland where it is estimated that an area of 6,000 hectares (a quarter of which was already planted) was designated for the exploitation of copra in 1905, measures were taken by the colonial administration to facilitate the recruitment of New Irelanders for plantations throughout the German protectorate. The pacification of the island, achieved between 1900 and 1904, together with the completion in 1902, thanks to the forced labour of the local populations, of 200 miles of road along the eastern coast, from Kavieng (the administrative capital set up on the northern tip of the island), enabled recruiters to circulate easily and without fear throughout the most populous area of New Ireland. The forced relocation of inlanders to the coast was imposed as much to establish the pax germanica as to increase the potential labour supply on the littoral. Villages thus gradually disappeared from the mountains, except for those on Lelet plateau, which were more difficult to control because of their altitude and their distance from the coast. Last of all, the creation of a head tax, to be paid in marks,
forced many New Ieriders to sign on with the local plantation. In 1906, one third of the workforce of the entire German protectorate came from New Ireland alone.\textsuperscript{9} In certain districts (Kavieng and Namatanai) up to 70 per cent of the active male population had worked for at least three years on European-run plantations.\textsuperscript{10} The figures show a horrifying morality rate among recruits: between 1887 and 1907, 40 per cent of those working in northern New Ireland died before the end of their contract.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1875, some ten years ahead of the Catholics from the Sacred Heart Mission, the first Wesleyan missionaries landed at the southern end of New Ireland, opposite the Duke of York Islands. After having sailed around to various villages on this part of the island, whose narrow, broken coastal plain is sparsely populated, the Methodists concentrated their efforts on the northern half, already controlled by the merchants and traders, and temporarily confined the Catholic missionaries to the south, with the help of the ‘zoning law’ enacted in 1891 by the German administration. Although the Methodist implantation was facilitated by the number and the non-European origin of their catechists, it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that the well-devised distribution of their mission posts — first along the east coast and then on the west coast of the northern half of the island — ensured their regular presence in a majority of the villages.\textsuperscript{12} Still slight at the turn of the century, the impact of the two denominations on traditional customs and beliefs was truly making itself felt by 1910.

The intense contact with Europeans had dramatic effects. The massive displacement of the young men of New Ireland, recruited to work on plantations throughout the protectorate, emptied certain villages of the better part of their vital resources and blocked the transmission of traditions between generations.\textsuperscript{13} Diseases introduced by the Europeans (dysentery, smallpox, sexually transmitted diseases) aggravated the death toll and contributed to lowering the birth rate below the replacement threshold.\textsuperscript{14} This resulted in so sharp a drop in the population that by 1907 the German administration realized that its labour pool, so vital for the economic interests of its colonies, was in danger of drying up, and grew alarmed.\textsuperscript{15} In the same year, a highly pessimistic account\textsuperscript{16} reported that the population of New Ireland was dying out and had abandoned a number of its traditional customs, about which it would soon no longer be possible to obtain information.

**Human sacrifice**

Traditional sacrifice of the wife or child of the deceased

Even before the contact situation gave rise to cargo movements — including the Mandak cult that my informants on Lelet plateau associated with child sacrifices — ritual killings that could be assimilated to sacrifices existed in New Ireland. Various sources concerning a period before 1910 indicate that the death of a man could lead to the sacrifice of his wife and/or child, which was carried out by the victim’s own matriclan or matrilineage. Such sacrifices are attested for the linguistic groups located on either side of the Mandak area, namely the Kara and Nalik to the north, the Barok to the south and the people of the Tabar Islands off the east coast of New Ireland.

In the Barok area, where the meaningful social unit is the lineage, only the child was killed in the event of a sacrifice at the death of the father. The New Ierider pastor, Linge,
originally from this linguistic area, evokes this old custom in his memoirs. He tells how a member of the widow’s lineage, usually her brother, would quickly take one of the couple’s children and beat it to death. He suggested that the victim, killed without warning the mother, could be either male or female, and writes that the half-sister born from the first marriage of his mother was sacrificed this way upon the death of her father. In 1974, Jessep, a Canadian anthropologist, collected seven cases of earlier child sacrifices from informants in three Barok villages. Except for one case — in which a little girl was handed over by her older brothers to their cross cousin (their father’s sister’s son) to be strangled by him — the child’s killing is always ascribed to a member of its own lineage; and in the only two cases mentioning the identity of the sacrificed child (of which the one cited above is an exception), the victim is presented as being a girl and the youngest child of the deceased.

In the other areas mentioned, it was the wife of the deceased who was sacrificed. A German area administrator reports that, in the early twentieth century, in one region on the east coast of the Kara zone, the wife was almost always strangled by a close male relative at the death of her husband. Without noting the frequency of this phenomenon, a member of the 1907–1909 German naval expedition states that, in the Nalik area, the execution by strangling fell to the brother or the son of the victim. Groves, who spent some time in the Tabar Islands in 1933, after this practice had already disappeared, reports that it was the real or classificatory brother of the young widow who took her life. Two sources of information on the Kara area mention, not the murder but the suicide of the wife upon the death of her husband. They indicate that the women of Mangai village were often driven or forced to kill themselves by their own clan. The Hungarian Birò, who stopped over in New Ireland in 1900, writes that the women of Kara could at that time commit suicide either by throwing themselves off a cliff, hanging themselves or having themselves strangled by a friend who was not a kinsman. He adds that women with a child at the breast were strangled and that only women with older children could choose whether to live or to die.

In other words, it would seem that the way wives died ranged from suicide more or less of their own free will to forced suicide close to pure and simple murder, and that being strangled to death by a member of their matriclan — apparently the most frequent form of death — could be done with their consent or under constraint. A man’s authority over his sister and her children explains the fact that, in most cases, the killing of the deceased’s wife, in the north of the Mandak area, and of his child, in the south, were done by the victim’s brother and mother’s brother, respectively. Among the Lelet Mandak, for example, it is the brother who receives and distributes to his own lineage the brideprice given for his sister, and who fulfills her social obligations to her husband’s clan on her behalf. If his sister’s sexual conduct is mentioned in his presence, he will feel ashamed and will wash away this shame by a gift of pig meat; formerly he would have felt obliged to strangle her or to compel her to commit suicide if she had violated any prohibitions whose transgression was punishable by death. The mother’s brother, in turn, is responsible in particular for seeing that his nieces and nephews make proper use of the things associated with their common descent group (land, knowledge of magic and ritual).
Human life for land rights

When stated by the authors who have reported the existence of the phenomenon, the reasons for sacrificing the wife or child of the deceased seem at first glance surprising. They have to do with the desire to acquire rights in the land owned by the deceased husband’s or father’s descent group (with two exceptions that will be mentioned later). Groves notes that, in the Tabar Islands,

[i]n former times, by killing their sister, own or classificatory, upon the occasion of the death of her husband, male members of the woman’s ti-i-ti [lineage] acquired rights in the land and coconuts of the ti-i-ti of the deceased husband.24

The following is also reported concerning the old customs of the Kara village of Mangai:

That land shortage must at one time have been acute is suggested by the custom of kiut, whereby a woman and her descendants gained rights to the land of her husband if she committed suicide upon his death. Her clan, one informant said, often urged or even forced her to do this. Two ancient ladies were making use of rights gained in this way. There is no evidence of land shortage today.25

Jessep’s detailed 1974 study of land tenure in the northern Barok area shed a bit of light on the circumstances that might induce a descent group to sacrifice one of its members in order to obtain land rights. In the two of the seven cases of child sacrifice for which Jessep’s informants added that the victim was a small girl, the child’s mother, who had borne several children, did not come from the village of her husband, on whose family lands she was living.26 As the right to use the land of the spouse’s or father’s lineage was limited to their lifetime and as a person could not live in a village if he or she did not have the right to use the land of one of its lineages, this woman and her children would have been obliged, upon the death of their husband and father, to return to the village where their own lineage had its land. The sacrificed child, who won for its own lineage permanent rights in the land of its father’s group, thus allowed its mother and siblings to go on living where they had resided until then and enabled its lineage to establish itself in this village, of which it became a resident. It was this last point, the integration of a lineage into a village from which it did not come, that Jessep’s informants stressed.27 In the second of the two cases, in addition to the life of the child, a pig was given to the lineage of the deceased father; the lineage, which was dying out, in turn gave not a small portion but the totality of its territory to the lineage of the sacrificed child.

Kaleleang lineage came to Kono in this way. A big man of Kono named Nabua, of Ngeat Karamane lineage, married a woman of Komalabuo [another Barok village] named Gatin, of Kaleleang lineage, and she came to Kono and lived with him on the land called Ion. She had five children, and when Nabua died, Kaleleang decided to kill the youngest (a girl), and both bodies were buried together in one hole.
... This was ... to get the ground Ion, so that the ground would now belong to Kaleleang. It was this way — the little girl was a sufficient payment, so the ground no longer belonged to Karamane; because Kaleleang blood had fallen, it bought this ground, and so Kaleleang now lived at Ion.

... Gogo Tare lineage came originally from Lihir Island [off the southeast coast of New Ireland], but has been at Karu now for many years. A woman of this lineage named De married a man named Baun of Gono Wutumsisi lineage of Karu, and they lived at Karu. De had two twin sons, Bubumasang and Gutingbulut, and then a girl named Bero. When Baum died, the twins sent Bero (by arrangement) to Baun's sister's son, who strangled her and she was then buried with her father. Also, the twins killed a pig worth ten strings of shell money and gave it to the nephew. The nephew then stood up and promised all the land [of the father's lineage] to the twins, and this land has belonged to Gogo Tare ever since.

... The two lineages agreed, and Wutumsisi lineage thought it better that the land went to the children (rather than to other lineages of Gono clan), because Wutumsisi was becoming extinct [in the Barok area, the land of an extinct lineage usually goes to the lineage that organises the funerals of the last to die in the moribund group, with priority given to lineages belonging to the same clan as the extinct lineage]. If Wutumsisi had still been strong they [the members of this lineage] would not agreed, or they would only have given a little bit of land.28

Four other cases were reported to Jessep by an influential man from a lineage named Satele, on whose land a river flows through the Barok village of Kanam. This man summed up the way land transactions were carried out in exchange for the sacrifice of children upon the death of their father and pointed to the four sections of the river that his own lineage had formerly given to four other lineages in this type of transaction.

If I die, and I have land, and my child's lineage kills my child, and buries it with me in the same hole, then the child's lineage wins some of my land. Look at the river at Kanam — the section of river near the bridge is known as Arugage, and it belongs to Nalagos Kolonobo lineage because, before, a Kolonobo child was buried with its Satele [the speaker's lineage] father; Satele had agreed with this beforehand, that Kolonobo would win the water.

The next section is called Anatabilong, and it belongs to Laudagon clan, since a Laudagon child was buried with a Satele man. So with the next bit, called Abuang — it went to Nalagos Kunuraba-Usagale lineage; and then the part called Aunaneino, which is a cave frequented by eels, went to a Nalagos lineage ...

These sections of the river could be fenced off, and fish and eels caught with poisonous roots. The rest of the river, going inland, still belongs to Satele.29

The shortage that led these lineages to sacrifice children upon the death of their father was not the result, as in the preceding cases, of not having any land at all where they were immigrants (following a marriage that did not respect the preference for village endogamy), but of a lack of access to a fishing spot on their own territory.30
In the two quotations above, Jessep’s informants speak of an agreement between the deceased father’s lineage and that of the child: the small victim was probably not killed until its father’s lineage had agreed beforehand to give up a small piece of territory in exchange for this human life. In other words, these human sacrifices could not be used to compel the father’s lineage to grant land rights, and probably only a lineage that had a big territory and was on good terms with the lineage of its male member’s wife and children would agree to the proposed transaction.

Two bodies, one grave
Decided and carried out by a member of the victim’s own descent group and used by this group as a means of winning rights to a piece of land owned by the deceased’s group, wife and child sacrifices had yet another feature in common: they were followed by funeral rites that doubly violated the rules usually governing funerals. First of all, whereas in New Ireland every person is supposed in principle to be buried in the graveyard of the male enclosure of his/her descent group (matriclan or matrilineage), even if the person lived far from clan lands, the sacrificed person — woman or child — was buried in the male enclosure of the descent group of her deceased husband or of the child’s deceased father. It is true that there were other exceptions to this rule, but its violation following a sacrifice performed at the death of a man is the only instance of a descent group, in this case that of the person sacrificed, freely choosing to bury one of its members in alien ground rather than in its own land. Secondly, the deceased man and the sacrificed victim were buried in the same grave or burned on the same pyre, whereas two persons having died the same day and belonging to the same male enclosure were always buried separately (except for a woman who died in childbirth and her dead child).

As for child sacrifices in the Barok area, all of Jessep’s informants said that the bodies of the father and child were buried in the same grave; one of them indicated that a member of the child’s lineage would place it in the hole with the father (see three preceding quotations). This detail is also found in Linge’s work, who underscores the importance of the shared grave. Not only did the New Ierlander pastor entitle the paragraph describing child sacrifices, ‘The burying of a child with its father’, he seems to make these exceptional funeral arrangements the very goal of the sacrifice, when, at the beginning of his book, he speaks of ‘the killing of a child to be buried with its father’ (Linge, 1932:11).

The burying of a child with its father. If a man of a different [clan] is married to a woman of my [clan], ‘Kobanis Ulurag’, and she bears him a son or a daughter and he dies before her, then a man of my [clan], usually an uncle, will quickly take one of his children and beat it to death, and take it to the grave and bury it in the same grave with the father … They did this to my own sister, Inmale.

The only reference to funerals following the sacrifice of wives are in Birò’s notes on the Kara area. These indicate that the wife’s body, together with a child at the breast, were burned on the same pyre as the husband and father, and that the bones left after cremation were gathered up and kept in one reliquary basket. These notes also tell that, in this linguistic area
and probably throughout the northern half of New Ireland — as far as but excluding Barok — where figures called *malanggan* were made for the ceremonies marking the end of the funeral rites, the deceased and the person or persons sacrificed (one or two wives, wife and infant) were commemorated by a single *malanggan* carving showing them as superposed figures or heads. This is the only known exception to the rule that only members of the same descent group can be commemorated by the same *malanggan* object. Without giving a reason for sacrificing the wife of the deceased — or, as a matter of fact, a child at the breast — Birò writes:

> The corpses of adults are cremated on funeral pyres. Wife and child of married males are incinerated with the deceased. These are first strangled, a task performed by a stranger and not by one of the kinspeople. However, wives follow their husband into death only if they are childless or have but a child at the breast. If the child is older, the wife may choose: if she does not wish to survive her bereavement, she can commit her child to the care of relatives and jump from a high rock, hang herself or have herself strangled by some friend so requested.

> … The bones of incinerated corpses are placed in special baskets; after adding boiled food to the bones, the baskets are fastened with strings and suspended in the hut of the deceased.

> … After adding fresh food to the skeletal remains, the baskets containing them are carried to the appointed place on the day fixed for the ceremony [*malanggan*] … The baskets with the bones, facing the spectators, are suspended from pegs, and there is beneath each basket a carved figure [a *malanggan* carving] which represents the departed.

> … Collective carvings, i.e. superimposed figures or merely heads, are placed before baskets which contain the bones of several persons cremated together: a husband with one or two wives or a father and mother with their infant child.35

Apparently the sacrificed individual who thus won his/her descent group perennial rights in the land of the deceased husband’s/father’s group was, exceptionally, identified with this group. This identification was the will of both groups involved in the transaction: that of the victim, who would kill or urge the victim to kill herself so that the wife or child might follow the man into death, into the grave or onto the pyre; and the deceased’s group, who agreed to bury the victim’s corpse in its own burial ground, and, when the sacrifice occurred in the *malanggan* diffusion zone, to later make a single funeral figure for the departed couple.

Was there a connection between this symbolic identification of the sacrificed individual with the deceased husband or father and the transfer of land from the group of the latter to that of the former? Why were only sacrifices of the deceased’s wife or child recognised as a means of gaining land? In the name of what logic did the deceased man’s descent group give a piece of its land to the group of his sacrificed wife or child? Some elements of the answer will be provided by exploring the way the people of New Ireland view their social relations and manage their land-holdings.
**Filiation, sacrifice and land rights**

Conception, filiation and land-holding

In the Mandak and Barok areas, which have been the subject of recent detailed anthropological studies, theories about conception acknowledge the father’s role, by no means minimising it as is sometimes the case in matrilineal societies; instead, they assign him a primordial function. In the Mandak area, he is considered to be solely responsible for making the embryo’s substance, its body matter, while the mother’s role is restricted to that of a nurturing container for the unborn child. In the Barok area, where the child is thought to be formed by the mixing of the father’s and the mother’s substances, the most detailed representations, collected in the south of this linguistic area, specify that the semen, emitted after several episodes of intercourse, reveals the woman’s procreative capacities by turning her vaginal secretions into ‘good blood’, which, by closing the uterus where it gathers (as opposed to the ‘bad’ menstrual blood that runs out), works in conjunction with the semen to form the embryo.

Although they stem from notably different views of conception, similar metaphors are used to express the relations between individuals and groups in the two linguistic areas. Each exogamous social unit (matrimoiety, matriclan, matrilineage) sees itself as a ‘maternal container’ for its members, in the image of what a mother is for her unborn child, and thinks of itself, in the image of the father initiating the act of conception, as the origin of life for the social unit that gave it its women. The child is called the ‘blood’ of its father and his descent group; children born of the same father or of real brothers are said to be of the ‘same blood’; and a clan or a lineage calls itself the ‘blood’ of another social unit if, in a previous generation, at least one woman from this clan or lineage married a member of the other unit and there are surviving descendants in the maternal line. A special term, identical in both linguistic areas, designates the child of a male member of the descent group. People always show respect and deference when speaking of those to whom they owe their ‘blood’ and who, through the male act of procreation, passed on to them a substance that bridged the boundaries of their respective social units.

These ‘blood’ ties between father and children, which therefore extend to their respective groups, give rise to transfers of wealth and knowledge. In addition to the food and daily care, the father gives his children in particular the bulk of the education that will enable them to become accomplished adults in every area of social life. He can transmit to them the elements of the esoteric knowledge and magic that are not the exclusive property of the descent groups, and it is the father who provides his sons with part or the total amount of the brideprices for the wives he chooses for them. In the Mandak area and the northern Barok area, the sum total of that which is received from the father, starting with his ‘blood’ at conception, creates a debt for the children and their descent group, which is collectively repaid at the death of the father by the gift of a pig presented at his funeral. Acknowledgement of the patrilateral ties is also expressed in the land-holding system, which will now be outlined.

The rights the land-holding group (the matriclan on Lelet plateau in the Mandak area or the matrilineage in the Barok area) exercises over its territory are justified by the fact that
their land contains the birthplace of the group, a spot associated with the presence of a
supernatural being that often manifests itself as an animal. The site and the entity are
merged linguistically in a single term: *masalai*, in neo-Melanesian. Alongside these
primordial rights, every group can also gain secondary rights in the land of another group,
providing they have furnished one or another of the compensations set by tradition. In the
case of individuals, all own primary and inalienable use-rights in the land of their descent
group, as well as secondary use-rights in the land of their father’s group and that of their
spouse; these rights are acquired without compensation and can be exercised respectively for
their father’s lifetime and for the duration of their marriage. But if certain compensations
are given, an individual can acquire other secondary rights, perennial or life-long (i.e.
transmitted or not to descendants) in lands that do not belong to his/her group. Let us take
a closer look at these secondary rights, some of which are, as I have said, group rights and
others individual rights, with a stress on the role played by patrilinial

Traditionally, when a man died, his children could extend the use-rights (initially
limited to the father’s lifetime) they enjoyed in the land of their paternal clan, which they
frequently did. This life-long use-right was obtained in exchange for an enormous pig
presented at the father’s funeral. When a descent group was thus dying out, the lineage
(Barok area) or the clan (Mandak area) of the children of one of the last male members could
acquire perennial rights to the entire territory on condition of assuming financial
responsibility (pigs, shell money, taros) and performing the funeral rites for the last to die.

In point of fact, any person on good terms with a descent group might procure a life-long
use-right in pieces of its land if he gave a pig when this group was celebrating a funeral.
Likewise, when a land-holding group died out (a clan at Lelet, a lineage among the Barok),
groups other than those of the children of the male members of the group in question could
tender for perennial rights to the entire territory of the moribund group, and thus offer to
perform the funeral rites for its last members. For instance, on Lelet plateau (where, whenever
several groups declared themselves, that of one of the children of the members of the dying clan
always prevailed), this opportunity could be seized by a clan whose territory adjoined that of the
dying clan, whereas in the Barok area, it would be a lineage from the same clan as the dying
lineage or one of the lineages with which it had married.

To acquire perennial rights to another group’s land, a matriclan or a matrilineage was
not compelled to wait until one of its counterparts was dying out. A large sum paid in strings
of shell money could persuade a group to cede this type of right to pieces of its territory.
Alternatively, land transfer was sometimes the indirect consequence of a killing — and not
the direct result of the sacrifice of a child. Jessep writes that, in the Barok zone, a lineage
could give a piece of land in compensation for the life of a warrior from an allied lineage
killed on its territory by their common enemy, and that a lineage responsible for a homicide
would do the same thing to compensate the victim’s lineage. When I mentioned this at
Lelet, all my informants said was that, in order to restore peace between various groups after
a killing, the clan on whose land ‘the blood had fallen’ sometimes gave pieces of land to the
victim’s clan, whether or not the killer was one of its members.

On the other hand, only the descent groups of the children of the male members of a
clan or a lineage could make use of human sacrifice to gain a perennial right to a piece of this
clan or lineage territory, since, in the Barok area, the only form of human sacrifice practised was that of the child upon its father’s death. It is possible to think that this means of acquiring land was also in force in the Mandak area because, notably, of the strong similarity between the land-holding systems in the two neighbouring linguistic areas. The extreme reticence of the Lelet inhabitants to talk about practices of which they are ashamed after over 50 years of Christianisation may well explain the silences and the denials that greeted my questions on this custom.\footnote{52}

The logic of sacrifice

In light of the foregoing, several hypotheses can be formulated concerning the logic behind the gain of a piece of land for the murder of a child. It could first of all be considered that, as in the case of the gift of land stemming from the killing of a warrior, the father’s descent group compensated the life of the sacrificed child by giving a piece of its land to the child’s group. Yet it is hard to understand why the father’s descent group would be willing to compensate a life they themselves had not taken,\footnote{53} and of someone who had never done anything that might make it worth compensating his or her group, unlike a warrior who had given his life to defend the territory of an allied group.

Following another line of analysis, we see that, like most compensations for rights to the land of another group, the killing of a child can be understood as an exceptional type of contribution to the funeral rites of a member of a group giving up pieces of its territory. It is conceivable that, instead of giving a pig as compensation for everything the father had transmitted to his children during his lifetime, and perhaps making a present of an additional animal to enable the children to gain life-long use-rights in the land of their father’s group, the children’s own descent group would offer the life and corpse of the youngest child. In reply to this more valuable gift (one human life in place of one or two pigs), the father’s descent group would have responded by granting the children’s group perennial use-rights to part of its land.

The hypothesis that the killing of the child was at the same time ‘a dramatic way of symbolising the children’s indebtedness’ to their father and a way of paying off the debt, as Jessep puts it,\footnote{54} is quite correct, as confirmed by the Barok themselves. Several of the Canadian anthropologist’s informants attributed to this killing the double function of repaying the children’s debt to their father and enabling the lineage of the mother and the surviving children, living as immigrants in the deceased’s village, to acquire a piece of his group’s land.\footnote{55} The New Irelander pastor, Linge, on the other hand, does not link this custom with winning land but explains it as a way ‘to return the love and care of the father toward his children’, and claims that descent groups that have intermarried practise such child sacrifices as a form of deferred reciprocity.\footnote{56}

Should we therefore consider, as we might be tempted to do, that granting the children’s group right to a piece of land belonging to their deceased father’s group was explained uniquely by a concern to maintain a balance between the groups, with the gift counterbalancing the repayment of the children’s debt — the sacrifice of the youngest — that was greater than the usual amount, set at one pig? I do not think so. First of all, it would not explain why the children’s group, if it wanted to repay its debt with a supplement and...
win, in return, an unusual favour from the deceased father’s group — namely a perennial right in their land — could not have given a certain number of pigs, for instance, instead of the child’s life. And secondly, the hypothesis does not account for the exceptional symbolic identification of the sacrificed child with its father, which appears clearly in their funeral rites.

To my mind, the reasons for burying the child in the male enclosure of its father’s group, and especially in the same grave as its father, should be sought in the maternal metaphors associated with the clan and with its male enclosure. According to Wagner, the Barok ‘depict the image of group membership through the containment of the body in the mother’s womb, and eventually in the ground of the group’s territory’, and the male enclosure as ‘a perfect image of containment … [that] could be likened to a womb containing … the dead’. Likewise, the Lelet Mandak associate the image of the corpses absorbed by the ground of the group’s male enclosure with the image of the foetus in its mother’s womb; in Pinikindu, a Mandak village on the coast, the term for the stone wall surrounding the male enclosure comes, notably, from the word ‘womb’. The metaphorical gestation of the corpses in the group’s land thus echoes the representation of the clan as a ‘maternal container’ for its members. In this perspective, might not the grave in which the corpses of the father and his sacrificed child are deposited be regarded as a symbolic womb encompassing their two bodies? In this case, one might therefore suppose that the child, the fruit of the same womb-container as its father, was ‘reborn’ in death as a member of its father’s group. It was in order to be buried with its father, as Linge wrote, or as I would say, in order to be affiliated to its father’s descent group through the symbolism of the shared grave, that the child would have been sacrificed by a member of its own lineage.

This interpretation of the funeral rites following a child murder as a post mortem change of social affiliation has the advantage of providing a plausible explanation for the transfer of a piece of land from the father’s group to that of the sacrificed child. People’s primary use-rights in their clan land are seen as transmissible, upon their death, to their descendants in the maternal line. In this sense, they are distinct from the life-long use-rights a person may acquire in a land held by a different group, which cannot be transmitted within the person’s own descent group. If the father’s group was willing to consider the sacrificed child as one of its own — as I have postulated — then it was only correct to give it an automatic right to a piece of the group’s land identical to that of the other members, namely a perennial right that could be transmitted to the child’s maternal kin from generation to generation. Although the sacrificed child changed its social affiliation, it kept its maternal kin, whom it could not repudiate, and it is to them, in particular to the mother, that the rights would go: those rights that the child had acquired in death to the land of its paternal group. The result is the a priori paradoxical but logical situation in which, following the sacrifice of a child, persons (mother, siblings and their descendants) could make use of rights in the land of another descent group as maternal kin of one of its members: the sacrificed child, now a member of its father’s group. The use-rights exercised by the maternal kin of the sacrificed child, rights in a piece of land held by the lineage of which the child had become a member in death, could be assimilated to perennial rights gained by their group and transmissible within this group from one generation to the next.
Giving back the ‘blood’

But why ever did the father’s lineage agree to a transaction that deprived it of a bit of its land in exchange for the membership of a dead child? Most likely because, by seeing to it that the child followed its father in death and into the grave, the victim’s lineage acknowledged a debt in a radical, spectacular and dramatic manner: this child, and any surviving siblings — therefore part of the members of the lineage — owed their ‘blood’ (in other words, their entire substance for the Mandak; or that part of their substance produced by the semen which sets off the process of conception, for the Barok), the origin of their life and part of the wealth, goods and advantages they have enjoyed, to the deceased man. Thus, instead of being reimbursed by a pig (in other words, by an item having an economic value and functioning as a substitute for the substance, the care and the goods and advantages received from the father), the children’s debt to their father was repaid by simply giving back the bodily substance of one of the children in the form of the child’s corpse, placed by its lineage in the father’s grave, and by the post mortem affiliation of this child to its paternal lineage. What the father’s lineage recovered, exceptionally, by the sacrifice of the child, was part of the ‘blood’, of the substance that its male members give, through the act of procreation, to the lineages of their wives and which never goes to nourish their own group.

As I understand it, the logic underpinning these child sacrifices suggests that they represent the extreme form of acknowledgment of the patrilateral ties which are characterised by the sharing of ‘blood’, since this was the only instance (not connected with compensations for dead warriors) in which a descent group agreed to cede a piece of its land to another group without financial compensation, and it only ceded this property to the descent group of the child of one of its male members. But these child sacrifices at the same time expressed the limits of these patrilateral ties insofar as it was only the affiliation of the sacrificed child to its father’s descent group, and therefore the transformation of this ‘blood’ into a clan tie, that justified the transfer of property from the father’s group to that of the child.

A similar logic probably operated in the sacrifice of the wife upon the death of her husband, a custom followed in northern New Ireland and in the Tabar Islands. Providing, of course, that the conception theories — ill known for these societies — also assigned the primary role to the father and that these sacrifices were practised only when the couple had children, or failing that when the deceased man’s clan could nonetheless think of itself as a ‘blood-giver’ with respect to the wife’s clan, owing to other fruitful unions between the two groups. In this case, one could envisage that the mother’s bodily substance, given as a corpse, might substitute for that of the child, whose life was spared, and that, by adopting her husband’s social identity, she repaid in a spectacular manner, the ‘blood’ debt of her clan. The idea that the sacrificed woman thus became a member of her husband’s clan seems to be corroborated by Birò’s notes, mentioned above: not only was a single malanggan object carved and displayed for the two members of the couple, as though they effectively belonged to the same clan, but the fact that the husband’s clan gave food to the skeletal remains of the couple contained in the basket exhibited at the foot of the carving can be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the clan’s maternal role as ‘nurturing container’ with respect to the victim, who is assimilated to one of its
members. Furthermore, if it is a reflection of the commentaries provided by the people of New Ireland, the astonishing statement by Billings and Peterson, already quoted, that 'a woman and her descendants gained rights to the land of her husband if she committed suicide upon his death', points in the direction of my interpretation, according to which the maternal kin of the victim, in this case the wife, would inherit the land rights she had effectively acquired in death, by virtue of her affiliation to the deceased man's group.

Land rights and rights in *malanggan* objects

Traditionally, human sacrifices, whose analysis will enable us to make sense of those that, from what my informants say, were performed in the setting of the Mandak cargo cult, were not done only with a view to obtaining land. They could also occur in conjunction with *malanggan* objects and ceremonies.61 We are now going to take a rapid look at the second of these, which we need to assess in order to understand the cargo cult.

In the past, in the northern half of New Ireland and on the small nearby islands as far as but excluding the Barok area, the rites marking the end of the funeral cycle revolved around the manufacture, display and destruction of one or several wood carvings or wickerwork pieces belonging to the mixed class of *malanggan* objects. These included statues, poles and friezes representing a variety of elements ranging from the deceased to the solar and lunar entities responsible for creation. The class of *malanggan* was divided into a multitude of types, subtypes and (in some regions) families of types. Before the disappearance of many *malanggan*, each matriclan on Lelet plateau controlled at least one subtype of these objects; each subtype had its own motifs, sometimes its own form as well as specific rites and then differed from the other generic suborders held by the other clans. Linked, similarly to the territory, with the clan's emergence and identity, *malanggan* patterns were governed by a system of laws modelled on that of land-holding.

Like the clan territory, a space held by a clan and worked by individuals in the form of temporary clearings, a *malanggan* subtype was a pattern held by a clan and individually exploited in the form of ephemeral material objects that were destroyed at the end of the ceremony during which they had been manufactured. Just as only someone who had a use-right in a piece of land was entitled to occupy and work it, so only someone who had a use-right in the *malanggan* pattern could commission copies to be made in view of commemorating departed close kinsmen. Unlike the corresponding land use-rights, though, the right to use a *malanggan* pattern was not a birth-right for all members of the controlling clan, but was transmitted uniquely to certain young members, both male and female, thus establishing certain social distinctions within the group. That being said, like land-rights, these use-rights were transmitted without payment from one generation to the next within the clan, and were characterised by transmission in the maternal line to the descendants of their beneficiaries. A person, child or adult, who did not belong to the clan holding a given *malanggan* pattern could acquire the right to use it in exchange for the present of a pig on the occasion of a funeral; like life-long use-rights in the land of another group acquired in exchange for the same compensation, this limited right — authorising a person to make a single copy of the *malanggan* subtype concerned — could not be passed on to descendants in the maternal line and therefore could not become a perennial right for the person's group.
Finally there were transfers of the control of a *malanggan* pattern from one clan to another (all members of the clan holding the use-rights to this pattern would renounce them simultaneously), and these were obtained in exchange for the same compensations as transfers of control over land: namely in exchange for conducting the funeral rites for the last members of a dying clan, or in exchange for an important sum of traditional shell money.\(^62\)

The similar management of land and *malanggan* suggests that the sacrifice of the wife and/or child upon a man’s death — a recognised way of transferring a land-holding, which is attested in different linguistic groups in the *malanggan* diffusion zone — could also enable the victim’s clan to acquire rights to the model of a subtype of *malanggan* initially held by the husband’s or father’s clan.

Before analysing a document that corroborates this hypothesis, it needs to be clear that every right in a subtype of *malanggan* entails a corpus of knowledge, and that transfers of rights between individuals and groups were also transfers of knowledge. On Lelet plateau, the male individual who held a use-right in a *malanggan* subtype was duty-bound to have a thorough knowledge of the pattern, in other words, to have the mental representation of all the invariable motifs which, featuring on each of the copies made, justified their classification in a given generic order and suborder. He also knew the technical and magical secrets that often went with the making of the individual copies of each pattern, and the specific rites that marked each stage of their manufacture, their display and their destruction. Because he possessed this knowledge, the person could guide the craftsman he had commissioned to make one or several copies of the pattern, and he was also equipped to conduct the different stages of the *malanggan* ceremony in which he would thus exploit his right of use. The origin myth attached to the *malanggan* subtype, symbolic equivalent of the sacred birthplace of the clan — which justified the control exercised over the territory around it — was, in all likelihood, transmitted only to those clan members who controlled the pattern. Women were supposed to be ignorant of the material existence of *malanggan* objects, and the manufacture, display and destruction of these pieces unfolded far from their eyes, in the male enclosure concealed by a tall fence made of leafy branches. The women were instructed uniquely in the specific female rites (dances, ritual distribution of food, etc.) connected with the *malanggan* subtype in which they acquired a right of use. This right, exploited on their behalf by their male clansmen, as a rule their brothers, enabled them, like the men, to fulfill the social obligations connected with the commemoration of their dead.

Transmission of use-rights to the model of a *malanggan* subtype took place between individuals and always at the end of a ceremony in which the person ceding the right had commissioned a copy of the subtype in question. Prior to the hand-over, the male beneficiary of the right had received permission to remain in the hut where the craftsman was making the object and to be present at each stage of the ritual — even the most secret ones — so as to acquire all of the technical, magical and ritual knowledge necessary. It was while the object was briefly displayed in the male enclosure, before an all-male audience, that the person who had commissioned it announced the identity of the individual who had previously given him the right to reproduce this *malanggan* subtype, and proclaimed the name of the person or persons to whom he had transmitted his own knowledge and whom he officially declared to be the new holders of a right to use the pattern. When the receiver of
the right was not a member of the clan holding the pattern, it was publicly stipulated that his right was limited, that is restricted to the manufacture of a single copy and that the right was not transmissible to other members of his clan. This rule did not apply when the ceremony was the setting for a transfer between clans. In this case, the beneficiary of the right, as a member of the clan officially designated as the new holder of the malanggan, received full rights, with no restrictions on the number of copies and transmissible to his descendants in the maternal line.

A human life for rights to a malanggan
We now come to the story of a transmission of rights to a malanggan pattern. The events occurred at the end of the nineteenth century in a village on the west coast of the Kara area, and were reported to Küchler in 1983. The story tells how a clan, Moromuna, 'got right to Malanggan by killing one of its women and giving her to Moromaf', another clan considered to have originated the malanggan known in the region:

‘Kumaut of Morokomaf sub-clan [Moromaf clan] was married to a woman of Moromuna clan. … Kumaut taught his knowledge about the images of Malangan to his children. Since the clan Moromuna had not bought the images received, a fight broke out between the clans. To make a truce, the clan Moromuna after the death of Kumaut killed one of its own women, the wife of Kumaut called Pururau. The blood of Pururau paid for the Malanggan and the land taken by Kumaut’s children.’

On Lelet plateau, when a man exploited his use-right in the pattern of a malanggan subtype held by his clan and commissioned one or several copies to be made during a funeral ceremony, his child would often give a pig (provided by his maternal uncle) on the occasion of these rites so that his father would initiate him into the secrets of this malanggan and give him the right to make a copy at a later time. In the story set down by Küchler, it would seem that the children did not hand over any compensation for the knowledge their father had passed on to them, which probably concerned several patterns of malanggan subtypes controlled by his clan. Even if one can imagine the father not daring publicly to introduce his children as the new holders of a use-right in these malanggan whereas they had not made prior compensation, their illicit knowledge could materially enable them in the future to order the manufacture of these subtypes. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that the children, perhaps emboldened by their father’s transgression and by his manifest disregard for the interests of his own clan, would not be tempted to have several copies made of each pattern and to transmit what they knew to their own matrilateral descendants. This, I believe, explains the anger of the father’s clan and the fight that broke out between the two clans. Peace was restored when, upon the death of the father, his wife was sacrificed and given to her husband’s clan by her own clan group. In all likelihood, her own group in turn received control over the patterns of the malanggan subtype whose secret knowledge had been unlawfully revealed to the children. As maternal kinsmen of a member of their father’s clan — in this case the mother, who had in death become a member of this clan — it was henceforth normal for the children to have acquired, without compensation, the knowledge
associated with this clan’s *malanggan* patterns and to exercise a non-restrictive and transmissible right of use.

And it is probably because, in death, the wife was affiliated to her deceased husband’s clan that the children, by virtue of this sacrifice, received control both over several *malanggan* patterns held by their father’s clan and over a bit of its territory, as the last sentence in the passage from Küchler seems to suggest. In effect, while not everyone necessarily enjoyed use-rights in a *malanggan* pattern controlled by his clan, everyone did, by birth, have use-rights in the clan territory. When the wife or child of a deceased man was sacrificed in order to obtain a piece of land, the victim’s post mortem membership in the deceased’s clan did not justify the victim or his/her descendants acquiring use-rights in a *malanggan* held by this clan. Conversely, however, when the same sacrifice was made in order to obtain rights to a *malanggan* held by the deceased’s clan, the affiliation of the victim to the latter’s clan automatically implied that both the victim and his/her matrilateral descendants received use-rights in a piece of this clan’s territory.

The similar management of clan territories and *malanggan* patterns strongly suggests that human sacrifice was not restricted to resolving conflicts arising from infringement of the rules governing the transfer of *mananggan* rights between members of different clans. Let us suppose that several members of the same clan live as immigrants in a village relatively far from their homeland. If none has the right to use a *malanggan* pattern held by their clan, their matrilateral descendants have every chance of being deprived as well: they live too far, both geographically and affectively, from any members of their clan who might give them such rights. Gaining control of a *malanggan* subtype is the only way for this little group to dispose of a full right of use to a *malanggan* with no restrictions on the number of copies that can be made and with transmission to their maternal descendants. Since the distance from their clan precludes any hope that it will make an effort to get together the considerable financial resources needed to buy a *malanggan* pattern, all they can do is wait for the husband of one of their women to die and then resort to human sacrifice. As indicated above, this solution has the advantage of also procuring them control over a piece of the dead man’s clan territory. There is every reason to believe that, during the funeral ceremony in which a single *malanggan* object was made to commemorate the sacrificed individual and her deceased husband or father, the members of the victim’s clan were initiated into the knowledge relating to the *malanggan* pattern in question. These clansmen were in the position of maternal kin of a member of the clan holding this *malanggan*, in other words, the victim, affiliated in death to the clan of her husband or father. They received, gratuitously, an unrestricted right of use in this model which they could pass on to their descendants; they thus became co-responsible for controlling this model, a control henceforth exercised by their clan group. It is likely that only a clan holding several *malanggan* subtype models would be willing to divest itself of one of them in exchange for the sacrifice — and thus membership in their group — of a person belonging to the clan of the wife of one if its own male members.
White people's malanggan

The site of the cargo cult

Equipped with an analysis and interpretation of traditional human sacrifices, we can now return to my informants’ reports of this clan that sacrificed children in view of obtaining white wealth.

This particular cargo cult arose in a coastal Mandak village called Mesi, and, from what the Lelet Mandak said, lasted several years before expiring in the space of a few months under the influence of the first missionary. According to Threlfall, Mesi was the first village on the central west coast to be visited, in 1907, by a group of evangelisers, and the missionary who chose to live there died at the end of the same year. This cargo cult, probably extinguished by the end of 1907, may have arisen four years earlier. In effect, 1903 was a catastrophic year, marked by a terrible famine following a long period of drought; it is therefore easy to imagine how desirable European commodities, mainly foodstuffs, must have appeared to the famished population, whose gardens were ravaged and who were reduced to living on the plants and berries they could find in the wild.

When the evangelisers arrived in Mesi in 1907 — twenty years after the first Wesleyan missionaries set foot in New Ireland — the villagers had a very bad reputation with white people because of their warlike ways and the recent killing of several merchants. These evangelists themselves barely escaped being killed and eaten, if we are to believe the accounts of their first contacts with the villagers. At this time there was a great difference between the populations of the northern part of the island and the long alluvial plain along the northern half of the coast, on the one hand, and the west-coast populations, on the other hand. The first region had been heavily settled by merchants, planters, labour recruiters, colonial administrators and missionaries. Decimated by disease and cruelly exploited by the colonists, these populations paid a high price for their access to European goods. Alternatively, the population of the west coast, who lived in an area difficult to reach by land and ill controlled by the colonial administration, had only a recent and episodic experience of trade with Europeans, even though some villages had been visited by merchant vessels and labour recruiters.

Far from being just another Mandak village, Mesi is a mythico-religious centre: closely associated with fertility, it was particularly well suited to the emergence of a cargo-type movement. According to beliefs still alive on Lelet plateau, the two rivers that empty into the sea at the north of the village define the boundaries of a sacred space called Katandan Moroa, the chosen home of Moroa, the male entity identified with the sun. Regarded as having presided over the original creation of all things that are pleasing and beneficial to mankind, including malanggan objects, pigs and shell money, Moroa is the male procreative principle behind natural fertility. He is also ultimately responsible for the fecundation of women: the semen of their sexual partners cannot take effect if Moroa has not at the same time deposited his own supernatural semen in their womb. Near Katandan Moroa lies the territory of Sepka, which belongs to the lunar entity, Sigirigum. Endowed with an ambivalent sexual identity, Sigirigum is Moroa’s wife and his female counterpart in representations having to do with natural and human fertility: it is she who triggers
menstruation and who, in the last instance, is instrumental in stopping the flow following
fecundation, and therefore responsible for gestation. On the shore of Moroa’s territory is a
spring (lemetla) which serves as the entrance to the underground world of the dead,
Kantimum, ruled by the solar entity. The ghosts of deceased humans live there in an
atmosphere of fertility, plenty and harmony that the fertility-rite experts are able to produce
temporarily in the world of the living by re-enacting the sexual encounter of the solar and
lunar entities, Moroa and Sigirigum, using the sacred stones they procure in Katandan
Moroa. It is also on the outskirts of Mesi, in a place called Lukun (from loronkun, ‘taro’) that
Sigirigum, at the command of her solar husband, took on the appearance of Nirut, an old
woman with a hump planted in taros, in order to introduce these tubers to young humans.

‘Giving a corpse for the white people’s malanggan’
The story told me by one informant featured a striking expression. Under the direction of a
Mesi villager known as Lupalau, the Lurumbi clan, of which he was a member, sacrificed a
succession of toddlers, ‘so that all its members might become the lavaunpanga of a white
people’s malanggan’. Formed from the verb —un, ‘to acquire, obtain’, and the adverb panga,
‘all, everything’, and therefore meaning literally, ‘those who acquire all things for themselves’,
lavaunpanga is a term used specifically to designate those individuals — children or adults
— who were initiated into the secret knowledge concerning a subtype of malanggan object
and who thereby became the official assignees of a use-right to the pattern. Although my
informant did not tell me that the aim of the Lurumbi clan was to obtain ‘control over the
white people’s malanggan’ — or according to the vernacular expression, to obtain ‘the
skeleton of the malanggan’ — the formulation nevertheless suggests that this was in fact the
case. In effect, only control over a malanggan ensured the clan that many of its members
could be given the right to make copies. The same informant added that a finger of the
sacrificed child was given to the parents, who were told that ‘the malanggan had eaten the
child’. Then he added: ‘it was the clan’s duty to give the malanggan a lau so that all its
members might become the lavaunpanga of the malanggan.’ Lau designates both the corpse
and the spirit of the deceased when death was the result of murder, an accident or suicide.68
Thus the Lurumbi clan killed one of its very young members and fed its corpse to what it
regarded as a ‘white people’s malanggan’ in the hope of acquiring control of the malanggan in
question.

This ‘white people’s malanggan’ was a shark called lembabenan or labanambe, whose
belly was full of merchandise and books that Moroa, the solar entity behind these creations,
had originally sent to the black people by way of the dead, but which had been diverted from
their true destination by white men. Lembabenan and labanambe are formed from the word
lanaanan, ‘food’, a term found in the expression levenpangaanan (literally: ‘all foods’), which
designates manufactured European products, also called ‘cargo’ in neo-Melanesian, and from
the syllable —mbe — part of the root of the words lembeve and lembele, meaning respectively
‘shark’ and ‘womb’. As ritual esoteric language typically uses words from everyday language
minus their last syllable, the two names given equally to this curious shark probably played
on the ambiguity of the two words. The Mandak representation of ‘food’ as something every
individual receives free of change from their nurturing container, respectively their mother
and their clan group, could be the source of this image of merchandise contained in a womb. Such an image would express the vision of ‘cargo’ as goods rightfully belonging to the inhabitants of New Ireland by virtue of a sort of maternal descent reckoning from Moroa to themselves.

As for the choice of the shark as the womb-like container of cargo, it can be explained by the importance of this animal for the coastal populations that catch it, fishing from their frail canoes with bait and a lasso attached to the end of a board. There are myths that tell how Moroa created sharks and taught them to let themselves be caught by men, providing these had kept a series of taboos before setting out to fish; to men, Moroa taught the ritual and magical techniques necessary for catching the sharks. In other words, like the cargo initially intended for the inhabitants of New Ireland, the shark was created by Moroa so that people might catch and eat it. Expert shark-catchers recognise several types, some of which cannot be caught by humans and have only a spiritual form that shows up as a shadow in the water; this seems to be the type that served as a model for the lembebanan or labananmbe.

Mythic representations and dualism
One myth connected with the cargo cult and presenting a number of analogies with more traditional myths explains how the white people robbed the black people of the goods Moroa sent them. I will summarise the story as it was told to me:

Long ago, a black man and a white man, who were cross cousins and ghosts of the dead, found themselves inside the lembebanam. The white man worked for the black man who was the boss of the lembebanam. Nevertheless, the black man did not know how to make the cargo Moroa had given him together with books, telling him to give it all to the black people, to those who were alive. One day, the two cross cousins came out of the shark to wash themselves in the sea. The white man suggested a game to the black man: they would take turns diving in the deep water to see who could stay down the longest. The white man went first, and came up after a long time. When it was the black man’s turn to dive, the white man seized the occasion to go back into the lembebanan and run off with it. It is in the books contained in the lembebanan that white people, those who were alive, learned to make cargo.

In certain traditional esoteric myths unknown to the women, which tell of episodes of creation, Moroa and Sigirigum, the sun and the moon, are both presented as male characters. They address each other using the kinship term for same-sex cross cousins, and each is responsible for the humans belonging to one of the two dual units of which they are also the emblems. In these myths, Sigirigum takes the role of the bad hero responsible for foolish creations such as raising rats, using liana for strings of shell money or using inedible nuts that he chews with the wrong leaves soaked not in lime but in secretions from his wife’s vagina. So that he himself and the humans in his charge may gain the benefit of Moroa’s intelligent creations — including raising pigs, using real shell money and chewing areca nuts with lime — Sigirigum plays a little trick, inviting Moroa to a celebration where he offers him rats, liana and inedible nuts. As his cross cousin hoped, Moroa is compelled to
reciprocate, and throws a celebration at which he gives Sigirigum and his group of humans genuine nice things, enjoyed until then only by the half of humanity for which he was responsible.

In the myth associated with the cargo cult, the black man and the white man, like Moroa and Sigirigum, are regarded as cross cousins and each acts on behalf of one half of humanity: black humans and white humans. One might have expected traditional myths to urge the people of New Ireland to compare themselves with the members of the dual unit led by Sigirigum; in effect these myths mention an initial imbalance between the two halves, owing to the lunar entity's inability to make good creations, and they speak of the desire of this entity to procure for the humans in his charge the superior goods owned by the other half. But it is the white people who take on this role. The idea frequently found in Melanesian cargo and millenarian movements that the dead, who act here as go-betweens for Moroa, were supposed to deliver the cargo to the black people alone, effectively makes it possible to place white people in an initially inferior position (clearly expressed in the myth by the white man's subordination to the black man, an inverted reflection of the situation experienced by the New Irelanders at the time) and to attribute to them the desire to procure goods meant for others by the superior will of the creator entity. As Sigirugum did to Moroa, the white man tricks the black in order to get what he wants. But whereas, in the old myths, the two halves are made equal by means of a subterfuge — based on the expectation of reciprocity — as well as by an exchange in which Moroa is invited to give Sigirigum — at the latter's instigation — the genuine things he had created, the opposite imbalance arises between black and white: the trick enables the white people to steal the goods and knowledge the sovereign solar entity intended to reserve for black people, ever after kept in their state of unknowing.

On the one hand, the followers of the cult regarded the cargo and the books containing the secrets of their manufacture as Moroa's creations, intended for the people of New Ireland but usurped by white people. In this, they were showing more than a simple desire for European manufactured products; they were manifesting a deeply rooted will to restore a vision of the world in which the almighty solar entity had created expressly for them all things that were pleasant for humans. This vision was severely shaken by the arrival of the Europeans, exclusive owners of these ever-so-enviable new items. On the other hand, they saw these same goods as symbolic of both white people's identity and their specificity as attested by the identification of the shark that contained them with a malanggan. This association between cargo, books and a malanggan was no doubt facilitated by the fact that the local populations never saw the production phase of manufactured goods. White people could therefore be suspected of behaving like the clan fashioning copies of its malanggan, hidden behind a high fence of vegetation erected around the male enclosure and forbidding entry to all outsiders in order to protect the secrets, techniques and magic spells connected with their production.

Offering a sacrifice to white people
But let us come back to my informants' account of the conduct of the cargo cult. Having killed the child, the Lurumbi clan would suspend the corpse from a ritual post erected in Katandan Moroa, beside the spring known as Legepkevi, the source of one of the two rivers
bounding this sacred place. This ritual post, *laramba*, traditionally appeared in certain rites marking the closure of the funeral cycle in which the table placed at the foot of the post was used to display the food (taro and pig meat) before it was distributed. It was also used when, following illicit sexual relations between two persons (from the same dual unit or guilty of an adulterous relationship that had become known), the mutually offended clans, as a peace gesture, offered each other the respective bodies. Each clan killed the clan member who had violated custom, made a *laramba*, which it set up in the other hamlet, suspended the victim from the top of the post, then buried the body that had been likewise presented to it, in its own graveyard. The *laramba*, then, the name of which comes from the verb ‘to give’, was thus used to display the food or the cadaver given by one group to another. The two aspects, it seems to me, are conjoined in the ritual post used in the cargo cult. The sacrificed child displayed on the post was said to be ‘fed to the white people’s *malanggan*’ and therefore seen as a form of food, at the same time as it was probably seen as a corpse presented to the Europeans so that they might bury it in their own ground, as in the traditional sacrifice where the child was given to the lineage of its father and buried with him.

The Lurumbi clan would then wait for the *lembebanan*, the shark, to swim up to the Legepkevi spring from the sea or the world of the dead (depending on the version), and deposit, on the table at the base of the ritual post, the merchandise and the books it carried in its belly. A taboo placed on this spring ensured the clan that no outsider could benefit from these goods. The *lembebanan* would indeed arrive, but it would deliver only part of its cargo, namely the merchandise. When this had been exhausted by the cult members who, without the books, could not manufacture the goods themselves, another child would be sacrificed. Each sacrifice, which was followed by the arrival of the *lembebanan* and the delivery of the merchandise but not the books, therefore bore witness to the partial failure of the preceding one.

Before being killed, I was told, the child was fed in Katandan Moroa on the foodstuffs formerly procured by the *lembebanan*, some of which were put by for the purpose. It is worth noting that the sacrificed victim was fed on the contents of the *lembebanan*, the ‘white people’s *malanggan*’, before being killed and ‘fed’ to this *malanggan*, as the parents were told when they were presented with the child’s severed finger. This two-way nourishing relationship, which joins the sacrificed child with the instrument of the whiteman’s identity (the shark filled with merchandise and books, seen as their *malanggan*), may echo the image of the child nourished by the contents of the nurturing womb that is its mother, and the image of the corpse which nourishes the graveyard of its clan where it is buried, two representations that are associated with the notion of membership in a clan. In this case, we would have here a symbolic short-cut expressing the following thinking: the members of the cult wanted the sacrificed child to be affiliated in death to the group — here white people — whose *malanggan* it was to win for its own clan.

As we saw earlier, this was traditionally the only way an exchange could enable a clan to win control of a *malanggan* initially held by another group and to be taught the knowledge indispensable to the manufacture and ritual display of the copies which could not be transmitted either under force or outside a ritual funeral setting. It was therefore entirely in
line with this tradition that a clan from Mesi seems to have tried to exchange the life and the social identity of several of its very young members for the technical and magical ability to procure European manufactured articles.

I will add one last argument in support of my hypothesis. Traditionally the clan which, in return for the sacrifice of one of its members, received control of a land or a malanggan belonging to another clan, necessarily got it from a clan to which it had given one of its women, since it was only a man’s wife or child that was sacrificed upon his death. Now it happens that New Irelanders did give women to white men. The women of New Ireland were highly prized by the colonists, who took them as concubines or used them as prostitutes; and many children were born of these unions. The fact that Europeans had fathered children raised by New Irelanders may have promoted the idea among the latter that they were indebted to these white men who had given them their ‘blood’, and that by foregoing for their own benefit the life and social identity of some of their children, they might both pay off this debt and acquire rightful control of European goods. Furthermore, nothing prevents us supposing that one of the merchants killed by Mesi villagers before the arrival of the first missionaries may have had a child with a Lurumbi woman, and that the first child sacrifice was performed following this death, prompted by the dramatic food shortages that plagued New Ireland in 1903: this situation is indeed comparable to a total lack of land or malanggan, which can drive a clan to traditional human sacrifice.

Insofar as only a clan holding several malanggan subtypes would probably agree to forfeit control of one of them, it is likely that the cult followers were seeking, not to deprive Europeans of their control over the production of merchandise, but merely to ensure their own source of the production of these goods, separate from that of white people. They were probably not aiming at a new inversion of the imbalance between Black and White mentioned in the cargo myth, but at establishing through exchange a true balance between these two halves of humanity, and therefore a parity comparable to that reigning in traditional myths between the dual units following the exchanges between Moroa and Sigirigum. In other words, like so many of these movements, this cargo cult seems to have reflected the deep-seated desire of its members to deal with Europeans on an equal footing.74

The association of merchandise and books with a ‘white people’s malanggan’, the pivot of the cult and source of its original features — in particular recourse to child sacrifice and the desire for the victims to be affiliated in death to the white people’s group — left a remarkable reminder: the Mandak verb for writing (‘I write’: anamalanggan 75) is itself formed from the word malanggan.
Footnotes

1 During a 16-month ethnographic study funded by a DGRST research fellowship.
6 See Bodrogi (1967: 76), who has translated and published the notes taken by his compatriot, L. Birò, in New Ireland in 1900, in the course of a voyage made for the purpose of collecting malanggan objects for the Budapest ethnographic museum.
12 The information on the history of Methodist missions in New Ireland is taken from Threlfall (1975).
13 When, in 1903, Parkinson (1927 [1907]: 522) expressed his surprise at not finding any masks in the Tanga Islands (off the southeastern coast of New Ireland) where they once abounded, he was told that they were no longer made because the young men were away from their natal village and could no longer be initiated into the secrets of mask-making.
14 See Scragg (1957).
15 Chinnery (1929: 46–47).
16 Parkinson (1926 [1907]: 524).
17 Linge (1932: 11, 50).
19 Boluminski (1904: 28).
20 Walden and Nevermann (1940: 13).
22 Billings and Peterson (1967: 26).
23 See Birò’s notes, published by his fellow-countryman, Bodrogi (1967: 64).
26 This remark in no way implies a connection between the mother’s foreign origin and the fact that the child sacrificed is female; these are simply the two cases on which Jessep’s informants were most forthcoming.
27 Note that these cases, reported by Jessep’s informants, occurred before the turn of the twentieth century, in Kono and Karu villages.
30 If human sacrifices seem to have been traditionally restricted to rare cases of lack of land or fishing zones, it is likely that, before bringing them to a halt, colonisation, through the plantation system, first increased their rate. In the Barok and Mandak areas, and probably in the other linguistic areas as well, whose land-tenure systems are still little known, trees, which are grown by the men, belong to the man who plants them. If a man has planted trees — usually banana palms — on the land of his wife’s or children’s descent group, the latter is supposed to tear them up upon his death because they are not its property. (The trees the man has planted on the ground of his own descent group belong to his maternal kinsmen who make the largest material contribution on the occasion of his funeral.) The exploitation of copra, instigated by merchants and planters, suddenly made coconut palms very valuable; but these are slow-growing trees that only begin producing years after they have been planted. In order to continue, after a man’s death, to exploit the coconuts he has planted uniquely on the ground of his descent group (otherwise they would be torn up at his death), his wife and children have no alternative but to acquire permanent rights to the land on which the
trees are growing. While human sacrifice was not the only means of gaining rights to a piece of land belonging to another descent group, it did have the advantage of not depriving the group practising it of part of its wealth. That is probably why W. C. Groves mentioned that killing the wife enabled the group to gain rights to the coconuts of her late husband’s lineage, and why F. Bolominski noted the frequent sacrifices of wives in north New Ireland (in the vicinity of Lauan village), which was an early centre of intensive copra production. Furthermore, the German administration probably increased the number of human sacrifices by forcing the inland villagers to move to villages on the coast, where they found themselves in the situation of immigrants.

31 On Lelet plateau, for instance, the man in charge of one of his clan’s male enclosures and anxious to win prestige by organising funerals, would, in exchange for payment, accept the bodies of the refugees he had admitted to his hamlet. Upon occasion he would also use his authority to perform the funeral of his own wife, turning a deaf ear to the demands of her clan, who wanted to take the body back to their own group’s male enclosure.

32 Linge (1932: 11).

33 Italics in Linge.

34 Linge (1932: 50).

35 Birò, quoted by Bodrogi (1967: 64, 66).


48 See Jessep (1977: 233–285). It was always the entire territory of the moribund clan that was at stake; the territory was not shared if several groups were candidates: there was only one winner.


51 This could mean that, when a person had been killed and found on a land, the clan to which it belonged was often suspected and would prefer to cede a piece of its territory as compensation rather than suffer the revenge of the victim’s clan.

52 Under the leadership of Ben Lenturut, bishop of New Ireland and himself a native of Lelet plateau, the United Church was infiltrated in 1972 by several ecstatic movements known as ‘Holy Spirit Movements’ (See Derlon 2002a, 2002b). These were an outgrowth of evangelical and fundamentalist sects characterised by an extremely dogmatic and puritanical approach to Christianity (See Barr 1983). In the 1980s, this new trend in the United Church was very strong at Lelet, where the most fervent members came from the 20—30 year-olds who had attended school. Impressed by the local pastor’s sermons, which presented their pagan past as the work of Satan, and by the young people’s clear disdain for traditional customs, my privileged informants, all elderly, refused for over a year to acknowledge that some of them were still using human skulls or that the young boys used to be circumcised during certain types of malanggan rites. Their refusal to admit that their ancestors once practised child sacrifice is therefore easily explained, and all the more because I was too hasty in ceasing to question them on the subject, perhaps unconsciously happy with their negative replies.

53 In the 1970s, as shown by a land dispute reported by Jessep (1977: 208), it was this inability to understand why they should have had to pay for the life of a child they had not killed that one Barok lineage used as an
argument for demanding and obtaining payment for the pieces of land used by a lineage that had once sacrificed one of its young members. While the true logic behind this acquisition of land in exchange for the sacrifice of a child now escaped the villagers, they had nevertheless grasped the fact that it could not be simply compensation for homicide.

56 Linge (1932: 50).
60 On Lelet plateau, bodies used to be buried in a foetal position, in a log-lined vertical grave, which suggests that the father and his child rested like two foetuses in the same grave.
62 For details on the parallels between land rights and malanggan rights, as well as the ways and means of their transfer between individuals and groups, see Derlon (1994 and 1997a).
64 Küchler (1983: 73).
65 In his history of the Methodist Church in the New Guinea island region (1975: 80).
66 The 1903 drought is mentioned by Linge (1932: 16).
67 Threlfall (1975: 80).
68 Note that the name Lupalau itself, which my informants used when speaking of the Lurumbi clansman, instigator of the cargo cult, is built on the word lau and therefore could be a nickname given as a reminder of his role in the human sacrifices linked with this cult.
72 Or the cadavers of two other persons — a man and a woman — used as substitutes if the guilty individuals were too important to be sacrificed by their respective clans.
74 See Derlon (2002b) for information on the way the Mandak today envisage some of their relations with Westerners.
75 The prefix ana- acts as the personal pronoun ‘I’.