

3. *Las Kantri*: Lihir Before the Mining Era

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... (Revelations 21:1).

All of our talk was coming up. Those who died before, now they had come up, they had come up and we recognised them. But they couldn't talk to us and tell who they were, but we saw them and knew ... we recognised their walk, their eyes, their head ... now if you have a mark and you die, we can still recognise you.... When Kennecott was here, if you were hungry, go and eat first, you don't need to buy anything ... we took all sorts of White man's food, and we did not buy it. Food wasn't anything, if you were hungry, you go and eat, you just go. Everything was free ... Arau's talk was true, the ships were full up. Later he said when the ships come here, money will pour out on us. Every house will be full up of things belonging to White men. Now all the men started to look and they believed him now.... When Kennecott left so did all of our ancestors. Who will make these things come up now? Arau had said that everything will be free for us, but they [Kennecott] went back now and now things were not free, everything was hidden again (Bah Arom, Kinami village, Lihir, 2004).

This chapter offers a short economic and political history of Lihir to illuminate historical influences on the ways in which Lihirians have responded to mining, and to illustrate the genesis and escalation of desire for economic and political autonomy (not necessarily outright secession), and the rising antipathy towards the colonial administration and later the State. Earlier social movements — namely the Tutukuvul Isakul Association (TIA), which evolved into Tuk Kuvul Aisok (TKA),¹ and later the Nimamar movement — are the combined result of moral inequality between Lihirians and Whites, and the gradual process of pauperisation that encompassed Lihir under the Australian administration, generating a sense of economic frustration. These movements preached a form of millenarianism whereby Lihir would become the *las kantri* (last country) — the utopian new world. By tracing political and economic developments through the colonial period, particularly the latter years of the Australian administration (1945–75), the peak of these social movements (in the 1960s and 1970s), and later developments in the 1980s that led up to the beginning of mining, I provide a genealogy of Lihirian marginality, discontent and desire for wealth

¹ *Tutukuvul isakul* means 'stand up together to plant' in northwestern New Ireland languages; *tuk kuvul aisok* means 'stand together and work' in the Tigak language of that region.

and independence. This reveals not only the conditions under which these movements emerged, but also their defining characteristics that have continued to influence Lihirian praxis and ideology. Thus, a historical understanding of the ways in which Lihirians shaped and understood the colonial project and national independence tells us something about the contemporary political and economic climate in the context of large-scale resource extraction.

This chapter is intended to reflect the ways in which Lihirians have collectively reconstructed their sense of historical time. The 13 years of mining exploration and negotiations have been condensed into a revolutionary moment of change — a single historical cleavage. It is not that people fail to recall different moments throughout this period. Putput residents especially remember the mixture of anticipation, excitement, trepidation and sadness that accompanied early interactions with exploration teams, drillers, government and company representatives, the establishment of the Ladolam camp, employment opportunities and new wealth, the embattled negotiations and the experience of relocation. And while most other Lihirians were not so closely aligned with the project, many still recall a steady stream of political, economic and social changes in their lives. However, the combination of lapsed time and profound change means that, in popular discourse and memory, history is now often divided between mining and pre-mining periods. Many Lihirians think that the present — *nau* (now) — is spiralling into a state of social anomie which they compare with an Edenic, ordered and stable past — *bipo* (before). Social history has been divided in ways that essentialise the past and the present as dichotomous states.

Lihirian historical accounts are deeply imbued with a ‘structural nostalgia’ (Herzfeld 1990). It is often in people’s political interest to minimise the perception of historical change prior to mining and to develop narratives of unprecedented rupture imposed on an unchanging social environment. Although many Lihirians persistently present an image of past stability, cohesion, morality and order, Lihir has long been experiencing change, and there is scant evidence that Lihirians were not always subject to mutability and the inherent instability of local political formations. Without suggesting an earlier time of harmonious social cohesion, any ‘stability’ that might have once existed was purely the result of leadership qualities that were still ‘relevant’ to the social and economic climate.² Each generation required new leaders equipped to deal with new changes. However, large-scale resource extraction invariably produces change at a faster rate than that to which local communities (and their leaders) can adjust

2 Throughout much of PNG, disputes, conflict or even instability, are not symptomatic of social anomie, rather they are a relatively normal state of affairs. The pacifying efforts of the colonial administration may have successfully targeted endemic warfare throughout much of the Territory, but as Goldman (2007: 69) argues, ‘even for the most sensitive of post-colonial consciences, a “community without conflict” is neither a destination objective, nor a socially imaginable outcome’.

(Jackson 1997: 106–7). The recent shifts in Lihir highlight how pervasive and detrimental the effects of capitalism can be, even on the most flexible of social structures, especially when it arrives through large-scale mining.

Notwithstanding the comparatively sudden impact of mining, the changes that took place in Lihir over a much longer duration through the twentieth century were equally pronounced. The ways in which Lihirians responded to external influences from missionaries, merchants and administrators reflected comparable colonial encounters occurring throughout Melanesia and other parts of the world. Although social scientists have long held a deep fascination with indigenous responses to externally imposed change throughout the world, Melanesian responses have generated some of the most sustained anthropological attention. Of particular interest was the proliferation of spontaneous local movements from the 1950s onwards, that differed in their specific objectives and origins, but shared broadly similar concerns with the achievement of economic, social and political development through forms of communal action. The bewildering variety of movements, which the colonial administration loosely termed ‘cargo cults’, differed according to local historical experiences, customs and epistemologies.

Many of these movements contained an uneasy combination of local mythology, eschatological and subaltern theologies, ritual, communistic sentiments, new forms of leadership and economic activities (often centred upon cooperative efforts), prophesy, visions and supposed miracles, material objectives, and a deep concern with moral equality (Lawrence 1964; Worsley 1968; Lindstrom 1990; Burridge 1995). Both the colonial administration and national politicians have used the term ‘cargo cult’, often pejoratively, to describe any seemingly bizarre behavior or local political activities which often have little to do with cargo expectations as narrowly defined (Walter 1981). However, clear differences can be found among these movements and responses. Some were overtly political, and are better described as micro-nationalist movements (May 1982); others resembled self-help movements or development associations (Gerritsen et al. 1982), and some were decidedly ‘other-worldly’ or millenarian. Depending upon leadership and local historical circumstances, different elements were emphasised at different points in time, or were mixed with various results. Anthropological treatment of these movements has varied accordingly, combining cultural, psychological, political, economic, and theological analysis. More recently, commentators have opted for an increasingly self-reflexive and deconstructive focus: cult movements have proven ‘good to think’, as the gaze is shifted back to the Western fixation with desire and the irregularities and irrationalities of bourgeois society. They have perhaps proven similarly useful, albeit in different ways, for their alleged adherents, who think both with and against

them. Yet ultimately, we find that the variety of social movements prevalent within Melanesia continues to highlight Western assumptions underpinning interpretations of history and cultural difference.

Early Encounters

The first recorded sighting of the Lihir Islands was in 1616, by Dutch explorers Jacob Le Maire and William Cornelisz Schouten who observed it from the south at some distance as they hugged the northern shores of New Ireland. The islands were first named Gerrit de Nijs Eylandt by another Dutchman, Abel Janszoon Tasman, in 1643, when he navigated through New Guinea onboard the *Heemskerck*. He approached within two miles, and an artist onboard named Isaac Gilseman sketched the first image of Lihir (see Sharp 1968: 56).

The first contacts that extended to any form of trade or engagement were probably between Lihirians and whalers from the late 1830s until the early 1880s. Whalers operating in the Bismarck Archipelago during this period frequently sought wood to fuel their onboard processing, as well as food. German naval officers produced the first map of Lihir and the large bay of Luisehafen in 1880. Germany first raised the flag in North East New Guinea in 1884, but it was not until 19 May 1900 that the German administration arrived in Lihir in the form of Governor Rudolf von Benningsen and Prof. Dr Robert Koch, accompanied by the ethnographic collector Lajos Biro. During the 1880s, greater numbers of Lihirians became involved in the labour trade for the Queensland, Fiji and Gazelle Peninsula plantations, in what was often regarded as ‘blackbirding’ — the kidnapping of unwilling ill-fated islanders. Missionaries were habitually prone to describing these labour vessels as ‘slavers’, based on the assumption that islanders failed to comprehend the realities of the contract (Scarr 1967: 139). Historians have since reassessed these assumptions, suggesting that, once islanders were aware of the contracts, they used the opportunity to travel and signed on (and off) of ‘their own free will’ (Firth 1976: 52).

Large numbers of Lihirians signed on as plantation labourers for the Queensland sugar industry.³ Men and women were recruited from various places, with little uniformity across the region. For instance, in 1883, 649 men from Lihir signed on — an extraordinary number given that the population then was well under 3000 people — compared with only 368 from Tanga, 37 from Feni, 28 from

3 Given the comparatively high number of Lihirian men who initially signed on for the labour trade, it is tempting to speculate whether this activity also had cult-like qualities, and whether Lihirians interpreted recruiters as returned ancestors and thought that this avenue might offer a path to ‘deliverance’.

Tabar and 240 from mainland New Ireland (Price and Baker 1976: 116). Lihirians also participated in the Fiji labour trade, albeit offering only eight men between 1876 and 1911.⁴

New Irelanders recruited to work on the plantations throughout Kaiser Wilhelmsland (mainland New Guinea) had also come to realise the associated risks, which Firth suggests are best summarised by a single statistic — an average annual death rate of over 40 per cent of the 2802 islanders who passed through Kokopo control station on their way to western Kaiser Wilhelmsland and Astrolabe Bay plantations between 1887 and 1903 (Firth 1976: 53). Before long, New Irelanders were loath to travel and work in these areas, and began responding aggressively towards traders and recruiters. Kaiser Wilhelmsland was gaining a reputation in the New Guinea islands ‘of being the place where there was “no kaikai [food], no Sunday, plenty fight, plenty die”’ (Firth 1982: 38). Violent interactions between traders, labour recruiters and New Guineans were common in northwestern New Ireland, partly fuelled by community anger and resentment over the loss of kinsmen in plantation labour:

Men sought vengeance for the loss of kinsmen on plantations far from home. NGC [New Guinea Company] recruiters in the area of the Lihir Islands near New Ireland were subjected to what appeared to be a planned attack in March 1884, when nine new recruits fell upon them with their bare hands while kinsmen gave support with axes. The German helmsmen and at least two New Guinean crew were killed (*ibid.*).

Reluctance to engage in wage labour stemmed from the atrocious working conditions and a more general realisation that the lot of the labourer was not necessarily better than village life. Such sentiments were captured in the words of one Lihirian who, in 1900, reportedly asked Governor Rudolf von Benningsen ‘why villagers should go to the plantations when they had plenty to eat at home’ (Firth 1976: 54).

Not all outside engagement was violent. In 1907, Otto Schlaginhaufen left Germany with the Deutsche Marine-Expedition for the Bismark Archipelago. He reached the shores of Lihir at Leo, near Palie, in 1908. During his time in Lihir, he recorded 19 traditional Lihirian songs on wax cylinders, mapped the main island of Aniolam, and documented aspects of Lihirian culture (Schlaginhaufen 1959: 133). The renowned ethnologist Richard Parkinson, who worked throughout New Guinea between 1882 and 1909, also visited Lihir and recorded local cultural traits (Parkinson 1907).

⁴ By comparison, some 36 males from Simberi (Tabar group), 104 from Lavongai (New Hanover) and 325 from mainland New Ireland made their way to Fiji (Seigel 1985: 53).

In the final years of German rule, the annual reports state in an ominously prophetic tone that 'hitherto ... the administration has not been able to play a more active role here [in Lihir] because of poor communications' (Sack and Clark 1978: 338). The Australian administration, which followed the Australian occupation of the Territory in 1914, did not bring substantially greater economic development or considerably improved communication with Lihirians, averaging at best one patrol a year until at least the mid-1960s. The Australians inherited from the Germans an organised system of leadership, relying on village 'police' and their assistants, known as *luluais* and *tultuls*,⁵ to implement colonial authority (Rowley 1958: 217; Firth 1982: 2) (Plate 3-1). With the cessation of German rule, the first task for the Australians was to 'reassure' people that although the Germans no longer held sway, the hierarchical order remained the same: Whites were vested with power to direct the lives of Melanesians, or as Firth (1982: 2) appositely states, 'it was the old colonial order under new management'.

Between the wars, Lihirian engagement with the cash economy was largely confined to limited copra production and petty trade within the domestic sphere. Reminiscences collected from elderly Lihirians indicate that economic productivity was especially low during these years. Lihirians, conscripted from Lihir and other parts of New Guinea such as Rabaul, participated in World War Two as labourers, carriers and messengers for both Japanese and Allied troops. Lihirians received remuneration for their assistance to the Allied troops, and compensation for war loss and damage, including that resulting from activities by the Japanese.⁶ Most oral accounts stress high numbers of males absent from Aniolum during this time and the harsh conditions under the Japanese (Zial 1975). Several older Lihirian males from Aniolum recounted their forced labour constructing airstrips on mainland New Ireland. Many recalled Japanese brutality, describing gruesome deaths for those who relaxed or refused to work. It is likely that post-war reluctance to be involved in plantation labour was shaped by these experiences.

The Pauperisation of Lihir

By the 1950s, economic development was still relatively limited. A single copra plantation had been established on the plateau at Londolovit (now the site of the mine camp and town), employing imported labour from New Ireland, New Britain, Bougainville and mainland New Guinea, particularly the Sepik region. Lihirians were apparently not only unwilling to work under foreigners but

⁵ The words *luluai* and *tultul* originate from the Kuanua language in East New Britain.

⁶ For example, Namatanai Patrol Report (PR) 8-1948/49 records paying out 248 pounds and 19 shilling to people in Lihir, mostly for pigs taken by the Japanese.

seemingly uninterested in local production. There were no local copra groves; locally owned plantations were small and used mainly for feeding domestic pigs. While the Catholic mission, which was established at Palie on Aniolum in 1902 (Trompf 1991: 169), ran a small trade store, it did not yet deal in copra. Government administrators saw agricultural potential in Lihir, but their attention was focused elsewhere in the district.

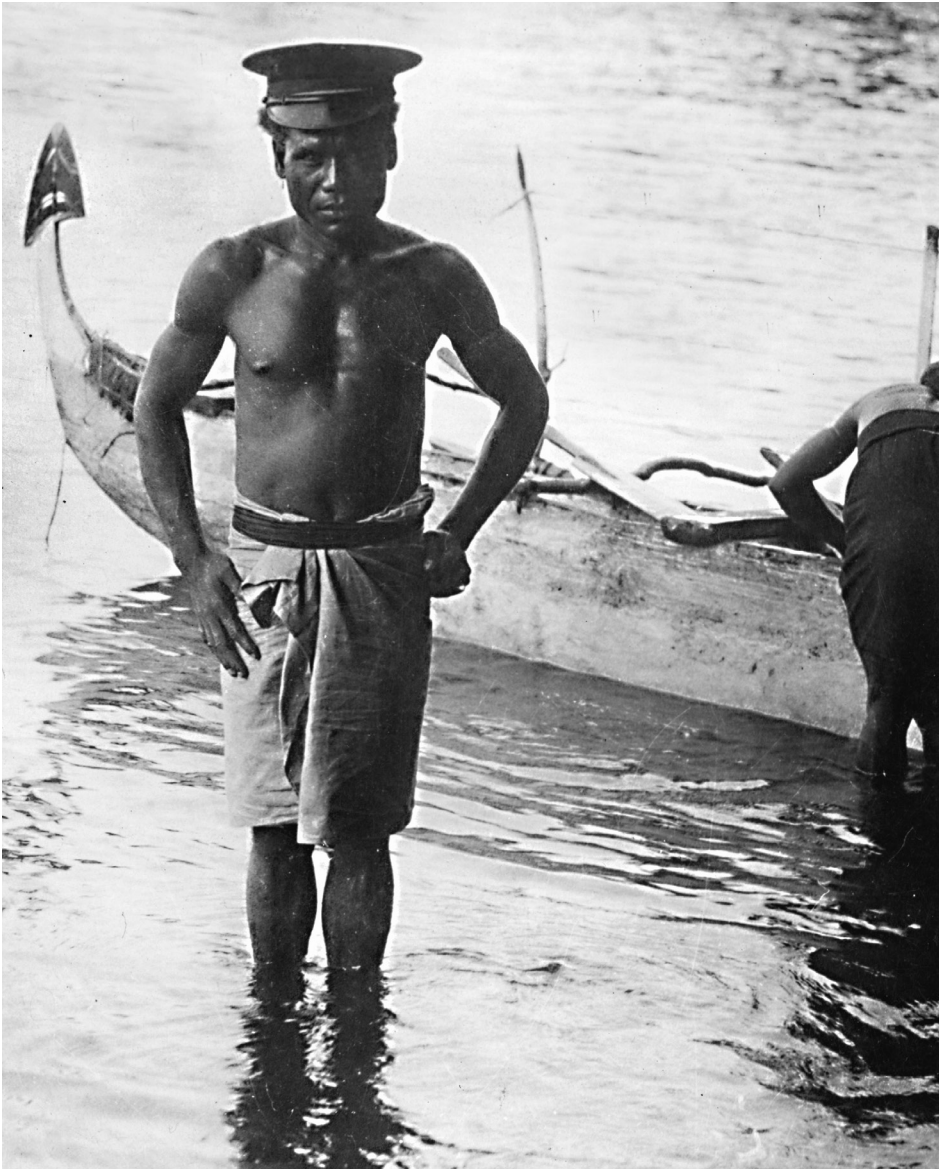


Plate 3-1: Lihir *luluai* in front of a *tlaliem* canoe, circa 1932.

Photograph by E.P. Chinnery, courtesy of the National Archives of Australia, A6510-1478.

All of this provided little incentive for Lihirians to develop their own plantations (Namatanai PR 4-51/52), and they were left by the administration to their own devices and ingenuity. Yet when Lihirians attempted to act upon their desires for (economic) self-improvement, their actions were consistently thwarted by an administration that held Lihirians incapable of running their own affairs, said to be the result of 'inbreeding' that produced a higher ratio of natives with 'sub-normal intelligence' (ibid.). Such apparently below average acumen did not stop Lihirians from raising nearly A£2000 towards their cause through 'donations' for the 'Lihir fund', which they were advised by the administration to deposit into a trust account at the Namatanai Sub-District office.

In 1951, Lihirians attempted to purchase a small work boat, to be Lihirian owned and managed, that would provide more regular travel to Namatanai on mainland New Ireland. Although the Catholic mission ran infrequent (and overcrowded) trips to the mainland, this service was insufficient for any regular copra trade. This early attempt to assume greater control over the direction of local economic activities was swiftly halted. The administration decided not to support this cooperative initiative, concluding that there would be too many logistical problems associated with local ownership and management of a boat. In years to come, the debacle surrounding the wreck and subsequent demise of the locally managed MV Venus on the neighbouring island of Tanga (Foster 1995a: 54–6) confirmed for the Australians the futility of locally owned and managed boats, causing them to rule such local initiatives 'out of the question' for Lihir (Namatanai PR 4-59/60).

By 1952, the administration had made the important observation that Lihirians were gaining a sense of economic self-consciousness:

Lihir Natives are awakening to the realisation that they are the poorest natives financially in the New Ireland District. The Lihirs have comparatively small holdings of coconuts and no alternative cash crop (Namatanai PR 6-52/53).

Even if the administration had possessed the foresight to act on these observations to avoid future political unrest, they were still constrained by scarce resources. It was some years before Lihirians connected their economic status with a government that denied their equality. Lihirians were beginning to perceive a process of 'pauperisation'. Like Jorgensen's observations among the Telefomin in the New Guinea highlands, this 'was rooted not so much in the "objective" features of the local economy — people did, in fact have more in the way of cash and material goods than before — as in their sense about where they stood in relation to future shares of worldly goods' (Jorgensen 1981: 66). These early murmurs of discontent would later flourish in the Tutukuvul Isakul Association movement, and find new life in the context of large-scale resource extraction.

Throughout the 1950s, the Lihirian copra industry advanced minimally, and Lihirians remained peripheral to New Ireland economic activity. Both the Huniho and Lakakot Bay plantations (on Aniolum) were established to complement the one already established at Londolovit, but they hardly offered encouraging prices for copra. The estimated total annual income recorded for Lihir in 1959 was A£8355, of which A£4015 was earned by 162 non-Lihirian plantation workers who came from New Ireland, New Britain, Bougainville and the Sepik District. Only 33 Lihirians were employed as labourers, earning A£1720; the remaining money was raised through personal sale of copra and foodstuffs, including pork (Namatanai PR 4-58/59). The fact that few Lihirians chose to work on these plantations amazed and frustrated plantation managers. While negative associations with indentured labour and wartime experiences undoubtedly influenced Lihirian reluctance, their desire for economic activity, tempered by their desire to have this exchange on their own terms, continued to be apparent — and has since been a recurrent theme in the relationship between many Lihirians, the mining company and the State.

The administration regarded Lihirians as 'lazy' and 'economically lethargic' (Namatanai PR 4-59/60), and so concentrated its efforts and resources elsewhere. Although various patrol officers noted Lihirian interest in forming copra societies, and recognised this interest could be harnessed if Cooperative Officers were sent to Lihir and the administration had a more regular local presence, it was decided that, until Lihirians showed more signs of genuine self-activity (more economic progress without external assistance), the administration would continue looking elsewhere in the district. Such policies kept Lihirians entrenched within a cycle of economic marginality.

During the following years, Lihirians were encouraged to establish more individual copra plantations as a basis for local economic development and political advancement. The administration was perturbed by the fact that Lihir showed so much unrealised potential. If Lihirians were to be incorporated into the local government council system, they would need to show more consistent efforts in their copra production. In 1959, Lihirians had over 32 000 mature, and 28 000 immature, coconut plants, which the administration estimated should yield at least 170 tons of copra annually. Instead, Lihirians were only producing between 60 to 70 tons (Namatanai PR 4-59/60). These results did not endear Lihirians to administrators, who believed that it was possible to 'develop the natives' by instilling the value of assiduous work and entrepreneurialism, but regarded those who failed to respond positively (according to Australian standards) as hopeless.

For the Australians, the acknowledged absence of necessary infrastructure for Lihirian economic development, such as a road, vehicle transport, sea ports and regular marine transport did not excuse a lack of industriousness. Lihirians were

encouraged to make use of the marketing channels already available through the mission and the three plantations. In 1959, Lihirians were exempt from taxation, presumably due to their low economic output, but in 1960, taxation was reintroduced as an incentive to economic activity, with explicit instructions that no exceptions would be granted where people had the opportunity to make copra. This still failed to lift production levels, and the administration argued that this was the result of a peculiar attitude among Lihirians, where people only did enough work to cover their annual A£1 for tax and A£1 for clothing (Namatanai PR 10-61/62).

Admitting to years of neglect, the administration argued that the only remedy for Lihirian economic stagnation was increased contact with Europeans, in the belief that this would somehow develop the necessary economic sensibilities. At the same time, even as enthusiasm for cooperative societies increased, indicating that not all Lihirians were as 'backward' as the patrol officers liked to imagine, any economic advancement was still inhibited by the lack of qualified staff and appropriate transport, and for the immediate future, there was no intention to rectify this situation (Namatanai PR 13-64/65). Interestingly, the patrol reports repeatedly state that Lihirians had not lost 'faith' in the administration despite the lack of attention, and that Lihirians were still optimistic about what the administration might do for them. This might be interpreted simply as an administrative delusion, or an indication of government arrogance, ignorance and conceit. Alternatively, it may partly explain why support for the administration later declined rapidly in favour of emerging local prophetic leaders who promised more immediate returns on local investments. New expectations fostered by local leaders who preached radical messages of change would have lasting effects on Lihirians as they began to articulate their desire for greater control over their economic and political future.

'Improvements' and Approaching Impairments

Between 1965 and 1970, Lihir underwent three significant developments that paved the way for the TIA (which initially began on New Hanover). These were the establishment of 'progress' or 'cooperative' societies, incorporation into the Namatanai Local Government Council (NLGC), and the emergence of entrepreneurial 'big-men',⁷ who gained new status through their monopoly on copra production. The administration initially took these events as signs of

⁷ There has been considerable debate in the Melanesian anthropological literature over the term 'big-man' that denotes a particular style of Melanesian leadership. Although Melanesian 'big-men' have been contrasted to Polynesian 'chiefs', many anthropologists have contested the use of this term for all Melanesian leaders (see Sahlins 1963; Godelier and Strathern 1991).

progress that validated its own policy; but in reality, these were less the result of ‘obedience’ to administrative directives and more the cumulative result of nearly 70 years of sporadic engagement with outside influences.

The first of these changes took place after a visit in 1965 from Nicholas Brokam, the Member for New Ireland in the first House of Assembly for PNG.⁸ He came to gauge interest for a locally owned copra boat, believing it would give Lihirians a greater sense of connection to the mainland. Sigial, a *luluai* from Lesel village (on Aniolum), took it upon himself to form a committee with other big-men, with the intention to raise funds through a form of taxation and publicly discuss the need for a government school, increased copra plantings and something described as *lo bilong Brokam* (Brokam’s law). The administration found this an ‘alarming situation’, particularly as there was no consistency in the ‘tax’ levied; women were only occasionally exempted, and men were expected to pay between A£5 and A£10 (Namatanai PR 15-65/66). A man of immense ambition, Sigial was partly acting on faith in the administration, and partly attempting to make himself a man of consequence — describing himself as the ‘Member for Lihir’ — who could deliver economic prosperity if people abided by the ‘laws’ he delineated as the key to success. The administration was wary of the potential for disturbance as a result of Sigial’s activities, but concluded that, as no cults had ‘broken out’, all they could do was keep watch on his movements (to the extent that this was possible through annual visits).

This was the first recorded instance of Lihirians attempting to transform their society by mimicking the salient features of administration practice. While ritualistic performance of ‘official’ activities was a common feature of numerous movements throughout Melanesia, this was not mere copying or blatant irrationality. In Lihir, this was an attempt to harness the ‘power’ and ‘success’ seemingly inherent in the administration’s activities, or what Douglas Dalton (2000: 290) might describe as ‘corporally doing power’. In the years to follow, and into the mining era, finding the right ‘formula’ or practices became central to Lihirian attempts to understand and control modern processes of production and wealth accumulation; and in each instance, this was inspired by an imagined future that repositioned Lihir itself.

Sigial’s activities coincided with the formation of a number of small cooperative societies, some of which were probably spurred on by his messages. These represented some level of economic progress. On the outer islands, people began

8 Brokam was the Member for New Ireland from 1964 to 1966. Throughout 1965 and 1966, he made several enquiries in the House of Assembly about obtaining work boats to better serve patrol officers and communities in Namatanai District, though as we shall see, these requests were not fulfilled on account of limited government resources. He recognised the correlation between discontent in New Hanover and limited development opportunities and government assistance, and argued that a similar situation would arise in other isolated island areas if assistance was not provided.

forming themselves into functioning societies that worked together to market copra. Similar activities occurred on Aniolum, as people formed *wok sosaiti bilong tesin* (plantation work societies). People paid membership fees to join, and spent two days a week maintaining plantation groves 'owned' by various members. The administration understood these activities as confirmation of its modernist ideals:

Community effort will teach them the basics of working together as a unit and will place the progress of Lihir as a whole uppermost in their minds, and not the fostering of tribal differences, a stranglehold on progress at the best of times. These later will no doubt die a hard death, having been the accepted way of life for centuries, but their exit will be hastened when the benefits of community effort are made manifest. A square mile of healthy young palms speaks so much louder than an acre of ancient ill kept ones (Namatanai PR 15-65/66).

Copra production levels increased but never matched predictions. The rise was partly due to the establishment of new cooperative societies, but also the emergence of entrepreneurs who began to alter Lihirian economic, political and social conditions. These enterprising big-men began drawing on introduced forms of governance and economic activity to reinforce authority within existing frameworks of power. Both the 'traditional' and the 'modern' were integrated: *bisnis* (petty trade in the form of the copra industry) was in no way extraneous to or practically insulated from the matriline or the realm of *kastom*.

Bell's (1947) early descriptions of Tengan exchange correlate with anecdotal accounts from Lihir and provide insights into the ways in which New Ireland big-men managed and utilised introduced items and money within their local political economy. These accounts suggest that Lihirian feasting and exchange became grander and more competitive as big-men controlled and exploited new forms of wealth gained through plantation wage labour, either by themselves or through those under their influence. Notwithstanding the fact that exchange practices were radically altered through 'pacification' and the introduction of steel tools and new forms of wealth, the changes that occurred as new entrepreneurial big-men gained a stronghold on the nascent copra industry in the late 1960s and early 1970s represented a new era in Lihirian economic relations (for examples elsewhere in PNG, see Strathern 1971b; Gregory 1982; Clark 2000). Their ability to manage clan and village labour, which assisted their domination of the cash economy, also bolstered their local authority. This did not create a rural proletariat, but it did mean that the majority of Lihirians were subordinate to the success of these men and remained peripheral to 'commoditisation'. As in other Melanesian societies engaged in cash cropping, the colonial economy began to be reconfigured in terms of big-man politics (see Finney 1973; Strathern 1982b; Foster 1995a). These men established

small trade stores, maintained large copra groves that employed relatives and village members as casual labourers, formed 'progress societies', and provided transport services with motorised canoes. Leadership was consolidated around their management of a local political economy that was completely enmeshed with council activities and the control of local copra production, placing them among the 'biggest' men in Lihir. Their strategic effort to subsume the cash economy into the local exchange system represents an early attempt on the part of Lihirian people to control their entry into modernity and global capitalist exchange.

In 1967, Lihir was officially incorporated into the Namatanai Local Government Council (NLGC) and, within one year, the council was fully entrenched in Lihir with the appointment of local councillors. Elderly *luluai* and *tultul* were replaced by younger and more educated men. While some *luluai* stayed on as councillors (the new local government leaders under the NLGC), many were happy to relinquish their positions, especially those who lacked authority and were unable to carry out their council duties. Despite continual references to Lihirian ignorance and uninterest in political progress, in 1970 it was noted that Lihirians had a 'grossly excessive representation' in the NLGC with their 11 members, far exceeding the number from any other census division on a per capita basis (Namatanai PR 12-69/70). Regardless of whether Lihirians were able to comprehend the Westminster system, or who represented them in the national political arena, their entry into the new government system did not dampen enthusiasm for government-funded development. Indeed, it was this increasing expectation of government assistance and attention — never to be realised — that bred disillusionment, hostility and dreams for an inverted order.

Lihirians were becoming increasingly aware of their relative deprivation in comparison with Europeans and their close neighbours in the region. Reluctance to work for Europeans and non-Lihirians on local plantations reflected the minimal wages and returns offered in this exchange and the inferiority which Lihirians were made to feel at the hands of *ol kiap* (government patrol officers) and plantation owners. Incorporation into the NLGC, which coincided with the formation of cooperative societies and an increased interest in local economic production, fuelled expectations for the changes that the administration promised would arise through 'self-activity'. Inclusion into the new government system brought increased control into their lives, but did not secure greater economic activity in spite of the efforts of some Lihirians. Copra societies might have represented local enthusiasm for collective activity, but without the necessary transport and infrastructural support from the administration, these efforts were bound to fail.

The rise of entrepreneurial big-men, who gained prestige across various realms, introduced Lihirians to unprecedented forms of economic stratification. As

younger big-men merged their monopoly over copra production with their local political aspirations, some Lihirians expressed discontent over individual wealth accumulation that was seen as possible only at the expense of others. Combined with resentment towards the existing colonial hierarchy, Lihirians, especially older big-men with waning political influence, were receptive to the radical messages that would arrive from New Hanover.

The 'Johnson' Influence

In 1964, the Territory of Papua and New Guinea held the first national elections to provide representatives for the House of Assembly. In New Hanover, northwest of mainland New Ireland, which had a population of approximately 7000, nearly half the adults refused to follow the prescribed voting method, instead voting for America's President Johnson. These stirrings of discontent soon came to the attention of Lihirians, as people responded with increased antipathy towards the government's inability to fulfil local desires for economic progress and moral equality. According to Dorothy Billings, people in New Hanover had been impressed by US army surveyors working in the district, whose generosity with food, goods and payment for locally hired labour was unprecedented. This became known in New Hanover as 'the American way' (Billings 1969: 13). Frustrated with their marginal status and comparatively slow economic progress under the Australian administration, people from New Hanover voted for Johnson and raised A\$1000 to pay his fare to New Hanover. The administration responded to this action with more regular patrols, political education, and violent punitive expeditions. In return, the people of New Hanover refused to pay their taxes, and defaulters were consequently imprisoned (Billings 1969; Miskaram 1985).

The movement was labelled 'The Johnson Cult' (at least among its critics), although it was never a cult in any common sense of the term: it spawned no prophetic leaders, and the emphasis was practical not ritual. There were no visitations, deities, spirit mediums, elaborate doctrines, or epiphanic revelations. Whether the ancestors knew how to produce cargo was unclear and largely irrelevant: clearly, the Americans knew how, and they could teach the people of New Hanover, while the Australians apparently refused to share their *save* (knowledge). The main aim of the movement, which gained several thousand supporters in southern New Hanover and parts of New Ireland, was not political independence but the replacement of Australians with Americans as a means of improving the people's welfare and status (May 2001: 59). In an effort to channel these energies into more productive ends, Father Miller, an American Catholic priest working on New Hanover, encouraged people to form themselves into an 'investment society', which they called the Tutukuvul Isakul Association (TIA).

Miller's American heritage proved influential, often reinforcing the conviction among adherents that the Americans would somehow come to their aid. The TIA gained momentum throughout New Hanover, with strong support from Johnson 'cultists'. Although TIA membership required payment of government taxes, many members remained resistant towards the council and refused to pay.

Lihirian Adoption

The movement soon spread to Kavieng District, and groups organised themselves under the new title Tuk Kuvul Aisok (TKA), partly in an attempt to separate themselves from the stigma of the 'Johnson cult'. The TKA was reportedly introduced to Lihir in 1969 by Theodore Arau from Matakues village on Aniolum. Arau was described by Yngvar Ramstad as a quiet and shy man, about 45 years old at the time (Ramstad n.d. 1).⁹ Arau was never a big-man in the traditional sense, but he had once been a catechist for the Catholic mission and then a native *doktaboi* (doctor boy, or medical orderly). While living in Kavieng, Arau became a member of the TKA movement, later encouraging other Lihirians to join. Within three months, close to half the adult Lihirian population of approximately 4500 people had reportedly joined the association, and within a few years, as its influence and membership increased, every village was split between members and non-members. Inspired by the activities in New Hanover, Lihirian members also refused to pay taxes. Initially, the administration took a hardline stance towards the TKA, jailing those who refused to comply with territory laws, assuming that this would deter others. As was the case in New Hanover, however, this only made martyrs of the people who were prosecuted, strengthening local resolve and resistance.

At various times, the TKA resembled a 'progress society' or 'self-help movement', emphasising pragmatism over religion and self-help over myth. The TKA held regular working days that often drew people away from council tasks such as cleaning villages, maintaining paths, or building roads and bridges. Efforts were supposedly concentrated on clearing and maintaining TKA copra plantations in various villages. The divide between government and TKA work caused obvious rifts but, according to several elderly (pro-administration) Lihirians, the problem was not so much the division of labour, but rather that TKA workdays were often spent holding meetings and discussing possible dates on which the cargo would arrive. The TKA reportedly charged its members A40 cents for every day they did not spend cleaning and maintaining TKA coconut plantations, which may account for the reluctance of some entrepreneurial big-

⁹ Ramstad conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Lihir in the late 1960s for his doctoral thesis at the Australian National University. He did not complete his thesis in English (although he may have done so in Norwegian). He wrote three short seminar papers on Lihirian society, focusing on kinship, ritual, and the TKA movement (see Ramstad n.d. 1, 2, 3).

men to join the association. Membership fees ranged from A\$2 for women to A\$10 for men. Most people were unsure where their money was being stored or for what purposes it would be used, except for a sure belief that they would soon see a return on their 'investment'.

In 1969, Patrol Officer D.M. Donovan conducted a 'slow and thorough' investigation of all 'cult activities' in Lihir (Namatanai PR 8-69/70). The 'outbreak' marked the beginning of more concentrated administrative attention, yet this only strengthened TKA support and local resentment towards the administration which had supposedly denied them knowledge and blocked their 'road' to progress (Burridge 1995: 184). Within a matter of years, administration officials again admitted that for too long they had concentrated their efforts on Tanga, Anir and Namatanai, and that it was 'now Lihir's turn' (Namatanai PR 8-69/70). But their ineffectual reparation only consisted of more admonishment and rational modernist discourse.

After Donovan's initial foray, it was clear to the administration it was dealing with a 'full-blown cult'. This was confirmed by the high level of membership and the commitment displayed by leading prophetic figures such as Arau (the president), Tienmua (vice-president or 'number 2' for Lihir), and other office-holders such as Kondiak (the 'board member' for Lesel village) and Pesus (the 'clerk' from Londolovit village). The TKA's ideologies were closely aligned with those on New Hanover, but if Billings is correct and the TIA was more practically orientated than ritualistic, the Lihir version represented a significant departure.

Arau's prophetic messages and 'rules', which he supposedly received from New Hanover, centred around three dominant themes: the need to resist the council (and the administration); the prediction that change was imminent and likely to come from America; and the belief that Lihirian ancestors were thoroughly implicated in this process. While Donovan was carrying out his investigations, he collected a list of incidents and 'rules' which he translated from Tok Pisin into English. These summarise TKA beliefs and provide some insight into local activities at the time:

Teachings of Arau and Tienmua

1. Now is the time to get rid of the Council.
2. If you see a 'Kiap' coming, get your basket and run away into the bush.
3. If you are taken to court, TKA will bring you back.
4. If a person is not a member of TKA, he will be a 'rubbish' man and no money will be forthcoming to him. Also if he wants to sell one or two bags of copra to any member of the TKA, he will only receive 50 cents for it and be told to go.

5. All plantations which we have planted are for temporary measures only. If the 'Egg' hatches, they will be destroyed or left to feed to pigs.
6. If the 'Egg hatches' you will not have to work to find money. You can rest but money will come to you like flowing water.
7. If a person said something bad against TKA that person will become known to the TKA automatically.
8. TKA is a country we have not seen.
9. America is one of the true country and one is at Palie, Father J. Gliexner.
10. USA is one of the Countries that will never die and some of them are here — Fr. Tom Keller (Namatanai); Fr. Miller (Lavongai); Fr. David Milmila (Duke of York); Fr. Peter Vavro (Tanga). These priests are from USA, the country that never dies, but lives for ever.
11. And Fr. P Vavro is from Mazuz (Lamboar Lihir Island), he is not from USA.
12. Now a big ship and an aeroplane are being loaded with cargoes. Both are not fully loaded yet, but they will be sent to us when they are ready.
13. A man and a woman whose wife or husband has died shall not marry. They shall await the arrival of his wife or her husband when the 'Time Change'.
14. Those children who attending schools today can be saved, but we will await the time when life changes and then knowledge will come unlimited.
15. There are two types of 'Crabs'. One type went ashore on Siar and the other on Kavin (Kavieng).
16. If a person dies, do not say he is dead, you must say 'He has gone'.
17. If we hear the spirits of the dead, we must not refer to them as 'Ghosts', we refer to them as 'Brothers'.
18. If we call them ghosts or devil, this will stop the arrival of cargoes, time will not change and the 'Road' will not open to us.
19. Supposing this country wants to declare war with another country, our country will destroy that country.
20. It is the same with money, where the white man have changed their face value e.g. 10 cents [for] \$1.00 and 20 cents [for] \$2.00.

21. All of our money have been sent to the Bishop in Kavieng who will convert into American currency and then send them to America.
22. During March 1970, shipment of cargo will arrive from America. Note: Previous to this THE target date January and Feb were also marked for such.
23. Tienmua and Kaiprot of Konogogo (W.C. Namatanai) have been going around showing pictures from a book to people.
24. Arau and Tienmua have been telling the people that they propose to go to another place by secret means.
25. The people believed that they went to Lavongai in a submarine.
26. All male persons must marry before they could become a member. Because when the time changes, they must go inside the 'House' with their wives.
27. Iaspot [Yaspot] of Malie Island asked Cr. Lusom why the Council knew more about this work. Why haven't they bothered to find out the truth of government laws which are 'eating' the people.
28. On the 5th of January 1970, Toron of Malie Island Committee for TKA collected fees from members at Malie Island. \$1.00 for males. 50 cents for females. This they said is to purchase a car for the members use (Namatanai PR 8-69/70).

This list provides one of the few detailed accounts of TKA beliefs during the early stages of the Lihirian movement. Although many of these points resonate with more general themes from New Hanover, some require clarification. This list also provides an opportunity to consider some of the cult activities and enduring TKA beliefs that shaped Lihirian expectations for development and the current political and economic environment.

Arau often used the metaphor of an egg hatching (*kiau bai bruk*) to describe impending change and the delivery of cargo — the new millennium. This was not his own metaphor; it was in use elsewhere some years before the introduction of the TKA to Lihir. Billings recalls that, during the elections in Kavieng in 1964, she heard rumours of 'a Big Egg which was said to be believed to be hovering over New Britain and about to hatch cargo' (2002: 29). Lihirians and other New Irelanders have a history of cultural borrowing from New Britain, and it is quite possible that such metaphorical images were imported from similar movements occurring in New Britain at the time (see Counts 1971). Indeed, many Lihirians were willing to believe Arau's prophecies because of the magical knowledge which he obtained from the Buai cult, which originated in New Britain and the southeastern part of mainland New Ireland. The idea that money would flow like water, regardless of labour input, was also expressed in the idiom of

‘live money’ and ‘dead money’ — an idiom which some older Lihirian men later applied to the different forms of income derived from mining. In these terms, royalties and compensation payments are ‘live money’, wealth obtained without physical or moral diminution, as opposed to the ‘dead money’ earned through the back-breaking and humiliating work of *ol kagoboi* (cargo boys), cash cropping for minimal returns, or low-paid unskilled work in the mine.

Ancestral Connections to the Last Country

Phrases like ‘Time Change’ and ‘TKA is a country we have not seen yet’ represent the genesis of later millenarian concepts expressed in the idea of Lihir becoming a ‘city’ and the return of deceased ancestors. Arau’s prophecies generally appeared vague and non-committal; instead of concrete images, there was just the expectation of some form of revolutionary departure from a condition of subjugation and material poverty. It is possible that, in recent years, Lihirians have retrospectively applied the concept of a ‘city’ to Arau’s prophecies. Certainly, contemporary urban ambitions that draw from images of New York, Singapore and Sydney — now available through increased media access — are vastly different from anything people would have known about in the 1970s, when the weatherboard buildings in Kavieng town were considered metonyms of Melanesian modernity. Alternatively, the first ‘city’ that some older Lihirians may have seen or heard about was the US air force base on Emirau Island, north of New Hanover, seemingly built in a matter of days or weeks during World War Two, and literally brimming with technology and people. It is likely that the reference to ‘crabs’ travelling to Kavieng and Siar (at the northwestern and southeastern ends of the New Ireland mainland) is symbolic of Lihir-centred change. Given the insularity of Lihir in this period, these two places possibly represent the ‘limits’ of the known world for many Lihirians. The vision of becoming a ‘city’ reflects local conceptions about centres of power, and a continuing concern with Lihir’s peripheral status within New Ireland.

Arau’s prophecies were expressed in the Lihirian concept of *a peketon*, which refers to waves crashing on the shore, washing flotsam and jetsam onto the beach and then, with the receding tide, carrying the debris to other places: as change (or cargo) comes to Lihir, it will then emanate outwards from the new centre. Martha Macintyre (personal communication, June 2008) said that she asked about the meaning of this term during her initial visits to Lihir in the mid-1990s. Several Lihirians responded that it was a ‘white man’s word’. They thought that she was ‘testing’ them to see if they were ‘ready’ to receive the cargo; over the years, various Lihirians have attempted to prove that they were ‘ready’ through different activities and quests. Years later, it became apparent that they were referring to the Ancient Greek word *eschaton*, most likely introduced by the Catholic mission, which sounds quite similar to *a peketon*.

when pronounced in some New Ireland dialects. The linguistic and descriptive fit developed an influential metaphor for change arriving from the outside world: that Lihir would become the 'last country', or the 'new heaven'. While Lihirian millenarian concepts have undergone transformation as new leaders emerged, together with new political goals and the economic changes brought about by mining, the metaphorical concept of a *peketon* has remained central.

In the 1970s, TKA members came to believe that America would eventually replace Australia as the governing body. This might not equate to secessionism, but it does reveal their dissatisfaction with the Australians. The administration naively regarded this belief as a gross manifestation of big-man politics:

In their social structure, if their head man does not give them what they want, they merely keep replacing the head man until they find one that satisfies them. In the same way they wish to replace New Guinea's head man (Australia) and obtain a new one (America), which in their opinion will be more beneficial to them (Namatanai PR 4-70/71).

It is probable that Lihirian engagement with Americans during the Second World War encouraged people's desire to be annexed to America and their belief that America is the 'true' country that would deliver the promised cargo. This opinion may have been influenced by stories or experiences on Emirau, where US wealth, power and organisation were demonstrated. This confirmed the TIA's strong pro-American messages, and the stories of harmful race relations in New Hanover most likely resonated with Lihirian experiences with the colonial administration. Lihirians deeply admired the people of New Hanover, who had evidently surmounted government persecution and opposition. Letters of encouragement were sent from New Hanover urging people not to support the administration and predicting that New Hanover and New Ireland would soon be a state of America (Namatanai PR 17-70/71).

What Did They Really Want?

Billings argues that, as the descendent organisation of the Johnson movement, the TIA was principally concerned with social equality and not just with material wealth. Being primarily a politico-economic movement, it was not 'fundamentally religious' nor was it 'a manifestation of gross materialism':

They wanted to understand history, historical forces, and power well enough to maintain their place and their ability to control their lives. Those with the broader view did not like being considered ignorant and poor, and did not like feeling constantly humiliated by white people and by their own educated compatriots. They wanted equal status, and equal knowledge, in the modern world (Billings 2002: 165–6).

Likewise, Lihirians were not merely vulgar materialists. As various commentators have noted of similar movements, such as the Yali cult in Southern Madang (Lawrence 1964), the Mambu cult in Manam (Burridge 1995), the Kaun movement in Karavar (Errington 1974), or the Kaliai cult in New Britain (Lattas 1998), fancy Western stuff is only half the story. Obtaining wealth, goods, and even 'organisation' or 'order' is premised on gaining respect and a sense of equality. Consequently, indigenous questions about the origins of wealth have often been interpreted as questions about relations between Blacks and Whites — questions not only about material deprivation, but about the denial of equal humanity. Through obtaining the desired cargo, Lihirians not only sought to enhance their daily lives, but also to gain the respect of Europeans by possessing what the latter so obviously valued. Through their eyes, we thus begin to see the practical and symbolic qualities of goods, the social uses to which they can be put, and the idea that things are valued not only for their material uses, but because they can be used in social transactions that establish mutuality and respect (Appadurai 1986; Sahlins 2005b).

In the early 1970s, rumours circulated as far afield as Kavieng and New Hanover that Lihirians were erecting large storage houses in anticipation of cargo ships sent by their ancestors. Some Lihirians admitted that these and other structures were attempts to prove that they were 'ready' to receive the cargo. This theme later resurfaced in 2000, when John Yaspot from Malie constructed a large two-storey men's house which many thought resembled a 'hotel' rather than a men's house. Criticism was largely directed at the deviation from traditional style. His rationale for this design was twofold. He thought that such a house might be more appealing to younger men, which was an indication of the declining importance of Lihirian men's houses, and perhaps more significantly, that this would demonstrate that he was 'worthy' to receive the anticipated cargo from his ancestors.

People's preoccupation with cooperative activities reflected a similar concern with 'proving' that they could organise and work as efficiently as Westerners. Lihirians shifted between the practical and symbolic understanding of work as they attempted to understand Western success and power. However, given that Lihirians wanted America to replace Australia as the *papa kantri* (father country), much of this was designed to impress both the ancestors and the Americans, not the Australians. For some, America was conflated with notions of a benevolent father, the home of the ancestors and the fulfilment of TKA prophecies. In this instance, the enduring relationship between Lihirian ancestors, Whites, and receiving cargo (or obtaining development) is located in people's ability to prove their 'modernity' or their 'worth'. This contrasts with Leavitt's (2000) examination of cults among the Bumbita Arapesh of East

Sepik Province, where people aimed to fix the rift in their relationship with ancestors who were supposedly withholding the cargo until their relationship was reconciled.

However, even though Lihirian political and economic ambitions were deeply rooted in the desire for moral parity, arguments commonly employed by anthropologists attempting to make sense of Melanesian politico-religious movements only partly capture the reality of contemporary Lihirian ambition. As we shall see, by the time mining operations had commenced, Lihirians no longer articulated their aspirations only in terms of equality. They wanted unlimited access to the 'blessings' of industrial technology, but also control of these processes, ensuring their autonomy in the distribution of wealth, while expatriate mining personnel would ultimately become subordinate to Lihirian management.

Divisions and New Directions

Not all Lihirians were convinced that Arau was capable of delivering on his promises. As the association expanded and consolidated its membership, tensions increased between members and non-members, as people disagreed over which 'road' would lead to the desired destination of modernisation. Some sided with the administration out of loyalty and the belief that their own (relatively) close connection with *ol kiap* and other Whites would eventually bring them closer to what they sought. Similarly, councillors rarely joined because the administration provided them with political authority and a consistent (albeit meagre) income. John Yaspot's assertion that the councillors were colluding with the administration and deceiving the people is indicative of the tension between councillors and TKA members.¹⁰ Disagreement over the correct 'road' to achieve dreams of emancipation has continued to characterise political events during mining activities and negotiations about development (compensation, royalties, infrastructure and business). Persistent tensions between the desirable and the possible, and between 'truth' and 'deception', have been central to Lihirian people's relationships, both among themselves and with Whites, governing bodies, and other external agents.

In 1973, a young and educated member, Bruno Sasimua, aided by Father Tom Burns from the Catholic mission station at Palie, attempted to transform the TKA into a registered business group called the Tutorme Farmers Association (TFA).¹¹ The administration commended this effort, recognising it as 'an honest

¹⁰ Yaspot was a vocal advocate of TKA on Malie Island and showed formidable opposition to councillors and the administration. In a twist of irony, Ambrose Silul, his first-born son, later became the president of the Lihir Local-Level Government.

¹¹ *Tutormeis* is another word that can be translated as 'we stand together'.

attempt to create business opportunities amongst its followers' (Namatanai PR 16-72/73), and promised to send more regular boats to ship local copra. The promise was not kept, and as national independence approached, Lihirian attention riveted on the new national government that was expected to 'deliver the goods'. The death of Arau in 1975, the year of Independence, temporarily threw the association into chaos. Lihirians supported Independence, which they expected would bring the desired change, but their expectations were simply beyond the capacity of the new national government. Ferdinand Samare assumed the TFA presidency in 1977, and anti-government sentiments flourished as TFA members refused to pay taxes or vote for anyone but Jesus Christ. Samare and others were jailed, which again only made them martyrs in the eyes of their supporters. While the association had always uneasily existed as a combination of 'development association' and 'cargo cult', during the latter part of the 1970s, there was a marked withdrawal from both 'politics' and 'business'. Frustration over the lack of change delivered by the national government led TFA members to seek more esoteric options. Filer and Jackson (1989: 174) noted that visions, prophecies and supposed miracles sustained people's belief in the new millennium, and members met in designated areas, where they prayed, sang and performed dances.

The Nimamar Association

The association gradually shifted away from pragmatic endeavours, abandoning its links with New Hanover and its nominal ties with 'farming'. There was a greater push towards self-government, and TFA leaders re-formed under the new name of Nimamar — a sort of acronym derived from the names of four islands in the Lihir group that is meant to imply their unity.¹² This represented an official reformation of the TIA and TKA movements, as this group would eventually turn into the Nimamar Rural Local-Level Government.

Nimamar hardly enjoyed unanimous support, yet Lihirians were clearly united in their Christian faith, regardless of denominational affiliation, and more importantly in their antipathy towards the State, which became abundantly clear in the 1980s as Lihirians entered into negotiations with the State and Kennecott. There was a stated withdrawal from 'politics' and 'business', at least in the sense in which government officials would understand these domains. This shift was compounded by the belief that the prospective mining project

12 The name of the main island of Lihir, Aniolum, is derived from the vernacular terms *anio*, which means 'land', and *lam* which means 'big'. Due to dialect differences, some Lihirians drop the A from Aniolum, and simply say or write Niolum. The acronym, Nimamar, which starts with the first two letters of Niolum, follows this trend.

was the fulfilment of Arau's earlier prophecies. Many Lihirians were suspicious of the government's interest in the project, believing that the gold was theirs and that the State might ultimately benefit at their expense.



Plate 3-2: Former Tuk Kuvul Aisok meeting area in Matakues now used by church groups for prayer meetings.

Photograph by the author.

Nimamar leaders preached a form of millenarianism combined with some singular economic and political objectives. The desire for a radical re-ordering of society was made explicit in a letter which Ferdinand Samare wrote to Filer and Jackson in 1985. There is an element of continuity with the list recorded by Patrol Officer Donovan, but also a strong political and economic slant that reflects the failed expectations of the post-Independence period and the anticipated onset of the mining era.

Nimamar Association, Lihir Island

In 1968 Theodore Arau brought word of this association to Lihir Island. At that time it was known as the TKA (Tutukuvul Kapkapis

Associaton).¹³ This title means “stand together and work the land”. It was a basic principle of this association that when a man wanted to join he had to pay a membership fee of K12. After paying the K12, he then had to answer three (3) questions:

1. Do you believe in God? (YES)
2. Do you believe in the work of the Association? (YES)
3. Are you sure that your beliefs are proof against temptation? (YES)

When these three questions had been answered, Arau himself, who was then the President of this association, would explain some fundamental points to the new member.

The following are some of the beliefs of the Association, in other words the basic points outlined to new members. When a man becomes a member, he joins his father or mother or any other close relative who is already dead. One day, these dead parents or relatives are bound to return and rejoin us. One day our lives will improve. We are bound to receive all the various things presently possessed by Europeans. Right now you may be short of money, but one day there is bound to be enough money for all, and lots of other things besides. There will be nice houses to live in and life generally will be wonderful.

The following are the most fundamental points that Theodore Arau used to make. As long as a man's faith remains unshaken, he will observe the fruits of the Association's work as follows:

1. This is not really an association, it is the final country.
2. One day our parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and other relatives are bound to return, to shake hands with us and eat with us.
3. Now you are poor, but one day there will be so much money around that it will be like rubbish.
4. Now it is the capitalists who have all the money and commodities, but when the dead return to life, things will be different: the capitalists will become poor, and the poor man will become rich.
5. At some point, once our work has got started, we shall join the CHURCH. (this has since happened, and now we have joined the Church:
 - Custom has become part of our worship.

¹³ Although various terms were employed throughout northern New Ireland for the acronyms TIA and TKA, all referred to the central theme of ‘working together’.

- [We] bring out the cross and erect it in the village.
- [We] vote for the name of Christ.
- We shall hold onto our bibles.
- A visitor will come and (1) a statue of the Virgin of Mary will travel around and (2) the Pope will travel around in PNG. (This idea originated with the Association.)
- Some men will come and obtain information [!].
- Some men will come and investigate our work [!].
- The Company is bound to appear at Landolam, and it will have four (4) main bases: (1) Landolam; (2) Londolovit; (3) Lamboar; (4) Wurtol.
- Many of the things stated or written above are products of the WORLD COURSE.)

The Company has now appeared and is based at Landolam (Putput). The Association is not surprised by this. We in the Association knew ages ago that this would happen, at least from the time that Arau introduced the Association in 1968. That was 15 years before [the Company arrived].

When the Company was due to appear and prospect for gold, there were bound to be foreigners arriving to do the work. The Company has already appeared at Landolam. We knew about it in advance, because Theodore Arau had already told us its title (FINAL COUNTRY). BHP (or BISP?) has yet to appear.¹⁴ If BHP (or BISP?) appear, they will immediately teach us how to produce all sorts of things. This will be the start of the FINAL COURSE. This is also known as the USA. But it is not the American USA, it is the beliefs of the Association.

This USA will produce the Final Country. Once all these things have come to pass, Lihir will command the whole Country. This in turn will include the whole World.

N.B. This is the FINAL KNOWLEDGE, and it is the knowledge of the Final Country. Once we got into the Bible, we discovered that it contained the same beliefs as those which are the strength of the Association. So we in the Association have been strengthened and so have our beliefs. Having studied the Bible, we have come to believe that the Church is the road and the key. Jesus himself originally gave the Church the key to the Final Country. Jesus himself is the head of this FINAL COUNTRY.

¹⁴ Filer and Jackson assumed that 'BHP' stood for the mining company of that name (Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd), but could not decipher the reference of the initials BISP.

N.B. All this is not a dream or a manifesto. It is a form of knowledge or belief, but men still have to work at it. God put men on this earth, and men must work to follow his plan, to develop this earth in accordance with our Father's own will. To accord with the will of the God the Father, God himself has a plan. It is the TEN COMMANDMENTS. If men are going to change this earth and renew it, Jesus alone is the road and the law by which it can be done:

1. Love God above all things.
2. Love your brother as you love yourself.

HERE WE MAKE KNOWN A NUMBER OF IDEAS OR STATEMENTS, BUT THEY ALL COME FROM ONE BASIC BELIEF. THE ASSOCIATION BELIEVES THAT THE DEAD WILL RETURN TO LIFE. THE BIBLE STRENGTHENS US IN THIS BELIEF. THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE TKA, [which then became] THE TSA, TFA, TIA, AND NOW NIMAMAR, THIS BELIEF HAS NOT CHANGED. ONLY THE NAME HAS CHANGED, WHILE THE BELIEF REMAINS THE SAME.

Nimamar Association,
Lihir Island,
New Ireland Province,
PNG, Last Country.

HERE ARE SOME FURTHER POINTS ON WHICH THE NIMAMAR ASSOCIATION IS UNITED:

The Final Course:

- THE NATURE OF MONEY WILL CHANGE.
- THE STATE WILL BE ABOLISHED.
- THE ASSOCIATION WILL BECOME THE GOVERNMENT.
- LIHIR WILL BECOME A CITY.
- SCHOOLS WILL BE ABOLISHED.
- THERE WILL BE UNIVERSAL LITERACY.
- THERE WILL BE TWO CLASSES OF PEOPLE:
- "LIFE FOREVER";
- "SUMMON PRIZE" (Filer and Jackson 1989: 367–9).¹⁵

15 Filer and Jackson thought that the phrase 'summon prize' referred to some form of 'hard labour'.

This manifesto, which Nimamar members claimed was not a manifesto, was supported by a second letter given to Filer and Jackson by the Putput 2 branch of the Nimamar Association on 26 November 1985. This letter, which directly addressed the impending mining activities, reflecting the village's proximity to the exploration camp, expressed concerns about migrants coming to work or to establish businesses in Lihir, about the need for Lihirians to be in control of new economic developments, and criticised the government for ignoring Lihirians.

Filer and Jackson (1986: 120) suggest that Lihirian hostility towards formal political institutions largely stemmed from their experience of government and business, and the belief that these institutions had proven to be a hindrance in unifying the community. Although Lihirians had always been politically divided between the interests of different clans and lineages and their respective leaders, the external pressures of the twentieth century prompted a desire for a new form of unity. Consequently, Filer and Jackson settled upon the term 'ritual communism' (ibid.: 116) to describe the mixture of religious commitment, aspirations for economic progress, or a greater share of worldly goods, hostility towards the State, and a desire for increased social and political unity. These themes have strongly persisted throughout the period of mining, manifest in new forms and movements, but ultimately directed towards similar outcomes.

Having been elected to the New Ireland Provincial Assembly in the 1986 provincial elections, Ferdinand Samare was appointed as Minister for Commerce and Tourism, further obscuring the division between Nimamar and 'official politics'. Lihirians were growing eager for their own government, and by 1988, local councillors and Nimamar members discussed the idea of breaking away from the Namatanai Local Government Council. Lihirians considered the possibility of an island local government which would include both Tanga and Anir, but not the Namatanai mainland — a notion entirely unfathomable in the current context of hostility towards any economic or political alignment with other New Irelanders (Bainton 2009). In 1988, the New Ireland Provincial Government passed a *Community Government Act*, largely to appease Lihirians after the initial feasibility of the mine had been established. The Nimamar Community Government was established under this legislation, representing the first real transition towards a more autonomous form of local governance. This might confirm Worsley's (1968) Marxist theories of political trajectory, were it not for the fact that various supernatural and millenarian beliefs have remained a stable feature of the Nimamar movement, even influencing the ways in which some younger people regard contemporary politics and development issues. If it appears as though these beliefs have been disposed of, in so far as they no longer feature in daily discourse, it is probably more likely that

they have been (temporarily) displaced by new concerns that arise through the unpleasant experiences of development as it is delivered through mining operations.

As mining negotiations continued into the 1990s, Lihirians were determined that they would retain a greater proportion of the potential economic benefits. The New Ireland Provincial Government passed a bill in 1994 to transform the Nimamar Community Government into the Nimamar Development Authority (NDA), with an increase in the number of wards from 12 to 15, and the introduction of Ward Development Committees and Village Planning Committees. The NDA was supposed to function as a type of interim local-level government prior to passage of national amendments to the *Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments* in 1995, which happened shortly after the signing of the IBP agreement. Under that agreement, the NDA was granted control of funds to be spent on community development projects in Lihir (Filer 2004: 3). It was not until 1997 that Lihirian leaders held the first elections to officially reconstitute the NDA as the Nimamar Rural Local-Level Government (NRLLG). The delay may well have been the result of internal divisions between supporters of the government and those loyal to older versions of Nimamar. It may also have been due to the role of the NDA as an administrative unit, rather than a political body, during the project construction phase. In any event, the political inactivity of the NDA opened the door for the Lihir Mining Area Landowners Association (LMALA) to emerge as the major political force on the island, largely as a result of the all-encompassing political struggles between the mining company and newly relocated landowners.

The 15 Ward Members in the NRLLG elected Clement Dardar as their Chairman, although he insisted on being called the President. Only two members of the old Nimamar group were re-elected as Ward Members. While the original NDA officially remained as the administrative arm of the NRLLG, Lihirians continued to refer to their local authority as the NDA, which may have been a reflection of public confusion about the role of the NRLLG, which was now in control of substantial amounts of money derived from the mining project that were intended for 'community projects'. Problems surrounding the relationship between the NDA and the NRLLG were not resolved until 2001, when the Nimamar Special Purposes Authority was established to replace the NDA as the body that would administer NRLLG-funded projects. The original Nimamar members were steadily replaced as Lihirians became more involved with mining activities. However, strong anti-State sentiments and millenarian aspirations have remained influential within the NRLLG and throughout the wider Lihirian community.

New Order

Although Lihirian forms of political change have their roots in the early New Hanover movement, in many ways the post-war Paliau movement in the Admiralty Islands (now Manus Province) provides a more useful analogy for the contemporary political process in Lihir, highlighting the way in which cultic movements are generated by some form 'extreme' experience. Even though Lihirians already had such experiences in the colonial period, the mining project has thrown this experience into sharp relief and given it a new life.

Both Mead (1956) and Schwartz (1962) have closely documented the social, cultural, political, economic and religious transformations that took place in Manus in the years following the Second World War. The overwhelming experience of the war involved the introduction of local people to new technology delivered by the American forces on a huge scale, and the observation of comparatively equal relations between White and Negro soldiers, which suggested that existing colonial lines between *masta* and *boi* could be dissolved. This left Manus people with the feeling that their lives had been irrevocably altered. Paliau, a former policeman, came back to Manus after the war with plans for a 'New Way' (*Niupela Pasin*), that envisaged a break with traditional social organisation and religion in favour of new village formations, organised (and often highly ritualised) communal work and savings, and the establishment of schools, councils and village courts. The movement emphasised social unity and attempted to bring together previously conflicting groups throughout the Manus region, yet unlike the Lihirian movements, there was a positive attitude towards the government and a strange antipathy towards the Christian missions.

In 1947, and again in 1952, many supporters of Paliau were caught in the grip of cargo cult movements that emerged in competition with the Paliau movement. Cult followers anticipated a 'Second Coming' of Christ, destroyed property (or anything associated with the 'old ways' that might be seen to 'block the path' for delivery of the new cargo), engaged in secondary burial rituals, and experienced visions, supposed miracles, and shaking (the so-called 'Noise'). Paliau tried to resist these cult manifestations, but as his own expectations and prophecies failed to materialise, he was unable to capture the growing numbers of cult followers, and this gradually led to the decline of the Paliau movement. However, in some ways Paliau and his supporters did achieve a desired level of change. The Baluan Local Government Council was established in 1950, Paliau became its President, and he eventually went on to become a member of the House of Assembly and gain the respect of the colonial administration.

While there are obvious parallels in Lihirian reactions to colonialism and local political development, the more telling comparison is found in the ways in

which Lihirians have responded to mining. As we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, the Destiny Plan, which involved the reconstruction of cosmology and the reproduction of mimesis and insular political views, the efflorescence of *kastom* (that is simultaneously about individual pursuits and greater social unity), and the increasingly legalistic discourse surrounding it — they have all emerged in response to the radical and abrupt experience of mining.

Although Lihirians have actively directed the course of events in their history, their actions have not always produced the desired outcomes. They have responded to marginality in multiple ways, all of which express dissatisfaction with social inequality. As their aspirations for moral equality and material wealth were consistently denied, and their ritual means for achieving these goals proved inefficacious, the result was an even greater antipathy towards the colonial administration and later the national government.

To be sure, we can recognise an internal cohesion within TKA and Nimamar beliefs and interpretations (see Horton 1970). But from a Western reductionist perspective — or what Weber would regard as the ‘specific and peculiar rationalism’ of the West — what was rational *to* these Lihirians was not necessarily rational *for* them — that is to say, the stated means were irreconcilable with the desired ends. Ever since F.E. Williams (1979) characterised cargo cults as a form of ‘madness’, anthropologists have tended to side-step their ‘non-rational’ aspects through functional analysis. As a result, there is a common tendency to emphasise the socially positive cultural consistencies or internal rationality of the associated beliefs, effectively censoring the judgment that people perceive themselves as effecting particular ends through activities that ultimately fail.¹⁶ This is an important point, because in the following chapters we shall see how a new group of elite Lihirian leaders employed a form of bourgeois rationality to critique and reject Lihirian cultural interpretations — the ‘mythologies’ of wealth — only to reinvent these ‘myth-dreams’ within a more complex scenario.

Lihirian responses to inequality are regularly vocalised and expressed through anger directed at the national government and the mining company. Lihirians have not internalised their concerns and they do not exist in an abject state. However, the ways in which they set out to achieve their ends are varied and diffuse. Lihirians have regularly employed numerous political strategies (which are often contradictory) when dealing with the government or the company. Understanding these responses to inequality, the demands and expectations which people place on the company, and the more general way in which they ‘menace the mining industry’ (Filer 1998), means acknowledging the unholy

16 There are some exceptions. Andrew Lattas (2007: 158) argues that, instead of seeing ‘madness’ or irrationality as the result of inconsistent Western policies, or contradictions in Western ideology or values, we should consider this appearance as the result of cultural myths and ontological schemes in which transgression is figured as a creative act.

trinity between resource dependency, the apocalyptic elements of Lihirian Christianity, and the secular decline in the legitimacy of the post-colonial regime.

The mining project with its related infrastructure, services, opportunities for wage labour, and payment of royalty and compensation monies — what Lihirians have come to recognise as development — has been generically interpreted as the fulfilment of prophecies, but for many this is not the new millennium. For those who retrospectively interpreted Arau's prophecies as the forecasting of a Lihirian 'city', many of the more pernicious aspects of their urban aspirations have come to pass. But for those who hoped for a just and equitable future, a virtuous society of equals in which everyone would be rich, recent experiences may simply represent their flight into the maelstrom of modernity.