CHAPTER 6

MODALITIES OF MODERNITY IN MAISIN SOCIETY

John Barker
Department of Anthropology and Sociology,
University of British Columbia

Abstract

In 1997, young people in the Maisin community of Ukaku in Papua New Guinea enthusiastically engaged in a fellowship movement. Resembling popular Christian revival movements across the country, the participants in the fellowship movement appeared to mark a divide between the traditional and the modern. Specifically, they embodied many key values of "modernity" in their clean new clothes and entreaties for personal faith while attacking sorcery, one of the key symbols of "tradition." This chapter examines these events to see what they teach us about the transition into modernity in Melanesia, especially as it affects notions of the person, morality and the body. Drawing upon ethnographic and historical evidence as well as studies of other Melanesian peoples, I evaluate three scenarios of change based upon distinct modalities of modernity: incremental modernization; the cultural encompassment of modernity; and multiple modernities.

Few developments in the recent history of Papua New Guinea more dramatically embody modernity than the varieties of Christian revivalism that have spread like wildfire across the country since the late 1960s.\(^1\) They “em-

---

1. The Christian history of Papua New Guinea can be divided into two main phases. During the first, lasting from the early 1870s to the 1960s, missionary work was carried out by a handful of denominations working in coordination with colonial regimes mostly within their own regions of influence. The second phase, beginning in the 1950s but accelerating since the early 1970s, has been marked by a profusion of new missions, most of
body modernity" in both a figurative and literal sense. While the various missions and denominations vary greatly in theological teachings, they tend to embrace a staunchly conservative Western middle-class set of values. They promote an idealized vision of the nuclear family, stress the value of hard work and personal savings (with regular tithing to the church), endorse a view of marriage as a partnership between individuals rather than groups, and much else. Members individually embody the values of their religion by adopting habits of "clean" living. Depending on the sect, they may give up smoking, alcohol, betel nut and other common pleasures, subject their bodies to a rigorous regimen of soap, toothpaste and shaves, and cloak their born again souls with clean, lightly colored or white, well-laundered clothes.

Most of the recent Christian movements also signal their modernity in a more negative way, by frequently denouncing aspects of indigenous cultural traditions as the work of Satan. This is a powerful claim, especially in more remote areas where the new conservative missions have evangelized among non-converted peoples. Anthropologists working in these areas report that the new converts tend to unquestioningly identify Christianity and its emissaries with the imagined power and wealth of Europeans. The majority of Melanesian communities, however, were already Christian before the advent of the new Christian movements and usually far more integrated into the economy and social and political infrastructure of the emerging state. Their reception which have organizational roots in the United States and are evangelical in orientation (see Garrett 1992, 1997). I refer mainly to the newcomers under the banner of "revivalist Christianity," as they tend to encourage an active and celebratory attitude towards the faith, particularly Pentecostal sects. But revivalism has also caught on in many congregations in the longer established "mainline" churches, some of which have developed charismatic wings in which people have adopted Pentecostal forms of worship, such as speaking in tongues. For an excellent survey of similar developments elsewhere in the South Pacific islands, see Ernst's Winds of Change (1994).

1. For the purposes of this paper, I identify "modernity" with traits such as mass consumption, individualism, the ideology of choice and the rupture of identity between persons and ancestral environments. Although often used interchangeably with "Westernization," it is more accurate to see such elements as features of an emerging global culture, driven by international capitalism, that affects all of the world's peoples, albeit in different ways and to differing degrees (Foster 2002; Gewertz and Errington 1999; Knauf 2002; Miller 1994). For contrary perspectives on how modernity should be understood in the Melanesian context, see Englund and Leach (2000) and Hirsch (2001).

2. At various points in this chapter, I draw general contrasts between 'Melanesian' and 'Western' cultures. These are necessarily broad generalizations and it must be kept in mind that they obscure a tremendous degree of variation and neglect the fact that the larger portion of the human population belongs to neither category.
of Christian revivalism, and the claims to modernity the movement embraces and embodies, has tended to be far more mixed and complicated. It has also received far less scholarly attention.\footnote{Douglas (2001) provides a useful survey and commentary on recent anthropological writings on Christian millenarianism in Melanesia (see also Barker 2003a). Most of this work, notably the fine detailed ethnographic studies by Robbins (1998, 2001), focuses upon remote groups who only recently converted to Christianity (see, e.g., Knauf 2002). Far less attention has been paid to revivalism in areas where people have been Christian for two or more generations (exceptions include Eves 2000; Robbins, Stewart, and Strathern 2001).}

This chapter provides a case study of the impact of Christian revivalism among the Maisin people of Oro Province, with whom I have worked since 1981. In the early months of 1997, leaders of a youth fellowship group initiated a revival with an attempt to expose and destroy sorcery materials hidden in houses. This was a fitting target, not only because Maisin universally condemn the practice, but also at a deeper level because sorcery beliefs rest upon notions of the body and person fundamentally different from those embraced and displayed in the fellowship gatherings that followed. These differences correspond in broad outline to a distinction several Melanesianists have drawn between "dividual" and "individual" conceptions of personhood. While it is easy enough to draw out the contrasts between the perceptions of the person and morality, as symbolized in the different ways affliction and healing are understood in the contexts of revival or sorcery, making sense of its significance for the Maisin's experience or understanding of modernity is another matter. The hard empirical fact is that the revivalists did not attack Maisin tradition as such; nor did the villagers perceive the revival as an attack. In the absence of evidence of overt conflict, I draw upon a range of writings dealing with modernity to sketch out three possible scenarios: incremental modernization; the cultural encompassment of modernity; and multiple modernities. Although the three perspectives draw from distinct assumptions about the nature of modernity and its modalities, they collectively serve to illuminate different aspects of the Maisin experience.

**The Youth Fellowship Movement among the Maisin**

The Maisin are a small linguistic group, most of whom live in eight villages along the southern shores of Collingwood Bay in Oro Province, near the border with Milne Bay Province. Maisin warriors were greatly feared throughout
the region, but they were brought forcibly under government control in 1900. Two years later, Anglican missionaries built a church and school in the largest village of Uiaku. The European presence in Collingwood Bay remained thin throughout the colonial period. Government officers and missionaries alike tended to regard the Maisin as a recalcitrant people, but the archival record and oral traditions suggest that the people were remarkably receptive to the possibilities opened by the colonial presence. Although they learned Christianity primarily from ni-Vanuatu and Papuan mission teachers—the mission being too poor to provide a white missionary—the Maisin encouraged their children to attend school and church; by the early 1920s, most young people had accepted baptism. Young men by this time routinely signed on for stints of labor at distant plantations and mines and several had joined the colonial police force or become mission teachers themselves.

The Second World War marked a watershed for the Maisin as it did for so many Melanesians. Most able-bodied Maisin men served as laborers during the bloody Kokoda and Buna campaigns in 1942. They returned to the villages, determined to secure the material wealth of the white man for their own people. The Anglican mission played a key if indirect role in attempts to realize this ambition, first by introducing the idea of cooperatives to the region—an idea that the Maisin took up eagerly. The village cooperatives were not very successful economically, but they served to cement the place of the church at the centre of village society. The Anglican expansion and improvement of the school system had a far more profound impact upon the local economy. Like other long-converted coastal populations, Maisin had early access to the new secondary schooling. The early graduates quickly found relatively well paying jobs, particularly when the Australian government made the decision in the early 1960s to accelerate the movement of Papua New Guinea towards Independence. In the early years after Independence in 1975, almost a quarter of the total Maisin population had completed higher education in mission and government institutions and found professional work in the civil service, school system, medical system and private business.

Six years after Independence, when my wife and I first arrived in Uiaku, this colonial history was clearly inscribed in the Maisin villages. The villages had an attractive traditional atmosphere. Far from roads and shipping lanes, the houses were built from bush materials and people still relied primarily upon traditional outrigger canoes for transportation. The daily rhythm of activities centered on the subsistence activities of gardening, gathering, hunting and fishing. At the same time, village public life centered on the school and church, still known as the “mission station” although true missionaries (and pagans) had long vanished from the area. Most adults had lived, often for ex-
tended periods, with relatives working in the urban areas and had come to rely upon their remittances of money and goods for survival. Everywhere we looked, we found an amalgam of local and introduced forms. Maisin, for instance, still lived in hamlets named for founding patrilineages but also participated in a wide variety of introduced committees, including government and church councils and an Anglican women's group, to determine community goals and projects.

In 1997, I returned to Uiaku after a ten-year absence. The village looked much the same, but there had been several important developments. First and most obviously, the population of the Maisin villages had swollen. Many Maisin had returned from the towns, some to retire and others after failing to find work or being laid-off. But the majority was made up of Maisin youths who were no longer able to secure a coveted place in the mission or government high school after completing Grade Six in the village. Second, I soon became aware that while the villages remained isolated from the towns with little local economic development, the Maisin as a whole were clearly far more integrated into the larger Papua New Guinea state than was the case earlier. A lot of people now spoke fluent English and Neo-Melanesian (Piggin English) and locally manufactured items such as clay cooking pots and sea-going outrigger canoes had become less common, replaced by steel utensils and motorized dinghies. The Maisin had become deeply involved with several prominent national and international environmental organizations, which were assisting them in a campaign to prevent industrial logging of the surrounding rain forest (Barker 2003a). The religious situation had also become more complex with the Anglican Church losing its monopoly. There was now a small Pentecostal chapel in Uiaku and several other families now worshipped privately as Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists and Mormons.

A large majority of Maisin continued to belong to the Anglican Church, but it too was changing. The regular congregations for Sunday worship were much larger and younger than a decade earlier and, with the encouragement of a relatively young Maisin priest, they had introduced more youth-oriented elements to the rather staid High Church Anglican service, most notably gospel singing with guitars and electronic keyboards. Maisin seem to have abandoned any attempt, beyond tapa cloth decorations, to "indigenize" Christian worship. In the early 1980s, Easter mass was celebrated with traditional drumming with the congregation in bark cloth and feathers. But on Easter 1997, everyone wore Western clothing. The most important innovation of all was a youth fellowship group. Similar groups had been established across the Anglican diocese and many of the Maisin participants had attended church youth rallies at Popondetta, the provincial capital and seat of the bishop. Lo-
cally, the youth fellowship worked to assist the parish priest when on patrol outside of Uiaku, organized sports events and conducted periodic evangelistic tours through the Collingwood Bay villages for both Maisin and other language groups. The youth hired themselves out to villagers to help in construction of houses, gardening and other projects to raise money to support their activities.

There was a palpable air of religious excitement in Uiaku in March 1997, especially among young people. The previous year, a small Anglican charismatic group from Queensland had visited, spreading word about the various gifts of the Holy Ghost. The gifts had begun to manifest themselves in January when the priest and a group of the youth accompanied members of a visiting indigenous religious order, the Melanesian Brothers, as they went from house to house to demand that the occupants produce “old things” that Maisin believed were used for sorcery—especially old lime pots and spatulas, oddly shaped rocks commonly used for garden magic and, more generally, any items that had been made and used by a deceased ancestor. Some older people protested their innocence, but many produced the objects, which the Brothers then took away and discarded in secret. This was followed in March by manifestations of the “gift of healing.” I first became aware of this at the Easter service. I had been daydreaming, I confess, as the priest served the Eucharist or blessed an interminable line of congregants. I was jolted back to reality when the back of a young woman’s head slammed into the gravel less than a meter from my foot, soon followed by four more young women. I had just witnessed persons “slain in the spirit,” although the Maisin themselves were not aware of the term (nor were they aware that in churches where this regularly occurs there are people appointed to catch the swooning faithful to keep them from hurting themselves). The father of this woman, an old friend of mine, was very proud. God, he told me, had saved his daughter from a wasting illness.

This was apparently the third occasion on which she had been slain in the spirit. The first two occasions had been in the early hours of the morning at the climax of youth fellowship meetings held in different villages. These meetings formed part of a “crusade” in which a large group of adolescent and young adults had toured villages in the parish, holding revival meetings lasting five or more hours at a time. These meetings featured gospel singing, simple dances, Bible readings and lengthy prayers. Long testimonials formed the main event. The cadence and subject matter of the testimonials delivered by both male and female youth were instantly recognizable, even expressed in Maisin and Neo-Melanesian. I had heard very similar testimonials in the course of field research in northern British Columbia and on the streets of
Vancouver and Port Moresby. They focused upon personal failings—especially abuse of alcohol, lust, violence and a number of other sins—and the comfort and strength each speaker had found in the love of Jesus Christ. Without exception, those who spoke wore clean, new clothes and were well groomed. Many had attended youth fellowship conferences in the provincial capital where they, no doubt, witnessed similar performances. There was a clear, confident and insistent tone to the affirmations of the power of Christian faith. The village priest, a Maisin man in his thirties, observed the revival meetings with approval. At the conclusion, he led prayers and then laid hands on each of the worshippers. It was at this point that some of the women had been slain in the spirit. The priest told me with evident satisfaction that God had given him the “gift of healing.”

While instantly recognizable to most outsiders, the youth fellowship revival was a great innovation for the Maisin. In the 1980s, adults controlled all aspects of Christian worship. The Church Council and Mothers’ Union included no members younger than their forties and services in the villages, outside of the church, followed a well-defined liturgy. Only persons—all males—trained by the Church and licensed by the bishop could preach. In 1997, clergy continued to control most aspects of the liturgy within church services, but the youth had created an enlarged role on Sundays. More importantly, they now provided the creative and energetic heart of Christian worship in the form of the much more freewheeling fellowship meetings. They thus presented as much a challenge to the old order of village Christianity as they did to indigenous religious belief in such things as sorcery and magic.

Contrasting Images of the Body, Personhood and Morality

The leaders of the youth fellowship movement might have launched a direct assault on the old village order. Revivalists elsewhere in Papua New Guinea often condemn in equal measure “traditional” culture and the established churches. But the leaders did not do so even in the case of the sorcery purge, which they directed at the tools of the trade, not at the beliefs underlying it. All the same, it is not difficult to detect contrary notions of the person and morality in revival and sorcery respectively, especially in their nondiscursive expressions such as their different ways of presenting the human body. My aim in this section is to draw out the contrasts. This is a useful and necessary exercise, but one that bears some risks in that it plays
into longstanding popular dualisms between tradition and modernity, paganism and Christianity, them and us—in other words, the “Orientalist” variations that have long plagued studies of cultural change. Viewed as Weberian “ideal types,” the opposition between the revivalist and received local views of the body appears stark and incompatible. But, as we shall see in the next section of this paper, such clean contraries quickly dissolve when we shift the focus to personal stories and the longer view of Maisin interactions with Christianity.

Let us begin with the revivalists. A concern with the reformation of the body has deep roots in Christian history. Many Christians in the Roman Empire sought to distinguish their movement from popular pagan cults by embracing modes of behavior in accordance with their interpretations of their founder’s message. We thus find in the early church various types of experimentation with the commingling of the sexes in worship, the regulation of marriage, the embrace by the most ardent disciples of celibacy and various forms of self-denial or the seeking of martyrdom (Fox 1986). While the drive to reform the body as the vessel of a Christian soul appears as a frequent theme in Christian history, the thrust of that reform varied tremendously depending upon the moral and cultural concerns of the day and the theological orientations of the reformers. Caroline Walker Bynum (1991) and other authors, for instance, have described a host of beliefs concerning gender, food and care of the body in medieval Christianity that rival the most foreign of Melanesian or African religious movement in their exotic appearance before the eyes of modern Western observers.

As one moves towards the present, Christian attempts to reform the body appear less exotic and more in tune with the modernist emphasis upon the individual. In somewhat different ways, movements in Western countries like the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church or the temperance movement to prohibit alcohol, all embraced an ideal of a healthy, strong, individualized body, based in turn on an assumption that through a combination of Christian faith and self-will, a person could remake themselves. Along a parallel track, most modern Protestant missions, whether to the urban slums of the industrializing nations or the frontiers of European empires, placed the reformation of the body at the center of the civilizing mission. Over and over in mission tracks one reads how cleaned and clothed, hard-working bodies make good Christians. Writing of Evangelical missionaries to the Tswana of southern Africa, the Comaroffs argue that “the ‘native’ body [was] a terrain on which the battle for selfhood was to be fought, on which personal identity was to be re-formed, re-placed, re-inhabited” (1997: 220).

The Maisin revivalists conjoined two familiar themes in their bodily representations and testimonials. The first was an ideal of self-denial (of alcohol,
sex outside marriage and other temptations) in combination with a personal commitment to Christ—an ideal that opened the heart of an ailing young woman to Christ's saving power and, more generally, promised to create healthy bodies, in both the moral and physical sense. The second was an idea of self-creation in the image of the Christian body clothed in relatively expensive fashion, an image that, according to the Comaroffs, tends to affirm "the modernist assumption that identity was something apart from one's person; something to be produced, purchased, possessed" (1997: 220). The speakers exemplified a model of individuality familiar to Westerners: attractive, confident, in control of their lives. Indeed, they modeled in their bright new clothes and employment of the insistent poetry of Evangelical redemption rhetoric their own contemporaneity and their access to discourses and fashions in global marketplaces of ideas and commodities (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 218–22). Their physical presence as much as their homilies suggested to followers that if they possessed sufficient faith in Christ, they too could change their personalities and their fates, transform their individuality in harmony with the donning of new clothes and a new Christian body.

As I noted earlier, the leaders of the revival did not engage in criticisms of the community at large; instead they directed their efforts at individual young people, enjoining them to personally embrace a commitment to Christ and Christian living. Criticism and even rejection of village life ways may have been implicit in what they said and did; their imaginings of a proper Christian life appeared to draw primarily from urban experiences, perhaps implying that the village formed an irrelevant point of reference, for instance. The attempt to eradicate sorcery materials stands as a key exception. I do not think this was an accident. Sorcery provided an attractive target for the revivalists. By confronting alleged sorcerers without mishap to themselves, the revivalists demonstrated the power of personal faith in Christ. More significantly, at a deeper level, they challenged the foundations of conventional village beliefs about the person and the moral order.

Much of the remainder of this chapter is taken up with a discussion of the nature of the challenge the revivalists posed. Before turning to that discussion, I need to sketch out Maisin assumptions concerning morality in the period immediately before the arrival of the youth fellowship crusade.

In the course of my initial fieldwork in the early 1980s, I found that Maisin assumptions about morality and the person conformed to a more general pattern reported by anthropologists from many Oceanic societies. In these cultures, Alan Howard (1985: 414) observes, "personhood is inextricably woven into the fabric of social life." While Western folk psychology "conceptually isolates individuals as actors," Pacific islanders tend to conceive of themselves as
“persons-in-relationships” and not as “discrete entities.”5 When explaining or justifying their actions, Maisin consistently referred to collective norms, especially reciprocity, themes that also formed the framework for popular stories. My more general impressions were greatly reinforced by a psychological study carried out by Anne Marie Tietjen on “traditional,” administrative and church leaders within the Maisin community (Tietjen and Walker 1985). Tietjen developed culturally appropriate variations of narratives posing moral dilemmas originally created by Lawrence Kohlberg to assess patterns of moral reasoning. While the leaders tested displayed different degrees of sophistication, all of them, regardless of education and experience outside the village, relied heavily upon collective norms, especially ideals of reciprocity. The topic of sorcery occurred frequently in their responses.

The health of the human body was the most visible manifestation of a set of commonsense (to Maisin) assumptions concerning proper moral behavior—a “code of conduct” that, ideally, provided a guide for moral living and an explanatory framework for misfortune. The basic elements of this framework can be discerned in the following excerpt from a sermon delivered by Deacon Russell Maikin during a church service in Ujaku in July 1982:

If we get cross with our brothers—hate, fight them and live separately—how will we come back and make social amity (marawawawe)? Jesus was involved in a big conflict, but he did not think of that. Jesus died so that we would not do such things. And it is good that he died for us.... We are living with our brothers and we must live in social amity. We must take care of each other. That is why the Lord came down. We were in the darkness and he came to bring us out. We must be with him in the big fight, when they bury him and he rises again. When we get up we will be in the light and in social amity. In our union with Jesus Christ, we will live in a good way. For Christians, Christ is like an elder brother. God takes care of us and we stay together. He made everything on earth, so must know and think upon these things.

Russell here uses the example of Christ to reinforce conventional moral norms. The term I am glossing as “social amity” literally means a free and balanced sharing between people of their inner beings. This describes the desired

5. While there is a general consensus on this contrast (e.g., Lutz 1988), anthropologists have fiercely debated the degree to which cultural constructions of the person differ from those typically found in Western societies. I address this debate in subsequent sections of this chapter.
state of free sharing, or "generalized reciprocity," that should obtain between close kin (Sahlins 1972). Achieving a state of social amity between distant kin or strangers is far more difficult. Russell's sermon suggests that prior to the coming of Christianity, the Maisin were torn apart by conflict. Christ provides an exemplar of transcending conflict for the collective good. Like an elder brother, Christ "cares for us," in part by offering sound advice. If people are willing to respect Christ, to follow his example, they will work towards creating balanced relationships at the broadest level, thus turning potential enemies into brothers, exchanging division and conflict for sharing and peace.

The good person embodies these values. When I asked about their expectations for village leaders or for what qualities they looked for in a potential spouse for their children, villagers came up with a consistent list of ideal traits. A good man or woman works hard, they are generous, they listen to others and they respectfully embody the traditions of their ancestors on ceremonial occasions. In turn, they command respect from others by their example, not by their position. They associated these personal traits with vigorous health and success in subsistence and other activities.

Stereotypes about the bad person were somewhat more complicated. There were basically two types of bad persons: the sorcerer and the typical victim of sorcery. Both represented more individual values in conflict with the collective ideal.

While Maisin suspected some men of practicing sorcery, no one in the early 1980s or today would admit to engaging in it. Still there were very clear notions of a typical sorcerer's behavior and appearance. Sorcerers were imagined as male, as females were thought to be too weak to handle sorcery materials. They were recluses, living on the edge of the village. In order to engage in magic, the sorcerer had to keep his body "hot." This meant, among other things, avoiding "cold" foods and sexual activities when performing sorcery. Sorcerers were selfish. They refused to share food and, especially, their lime pots with others while chewing betel nut. Small slights and annoyances easily angered them. Children were warned to keep clear of the houses of suspected sorcerers while playing, lest their noise provoke a sorcery attack. Sorcerers were imagined as amoral and unpredictable. They could be hired by people seeking revenge but they were quite capable of striking out on their own, even against very close kin.

Maison believed that most sorcerers were local men who used one of two basic techniques to attack their victims. The first was called wea, "poison," and involved the familiar techniques of sympathetic magic common through much of the tribal world. The sorcerer secretly gathered materials from the margins of his target—hair, spit, blood, skin or even sand from a footprint. The ma-
terial was placed into a bamboo tube, which was then heated over a fire, causing the victim to become feverish and eventually die. There was no cure for \textit{wea} save locating the sorcerer or the people sponsoring him and either killing him or providing a payment for releasing the victim from his spell. Maisin elders in the 1980s told me that their ancestors practiced only \textit{wea}, but since contact most sorcerers had taken up a second means of causing misfortune known as \textit{yawu}, “spirit.” As the name suggests, this involved the use of spirit familiars—generally imagined as recently deceased ancestors. The sorcerer entered into a trance in which he left his body to communicate with his familiar. The familiar stole the soul of the victim and hid it somewhere in the bush. In the case of \textit{yawu} sickness, a cure was available through the services of a healer who used her or his own spirit familiar to locate and restore the stolen soul. Unlike \textit{yawu} sorcery, which Maisin imagined to be practiced secretly, \textit{sevaseva} healing took the form of public seances often involving large numbers of villagers who assisted the healer in undertaking his or her spiritual journey by chanting through the night.

As amoral, spiritually empowered beings, sorcerers could attack at whim. All the same, Maisin assumed that in the vast majority of cases they or the people who hired them were provoked into attacking by some breach of morality. This brings us to the second stereotypic notion of the bad person—this time the \textit{victim} of sorcery. The Maisin imagined the typical victim as someone who had acted immorally, usually in some non-reciprocal fashion. They had stolen food, refused to share a cigarette, slept with someone else’s spouse, not paid bridewealth, flouted their possessions, or spoken over others. In other words, they had acted as individuals, like the imagined sorcerer, but they did not possess his spiritual power and thus were vulnerable to the attacks their behavior invited. It is not surprising in this regard that the Maisin term for “greedy,” \textit{dagari}, also means crippled and sick.

In sum, the visible state of the body roughly corresponded to the internal moral state of the person. Maisin made sense of misfortunes such as life-threatening illnesses and accidents as well as unexpected deaths in terms of the basic moral calculus sketched out above. This still left plenty of room for interpretation given the complexities of any one person’s social relationships. Maisin in the 1980s distinguished between “simple sickness,” which responded to local and Western medical treatment, and “village sickness” which resulted from sorcery attack. All villagers at the time attributed the death of all but babies and the very old to spiritual forces, usually local sorcerers, but they usually differed in assessing the point where they identified an illness as caused by sorcery. Serious illnesses, accidents and sudden deaths provoked a tremendous amount of speculation as to the causes. The victims and close family
members often insisted on their innocence, but more distant kin and unrelated villagers generally had no trouble coming up with a long list of moral breaches that the victim or her near family may have committed that would have provoked a sorcerer or his sponsors to attack.

The only cure for sorcery was to appeal to the sorcerers or those who hired them to remove the curse. Even while arguing their innocence, victims and their families searched their souls to discover where they might have offended their neighbors in order to take measures, such as sending gifts of food, to make things right and to restore the balance. In cases where the victim was in the prime of life and the sickness lengthy, gradually the whole village might become involved in making sense of the supposed sorcery attack and dealing with it. In part, this was because people feared that the uncured sickness would cause increasing frustration, speculation as to causes and anger—leading to further sorcery attacks. On a different register, particularly following a series of deaths, people feared that the sorcery provided an index of moral decline that threatened their collective survival (cf. Brison 1992). On some occasions, leaders called community meetings to discuss the morass at which people would air their suspicions and their fears. While particular men might be accused of being sorcerers at such meetings—forcing them to destroy old objects that neighbors feared they were using for attacks—the main purpose was to create something like a group confession, a massive airing of gossip and tensions, with the aim of overcoming divisions and creating social amity. Deacon Russell, whose sermon I quoted above, ended one such meeting with a prayer for the dying woman around which it had been organized and a request that everyone shout together; “She will be well!” (jebuga inei). It was clear that the plea for healing was meant as much for the body of the community as for the body of the victim.

Three Perspectives on Modernity

One could elaborate further on the contrasts between the underlying assumptions of personhood, as symbolized in the afflicted and healed body, implied respectively in the youth fellowship revival of 1997 and in common understandings of sorcery. The contrast sketched out in the previous section fits rather neatly into the framework of the so-called “new Melanesian ethnography” (Josephides 1991), which proposes “a model of ‘Melanesian’ personhood and agency...in dialectical opposition to ‘Western’ personhood and agency” (Foster 1995b: 8). In her seminal work, The Gender of the Gift, Marilyn Strathern (1988) argues that Melanesians generally work from assumptions of per-
sonhood radically at odds with Western notions of the autonomous individual; much of her effort in that book, in fact, is a critique of the ethnocentric tendency to read culturally-specific notions of individuality into Melanesia, as in Sahlin's (1963) early presentation of big men as capitalistic entrepreneurs. Melanesians, according to this school of thought, do not possess an explicit ideology of the person because persons “only exist because they are caught up in a network of relations” (Iteanu 1990: 40). The body is not conterminous with the person, as in Western thought, but the site of shifting social relationships. A person, in Melanesian thought, is best understood in terms of relationships, as a “dividual”—as “the compound and plural site of the relations that bring [people] together” (LiPuma 2000: 132). The dividual/individual contrast parallels another, also extensively studied by Melanesianists—the opposition between gift economies, which draw on the logic of reciprocity to bind people together in moral relationships, and commodity economies, which insist on a separation of people from the things they make and exchange and subject individuals to a singular universal scale, best symbolized by the medium of money (Burridge 1969; Gregory 1982).

The strongly cultural relativist position taken by supporters of the New Melanesian Ethnography has been controversial from the start. We will need to pick up on several of the main criticisms as the analysis progresses, but let us assume for a moment that the model sketched out above is more or less correct. Interpreting the impact of the revival, let alone ‘modernity,’ still turns out to be surprisingly complex. The most apparently obvious interpretation is that the revival amounted to a missionary assault upon a traditional religion. Indeed, the sorcery purge in particular had all of the classic elements—the dramatic confrontation between robed clerics (the Maisin priest and the Melanesian Brothers) and the defenders of superstitious magic. This kind of drama has been played out repeatedly in Christian history, not least in Melanesia where Christian converts have often taken a leading role in the destruction of local cults by exposing sacred religious objects to the profane gaze of the uninitiated and by destroying objects feared for their spiritual potency with-

6. In an early commentary on ethnopsychological studies of Oceanic communities, for instance, Howard (1985) cautions against drawing a simple opposition between “persons as individuals” and “persons as parts of relationships” corresponding to “the West and the rest.” He accepts that there are universal psychological dispositions and that all people experience both individualistic and collective senses of personhood. What varies is the relative emphasis different cultures place on one or the other and the ways that idealized notions of the person are played out in public discourse (Howard 1985:414-15). For some recent discussions of personhood in Melanesia from a variety of angles, see Epstein (1999) Lipuma (2000), Stephen (1995) and Strathern and Stewart (2000).
out ill effect (Tuzin 1997). To supporters, such scenarios amount to demonstrations of the triumphal power of Christian faith (Tippett 1971); while to critics they are acts of appalling vandalism, marks of Christianity’s narrowness and bigotry. To both supporters and foes, such confrontations mark a rupture between paganism and Christianity and, at a higher register, between tradition and modernity.

But this kind of interpretation will not fly in the case of the youth fellowship revival. While many of the revivalists joined in the attempted sorcery purge, they did not elevate this to a condemnation of village society as such. Indeed, as I have insisted several times now, the revival was notable for its generally positive tone. Further, it occurred in a thoroughly Christianized society, albeit one in which Christian teachings and beliefs about sorcery had coexisted since the arrival of the first missionaries. Villagers were already familiar with the biblical allusions and the ritual forms used in the revival. The revival differed more in the degree to which it associated Christianity with individual self-control and confidence than in the specific contents of its discourse and actions.

If not a confrontation, the revival did pose a challenge to Maisin assumptions about the relationship between the body and morality, a challenge that was very much tied up with their experience and perceptions of modernity, especially in the association between the individual and commodities. But understanding this challenge turns very much on how we think of modernity itself. And here, for better or worse, scholars have generated in a rich and stimulating literature very distinct and somewhat contradictory positions. Normally in an essay like this, one would draw a framework from one of these positions. But I find that the Maisin case actually fits into several scenarios working from different senses of modernity. At the risk of the loss of some analytic coherence, I have elected for the remainder of this chapter to explore the Maisin experience from three very distinct takes upon modernity. These are, roughly: (1) modernity as a more or less coherent cultural system, entailed in global capitalism and consumerism, towards which “traditional” peoples like the Maisin are evolving; (2) modernity as a set of cultural structures that, depending on the specific local forms and historical contingencies of their presence, challenge and transform but do not displace local cultural structures and dynamics; (3) modernity as inherently plural, expressed in both local and global idioms.

Incremental Modernity

Although the Maisin villages were and remain in an economic backwater through the colonial period to the present, the community has been decisively
transformed over the course of a century of interactions with the agents and institutions of modernity. Maisin children have been attending schools and churches since 1902 and support for education remains very strong. Since around 1912, when the first men signed on for plantation work, the Maisin have participated in wage labor, initially unskilled but following the war increasingly in highly professional jobs. By the 1980s, virtually all men and most women had spent a portion of their adult lives living outside the villages, usually in urban centers. Cash and commodities provided by working relatives had become an essential part of the rural economy. Many people spoke quite fluent English. And all regarded themselves as members of a global body of Christians. This modernity existed side by side with attitudes and practices that dated back to the precontact ancestral areas. As in most parts of Papua New Guinea, Maisin continued to practice a form of land tenure that invested control in kinship groups rather than individuals. The household economy relied upon subsistence and villagers, as we have seen in the previous discussion, placed a high value upon gift-giving between kin and neighbors.

Instances of such a “curious mixture of old and new” would not be hard to find then or today in rural Papua New Guinea, although it challenges understanding (Carrier 1992: 117). For some scholars, the presence of modern institutions like trade stores and churches bespeaks the displacement of traditional society with modern capitalism. Against this, many anthropologists have insisted that the persistence of indigenous values and religious orientations, notably belief in magic, indicates that the cloak of the modern lies lightly upon rural societies. And still more anthropologists, at least until recently, avoided confronting the topic of change altogether. Against such views, a number of scholars, particularly since the 1970s, have explored the gradual incorporation of Melanesian village societies within the nation-state and the global capitalist economy, a process of “articulation” that leaves many local cultural institutions in place but gradually reorients them to the values of the commodity and individualism (Carrier and Carrier 1989; Foster 1995a; Gregory 1982; Smith 1994).

The model of articulation assumes that as local communities become incorporated into global capitalism, the values and orientations of capital in turn penetrate indigenous institutions and values, transforming but not necessarily displacing them. The outlook is one of a graduated shift into modernity. There is much evidence to support this kind of model for the Maisin, as I have indicated in a series of articles (Barker 1986, 1989, 1990b, 1993, 1996). Indeed, it often seemed to me that the Maisin themselves thought of the changes their society had undergone in exactly these terms. People repeatedly complained in private and in public meetings that people no longer worked to-
gether as they used to, but instead relied upon remittances from working relatives to avoid community work projects. People did not share as much as they needed to, with the result that some people were visibly better off than others. Leaders frequently denounced "big heads"—those who spoke without regard for the opinions of lineage leaders—a problem that most people felt had been made much worse by the opportunities people had come to enjoy by attending higher levels of schooling and obtaining well-paying jobs.

Many people believed that sorcery had become far more prevalent and difficult to deal with as a result of such changes, Elders told me that prior to contact, Maisin had only practiced "poison" (wea) sorcery. The main sorcerers belonged to a single descent group, known as Dadumu, who had brought the right to make sorcery out of the ground at the time of creation. The Dadumu sorcerers were powerful and dangerous men, greatly feared. But Maisin believed that because they held a monopoly and were known, they used sorcery only against persons who had breached the moral order—that is, as a form of retributive justice that acted as a sanction in defense of the larger system. In the colonial era, both the mission and the government attacked the practice of sorcery. On at least one occasion around 1920, known wea sorcerers participated in a public burning of their lime pots, signaling their intention to give up their magic (Barker 1990a). Unfortunately, this had the effect of driving the practice of sorcery underground. Maisin believed that not only did the practice of wea continue in secret, people now began importing new sorcery techniques that were harder to detect, the most prominent being yawu or spirit sorcery. Many villagers believed in the 1980s that even young men had come to possess sorcery materials, usually purchased from neighboring language groups. Because the sorcery is less easy to trace back to the source, these young men could, it was believed, use their power with impunity—for simple personal revenge rather than retribution. At the same time, Maisin believed that the growing inequalities along with people's unwillingness to work together increased the chances that people would get angry with their neighbors and resort to sorcery.

Maison thus associated increasing commoditisation with out-of-control sorcery (cf. Eves 2000). Some villagers expressed rather fatalistic views on the situation but many, particularly the firmer members of the church, appealed to the need for a personal faith in Christ. It was generally believed that trust in God (or Jesus) gave a person the power to withstand or recover from a sorcery attack. Some people insisted that this was the only means to fight a sorcerer. Many volunteered personal stories or stories of near relatives in which they had recovered from a seemingly fatal disease following a visitation from Jesus, Mary or God Himself. The message that faith in God trumps the sor-
cerer was often repeated in church and in community meetings. “Heathen” bodies might be subject to sorcery attack, but Christian bodies, already in a state of salvation (jebuga), were safe.

This idea has far more profound implications for transforming local understandings of misfortune than more direct attacks upon sorcery practice. As long as sorcery is seen as a form of retaliation against some social wrong, the stricken body becomes the symbolic site of community division. Healing the body entails collective actions meant to simultaneously heal the breech in the moral community by sending gifts to those who might have been aggrieved by the victim or holding community meetings to air disagreements and conflicts. The idea of the Christian body, protected by faith in the higher power of God, breaks the internal relationship between the body and the moral community. Healing becomes not a matter of making amends with community but of expressing a strong enough commitment to a distant deity. And the sorcerer, by attacking one of God’s faithful servants, loses all legitimacy to become a symbol of pure evil, an act of the Devil. The typical narrative frame, in other words, shifts dramatically.

I saw numerous signs of such a shift in the early 1980s. When people gathered after a death, for instance, leaders often reminded them that “now we are Christians” so people need to “forget” their anger and have faith in God to overcome their own fears of further attacks. Several people told me that they had decided not to go to the healers or to attempt to seek the reasons behind a close relative’s sickness, preferring to leave the matter in the “hands of God.” Perhaps a more telling indicator of change has been the use of local healers. In 1982, a half dozen elderly men and women continued to practice the craft in the Maisin villages. All of them claimed to have acquired their powers from both spirit familiars and the blessing of God (one of the most powerful was, in fact, an upstanding member of the Anglican Mother’s Union). Fifteen years later, only one man was said to still carry out séances.

As the 1990s progressed, the Maisin seem to have been left with little more than faith when dealing with sickness. This same period saw a serious decline in the already skimpy medical services available in the Collingwood Bay area. The two village aid posts went for months without medicine or personnel until finally closing down and the district medical centre at Wanigela is often without medicines or electricity. Some Maisin with working relatives are able to go to the hospitals in town, but this is very expensive and out of reach for many. In any case, few Maisin believe that Western medicine can deal adequately with “village sickness” caused by sorcery. The Charismatic revival in the local Anglican Church thus found a receptive audience in 1997. Like former religious movements in the region, this one confirmed the reality of sor-
cery through a concerted act to purge its practitioners. And the late night ceremonies and possessions of the afflicted—in the form of being “slain in the spirit”—bore a resemblance to earlier versions of sevaseva. Still, charismatic forms of worship and celebration move decisively towards more personal and individualist conceptions of Christianity. The dramatic moment of healing, with the laying on of hands, symbolizes the direct gift of the Christian God without reference to the moral community. The same message is conveyed in the central ritual act of the youth fellowship meetings, when individuals stand up and testify to their personal sins and their restoring faith in God. Sorcery is still a central concern in Maisin communities and a major gauge of community unity. But it is not hard to imagine a time in the future, as the notion of the Christian body takes firmer hold of the imagination and sorcery is seen more and more as an individual criminal act, that the older community-centered understandings of illness and healing will give way to an individualized conception.

Conjunctures and Continuities

In a series of influential articles spanning more than 20 years, Marshall Sahlins has proposed and fine-tuned an approach to understanding the impact of global agencies upon “non-modern” communities that places culture at the center (Sahlins 1981; 1985; 2000). In brief, Sahlins argues that the arrival of agents such as missionaries or European traders did not lead automatically to the displacement of local cultural structures but, instead, selectively challenged local people to make sense and respond to the extrinsic forces in ways that made sense to them—that is, in terms of received cultural presuppositions. Such challenges force people to make visible their most basic cultural assumptions and thus reproduce them. But this is not mere continuity, for at the same moment of resurrection, a people must re-conceive, transform and sometimes abandon these ideas and culturally scripted actions. Sahlins and his students do not deny the often devastating impact of colonial agencies on Pacific peoples or deny local change, as critics sometimes accuse them of doing, but they place the analytic emphasis squarely on understanding local cultural perceptions and accommodations to such challenges as active and, for anthropologists at least, the key subjects for analysis.

There are, in fact, some striking continuities in the ways the Maisin have responded to extrinsic agencies since first contact—continuities that suggest underlying cultural structures. As in most parts of Melanesia, the Maisin have engaged in periodic religious movements over the course of the past century. These have consistently focused on matters of sickness, healing and fertility.
(of gardens and people). The Maisin have never been much interested in millenarian concepts; they have not participated in so-called “cargo cults” for which the region is famed. This lack of interest has continued to the present. The Christian revival movements that have swept across Papua New Guinea since the 1970s, usually led by Pentecostal and Fundamentalist sects, have often made great use of Apocalyptic themes, combining imported images and scenarios drawn equally from the Book of Revelations and popular end-of-time writers like Hal Lindsey, with local mythologies, aspirations, rumor and speculation. Such talk did not resonate with the Maisin. As we have seen, the youth fellowship revival evoked themes of healing and well-being.

Such moments of religious excitement have often involved sorcery purges. Within a few months of the establishment of the first church and school buildings in Uiaku, long before any baptisms or any chance that villagers could have had an inkling of Christian teachings, a group of Maisin surprised their Solomon Island teacher by presenting him with a large collection of “charms.” For the district missionary who rushed down from Wanigela to preside over a public burning of these objects, the act could only be attributed to the mysterious working of God upon pagan hearts (Money 1903). But Maisin continued to try to finish the job repeatedly, even after large numbers of the community had accepted baptism. In 1920, the district missionary reported that the people were heavily engaged in a “strange species of snake worship” (Anonymous 1925). (This was almost certainly an offshoot of the “Baigon Cult,” a healing and fertility movement first reported in 1911 on Cape Nelson to the north of the Maisin, that had begun with a visitation by a supernatural python (Anonymous 1925; Williams 1928)). Once again, missionaries intervened at the request of the people, destroying scores of lime pots believed to be used to make sorcery. Missionaries and patrol officers reported similar purges in 1916, 1932, 1936 and the late 1940s. There were certainly others that were not recorded. I learned from Maisin informants of two major purges, for instance, that would have occurred in the 1950s and 1970s.

These purges were often accompanied by healing ceremonies, usually involving all-night dancing often lasting weeks. The best documented occurred in 1932-33 under the leadership of a man known to the missionaries as Kitore and to the Maisin as Maikin. Maikin received a vision from the Christian God that allowed him to sense the presence of sorcery materials hidden in houses. Followed by a large retinue, he moved through the Maisin villages and then Wanigela, exposing the sorcerers and forcing them to destroy their magic. The missionaries recorded these events with approval (Thompson 1933). Elderly Maisin in the early 1980s, however, remembered Maikin mostly as an expert practitioner of sevaseva, a form of healing through the use of spirit fai
miliars and trances at all-night séances. The form of sevaseva that developed in Collingwood Bay almost certainly incorporated elements of the widespread Baigona and Taro Cults during the 1920s and 1930s—which were also focused upon healing, as well as improving the fertility of gardens. One of the sevaseva practitioners I knew well in the early 1980s actually claimed Maikin as one of his spirit familiaris.

When placed in the context of prior religious movements, the youth fellowship revival appears less an externally inspired attack on Maisin traditions than another in a series of attempts by Maisin to use outside agencies to deal with an internal problem—sorcery attacks. One also must assume that the most recent campaign to purge sorcery is no more likely to succeed than earlier ones. We are left with the general question of why these sorcery purges, usually linked to healing movements, keep on recurring. Their recurrence would appear to point towards some underlying cultural dynamic.

Getting at this dynamic requires that we first jettison the more extreme relativist positions taken by proponents of the new Melanesian ethnography. A number of critics have argued that opposing the indidual to the individual—the traditional person to the modern—distorts our understanding of both Melanesian and Western social ideologies and lived experience. In fact, the critics argue, all societies draw upon a range of imagined types of persons along a universal scale that is based upon the existential experiences of self-consciousness, at one end, and mutual dependence upon others for survival, at the other. What differs is the emphasis a social ideology places upon the available types and the cultural particulars of how persons, in their individual and individual presence, are symbolically imagined.

From what has been said already, it should come as no surprise that the most culturally realized individual for the Maisin is the sorcerer. But individualism appears in many guises in the cultural imagination: in the victim of sorcery whose singularity attracts anger or envy; in the healer, who undergoes singular privations to commune with spirits who are capable in bringing illness as much as removing it; and, most troubling, in leaders, who may be tempted by success to ignore their obligations to others. In fact, once you start looking for it, elements of individualism permeate Maisin thinking about the moral person and, by extension, about sickness and healing. The positive evaluation of social amity, which rests on a “indivial” conception, is formed largely in an opposition to a mostly negative conception of individuals.

As Kenelm Burridge (1966) demonstrated in the case of the Tangu in Madang, who employed a similar moral logic, Maisin thinking about morality appears to contain two critical contradictions. The first rests in the impossibility of squaring personal differences with the ideal of equivalence en-
tailed in the idea of social amity as balanced reciprocity. The idealized leader exemplified collective values and the values of collectivity, but he also therefore stood apart from his fellows, became more of an individual. Maisin worried that some leaders became too big and were tempted to commit sorcery. Leaders, on the other hand, confessed to me that they feared or had been the targets of sorcery attack. Good people thus easily transmogrify into bad. But sorcerers also held a contradictory position in the moral system. They were at once the chief threat to people and the primary enforcement of collective values. The contradictory nature of sorcery caused Maisin some intellectual difficulties when I asked informants whether they believed that God approved of the practice. All said that sorcery was in itself sinful, but many believed that God must have created sorcery for a useful positive purpose, as a means to keep sinners in line.

Sorcery and the ideas about the person upon which it rests are part of everyday life for the Maisin. Sorcery purges and healing movements have likely occurred at moments of intensification: epidemics when Maisin have looked at the bodies of those sick and dying or conflicts within the body of the community, and concluded that sorcery was out of control, that retributive justice was giving way to uncontrolled vendettas. The use of extrinsic entities—missionaries, patrol officers, practitioners of new healing cults, and God himself—can be seen as attempts to trump local sorcerers by reaching out to even more powerful figures. But this act does not remove the central cultural dynamic focused on individual/individual, good and evil. In effect, it may make matters even less subject to control. Thus sevaseva healing may have brought to the Maisin a new form of sorcery more difficult to detect and control than the old. By the same token, most Maisin in the 1980s perceived the Christian God as often acting as a kind of super-sorcerer, who responded to local breaches of morality with massive retaliations—typhoons, flooding and volcanic eruptions.

Clearly Maisin like using extrinsic sources to deal with their internal problems with sorcery and this has caused them to alter their conceptions of sorcery and morality over the years. But it is far less clear that there is any overall direction resulting from such conjunctures and reformulations, that Maisin have been evolving towards a “modern” conception of individuality. Indeed, it needs to be stressed that people like the Maisin living on the so-called periphery of the global system do not receive a consistent and orderly picture of the Western person or society, if such things can be said to exist, let alone the resources to develop towards these cultural stereotypes. The Maisin clearly are linked by various institutions and individual experiences to the outside, but locally these are contingencies to the continuing and periodically urgent business of living together in the community. From this perspective, their chang-
ing ideas about sorcery are better understood as unique inventions, the product of a historically particular mix of a persisting cultural dilemma focused on morality, fragmented introductions of Western institutions and ideas and the more or less happenstance mixing of the two over time.

Modernity Pluralized

The first two models I have considered share a core feature. They oppose modernity to tradition as a series of oppositions: individual/dividual, commodity/gift, disenchanted/enchanted, and global/local. They differ in terms of which becomes primary. In the first, the modern encompasses (and thus transforms) the traditional; in the second, the traditional domesticates the modern. There are two basic shortcomings to such approaches. First, they neglect if not deny internal differentiation in the community under study, assuming a correlation between a locality and cultural coherence. But Maisin have had a range of experiences in and out of their villages, in the school system, working in towns, and so forth. Consequently, their perceptions of local customs, of wealth, of commodities, of Christianity and so forth vary depending upon such personal experiences influenced further by age, gender and access to sources of money along with other personal factors (cf. Gupta 2000: 240). While the youth fellowship revival was a novelty for most villagers, we should not assume that they perceived it in the same way. Second, by arranging oppositions between the traditional and the modern in a sequence, the prior two models greatly downplay the fact that Maisin experience them at the same time. That is to say, the Maisin are quite capable, like most people, of tolerating, even enthusiastically supporting, positions and institutions that appear logically contradictory. It is not so much that people are “Sunday Christians, Monday Sorcerers”—that is to say, “selectively adaptive” (Kahn 1983); instead, I suggest that they operate in a culturally pluralized world in which they easily slide from one religious modality to another with only the most ardent traditionalists or Christians perceiving any problem.

When recast in this way, “modernity” appears less as a coherent set of cultural orientations—individualism, the use of commodities, disenchantment—as a recognition of contemporaneity (Englund and Leach 2000: 225). The shift appears simple, but it has significant consequences for analysis. Rather than a singular point on a scale of evolutionary progress or cultural imperialism, “modernity” becomes pluralized—a conglomeration of shifting, contested, hybridized positions manifested both locally and globally. From this perspective, we can speak of the modernity of Maisin sorcery with as much justice as the modernity of Christian revivalism. These are co-existing
positions from which Maisin seek to understand and cope with the challenges of the present.7

I think the idea of multiple modernities provides a fairly accurate description for how most Maisin understand their current society. To be sure, when they spoke to me about their history, many elders drew a sharp distinction between the time of the ancestors and the present, reflecting the near universal influence of missionary narratives of the shift from “darkness” to “light” in Melanesia as much as indigenous notions of historical transformation (Young 1997). But in the 1980s, Maisin also recognized that modern community life entailed a combination of “traditional” entities, like the lineages that shared rights to land, along with long and recently introduced institutions like the church, women and youth associations, or the village councilor. They conventionally conceptualized village life as having three “sides” represented by the activities and concerns of kin groups, the “mission” and the “government” respectively. Villagers participated in all three domains, which in total made up the contemporary society. In the late 1990s, many younger people had come to conceptualize the local community in more dualistic terms, distinguishing between church-related activities and those centered more directly on village affairs as generally complementary aspects of life. As mentioned earlier, the revivalists did not denounce Maisin “traditions,” as has been reported from many other Papua New Guinea societies. Instead, the anti-logging campaign had resulted in most Maisin feeling more aware and proud of Maisin “customs,” as they imagined them, leading to renewed interest in some cultural forms, particularly tapa making, costume design and traditional dancing. A few days before the commencement of the youth fellowship revival, I filmed many of the participants, including most of the leaders, in their feathers and tapa dancing before a thrilled group of Japanese eco-tourists.

7. The approach I develop in this section closely resembles that suggested by Knauf’s (2002) idea of “locally modern” in that traits such as individualism and consumerism continue to be seen as defining global modernity. In an important critique, Hirsch (2001) argues that modernity is better understood as a temporal process of disruption, in which local people are incorporated into larger state and transnational structures. At such moments, local conditions of being (“tradition”) come into sharp contrast to those new conditions brought on by missionaries, administrators and others (“modern”). The implication of this is that modernity has different contents at different points of history and should not be reduced to individualism and consumerism, which only reflect the historical contingencies of the present. Not only should modernity be periodicized, it should be understood that the earlier experiences of modernity in any one area influence those that follow. Hirsch’s call for closer attention to local histories is very timely and one that I have pursued more directly elsewhere (e.g., Barker 1996, 2003a).
Revival and sorcery, then, can be understood as coexisting ways of framed and dealing with the issues of personal misfortune, particularly serious illness and accidents, and the healing process. Both operate from the premise that misfortunes are rooted in personal breaches of morality. At one level, revival and sorcery focus upon the existential problems of human suffering and the nature of evil, basic questions that, as Weber pointed out long ago, lie at the heart of the human religious impulse. On another level, they operate on current concerns—the Maisin’s most immediate worries about their own personal and collective futures. I think that it is fair to say that in the late 1990s the Maisin had an elevated fear about their future. This is not to suggest that the early 1980s were a period of calm and contentment. Many people then felt that sorcery had gotten completely out of control, mostly as a result of people no longer respecting reciprocal obligations to kin and neighbors, their general despondency over the perceived backwardness of village life and the lack of economic development. These concerns remained a decade or more later, but had now been joined by growing alarm over the deteriorating state of the country in general. The growing access to money through remittances and earnings from tapa sales have tended to shift the center of economic relationships from larger kin groups to the household, resulting in modest but noticeable increases in inequalities. This problem has been exacerbated as the post-Independence economy has lurched from crises to near collapse, resulting in a marked shrinkage in paid employment. As a result, the local population has ballooned—even high school graduates, who used to find work with little difficulty, have had to return home—and those fortunate enough to still have working relatives appear relatively rich to their neighbors. At the same time, villagers are angered by the perceived corruption of politicians which has led, in their minds at least, to a serious deterioration in local social services and plots to “steal” Maisin lands and resources by accepting bribes from foreign companies and then issuing logging and mining concessions without consulting local landowners. Finally, Maisin are alarmed by the ever-increasing lawlessness of the cities. Several Maisin have been attacked and some murdered by raskol gangs in the towns.

While personal salvation provided the focus for the youth fellowship revival, it is not difficult to detect a broader set of messages—a vocabulary, if you will, that frames the contemporary condition. The main message is one of self-actualization: the idea that personal faith in Jesus Christ will overcome adversity that is, in itself, the product of personal failings. This conflation of personal and social issues is, of course, a central strain in the global “born again” movement, manifested particularly vividly in the “prosperity gospel”—the idea, with deep historical roots in the American positive-thinking tradi-
tion, that through faith alone an individual can not only overcome problems but gain material comfort as a kind of reward. In urban centers, the home base for many of the revivals sweeping the countryside, leaders enthusiastically preach the prosperity gospel as the answer for the country’s problems. It has, in turn, been taken up by some politicians, who proclaim that God will smile upon a country that elects “Christian” leaders by ending gang violence, providing funds for universal free education, and so forth (Gibbs 1998, 2000). The Maisin youth fellowship leaders did not go this far. Still, their clean new clothes, the contents of their testimonies focusing upon individual transformation and the simple jingles of the accompanying gospel tunes all resonate with the cheery consumer advertising that Maisin increasingly encounter not just in town but in the villages.

The resonance between the youth fellowship revival and the broader insinuation of the images and values of global consumerism into village society cannot be denied. Still, some caution is called for lest one simply rehash a story of triumphal modernization. This was a Christian movement, after all, not a convention of hardy Ayn Rand “objectivists” or Madison Avenue ad men. The main message was not about commodities but salvation. That message focused upon the individual, but when we consider it a bit further it is not hard to find tempering “dividual” aspects. The leaders did not promise wealth for the faithful but health—and that health involves “giving oneself” to Christ, a seemingly “dividual” conceptualization. The event of the fellowship itself, which involved long hours of group activities, suggests that the collective plays a key role in the salvation process. Many older Maisin observing the fellowship may have found this aspect the most reassuring, as a visible manifestation of community on the part of young people (who are often accused of thinking only of themselves). Finally, as suggested in the previous section, many Maisin, participants as well as observers, may well have regarded the revival primarily as a response to the collective problem of controlling illness and the sorcery that causes it rather than attending to the more individualistic elements of the testimonials.

The idiom of sorcery beliefs provides a different and markedly tragic vocabulary for framing the contemporary experience. While Maisin regard sorcery as part of their heritage, they clearly regard it as responsive to present conditions. In the 1980s and a decade later, most Maisin I spoke with believed that sorcery was on the increase. It had increased, on the one hand, because the new inequalities of wealth created envy, spurring more frequent attacks. In the past, these might have served to level differences, Maisin believe that sorcerers themselves participate in creating inequalities and using their powers to defend them. Formerly, one inherited the knowledge to perform wea or yawu from a father or uncle. Nowadays, according to most people, sorcerers
with the cash can easily purchase more lethal and difficult to detect forms of sorcery from markets at Tufi and in the towns. Young men are particularly tempted to resort to these new forms and use them, not so much to punish those who breach social rules as to advance themselves by killing rivals for women’s attentions or by extorting payments of cash and goods from would-be victims. Young men, according to this popular scenario, do well for a time; but inevitably they are defeated by their own greed. Sometimes other sorcerers attack them. More often, because they are too young to know how to handle sorcery materials correctly, they are stricken by their own magic and die a slow, painful death.

The Maisin conceptualization of sorcery is peculiar to a particular location, but it can no more be assigned in a simple sense to the “local” than the revival can be to the “global.” Anthropologists have reported markedly similar patterns in sorcery and witchcraft beliefs from around the world. In the best known and most controversial of these studies, Taussig (1980) argues that folk beliefs about the devil among Colombian peasants and Bolivian tin miners amount to indigenous critiques of capitalism, based upon their personal experiences of exploitation. This has proven to be a fruitful line of inquiry, with some anthropologists suggesting a correspondence between the efflorescence of sorcery and witchcraft in many Third World settings and the upsurge of “magic” in the West in the forms of lotteries, interest in New Age mysticism and, more negatively, widespread fears about Satanic cults and the secret sacrifice of children. Witches, Jean and John Comaroff argue, embody “all the contradictions of the experience of modernity itself, of its inescapable enticements, its self-consuming passions, its discriminatory tactics, its devastating social costs” (1993: xxix).

Revival and sorcery thus point towards alternate conceptions of the moral community and person. But this is only if we consider them in the abstract, separate from the people praying in the youth fellowship movement or desperately divining the cause of a sorcery attack. The revivalists attacked the implements of sorcery, thus following a path taken by various local reformists for at least a century, but they did not seek to eradicate the moral logic behind it, let alone the belief that sorcerers exist. For the time being at least, revival and sorcery coexist, just as Anglican Christianity has coexisted with earlier indigenous understandings of affliction and healing, evil and salvation. All Maisin participate in the world defined or explored by revival and sorcery, although they understand them in a range of ways depending upon their own personal experiences and backgrounds. In 1997, revival and sorcery spoke to a sense of the modern that was complex and pluralized and thus, dialectically, generated multiple modernities in the form of bodies afflicted and healed, as imagined in the vocabularies of the born again Christian and the social drama of sorcery attack and repose.
Conclusion

I opened this chapter with the observation that few recent developments in Papua New Guinea embody modernity more dramatically than Christian revivalism. This seems obvious enough, but making sense of the fact is another matter. A great deal depends on how one understands Melanesian conceptions of the body, on the one hand, and modernity, on the other. As in most places in the country, Christian revival projects an image of the "born again" or "saved" body that contrasts sharply, at least in the abstract, with the assumptions that underlie indigenous conceptions of sickness and healing. In many places, especially where Christianity is fairly new, adherents of revival have made the differences between their worldview and the "traditional" understandings of local societies quite explicit, often by condemning the latter as the work of Satan. The opposition scenario between a Christian modernity and a pagan past, however, is much more difficult to mount in places like the Maisin villages, where Christianity has long been assimilated into local society. The opposition of two types of bodies, of two types of person, lies at a more tacit level. We are left, then, with the question of what people like the Maisin make of Christian revival—what does it signal about their understanding of modernity and their place in it?

The current literature suggests three broad scenarios. The first two, rooted in classic sociological literature, perceive modernity and tradition as mutually incompatible states and thus focus on measuring the transition from one to the other, pictured variably as an inevitable evolutionary process, a historical contest or a movement of encompassment which results, at least temporarily, in hybridized and partial expressions of both. The first scenario I applied sees revival as an expression of the modern Christian person that builds from and pushes forward the gradual incorporation of the Maisin into the global cultural and economic system. The second scenario highlights the ways in which Maisin captured and reformulated the global "script" of Christian revival in terms of their own local and pre-existing cultural orientations and concerns. This scenario is not quite the reverse of the first, for encountering Charismatic Christianity the Maisin have had to adjust their notions of the body and the moral person, just as they had to do through the earlier missionary period. Change has certainly occurred, but at least for the moment they have managed to reproduce their own cultural categories and effectively apply them to make sense of their altered circumstances. The third scenario of this chapter works from a different sense of modernity, describing not a social state but merely the experience of the contemporary. The Christian fellowship revival and ongoing concerns about sorcery appear under this scenario to present alternative but largely compatible "takes" upon moral issues, as imagined in
variant notions of the afflicted and the healed body. These are specific local manifestations; but the "local" here, as in most places, is a context "saturated with the actions of national states, national and transnational media, global political economies, and histories of colonialism" (Gupta 2000: 240). Thus cognate forms of modernity—Christian revivalism and sorcery and witchcraft—can be found in many other localities.

Which of these models is the correct one or should we attempt some combination? Gregory Bateson was fond of reminding social scientists that "the map is not the territory," a precept he applied brilliantly in his variegated study of the Naven ceremony among the Iatmul (Bateson 1958). Theories about modernity, no matter how sophisticated, are maps that guide our understanding across an infinitely more complex terrain. Depending upon the general goal of a study as well as the situation on the ground, one type of approach may be preferable over others. Variations on the first scenario, for instance, seem appropriate for understanding the general direction of development in Western societies and even more fitting for the study of instances of forced acculturation in settler states like Canada or Australia. But even in such cases, it may often be useful to apply a number of perspectives in order to bring out different dimensions of the experience of modernity. As Birgit Meyer has said of her own work on African Pentecostalism, ideally the concept of modernity "raises a host of fruitful questions rather than providing pre-given answers" (1999, 2000: 241).

By examining a single situation in terms of alternative frameworks, we are able to bring out some of the different dimensions of the Maisin experience of modernity. But the approach at the same time highlights some commonalities. I will end the chapter by pointing to two of these. The first is that Maisin perceive and deal with modernity in highly moralistic terms. This is not to suggest that individuals do not desire money and the things that money can buy; but discourse about subjects such as economic development, both on the individual and collective levels, always has a strong moral component. This provides the link between the subjects we usually associate with modernity, like commodities, to Maisin conceptions of the body and the person. These links are by no means obscure within village society but obvious and compelling. Maisin "talk modernity" in no small part through their dealings with matters of sickness and health, their ideals about the good person and their actions to curb inappropriate behaviors. The second general point is the centrality of Christianity to local understandings of the body and morality in the late twentieth century Maisin society. Clearly, Christianity has been intimately involved in the ways Maisin have experienced and perceived modernity, but it cannot be reduced to a simple colonial agent of modernization. In their attempt to purge the villages of sorcery, the revivalists set their wills
against other Christians, not pagans—and, moreover, Christians who had themselves attempted to purge sorcery through comparable means in the past. In the late twentieth century, Maisin reflexively appealed to Christian themes and values in their varied understandings of the body and its own embodiment of the moral community. As in most places, mission Christianity created one of the key contexts for ordered change towards European perceptions of value, work and the person; but as they converted, new Christians made the religion their own, adapting to local perceptions, concerns and aspirations. As in most of rural and urban Papua New Guinea, secular models of the body, the person and social order have had little appeal. As Christians, Maisin live in a spiritualized world that simultaneously connects them to a diverse global community of believers and to their own local ancestors.

Acknowledgments

The field and archival research on which this article is based was carried out in 1981–83, 1986, 1997, 1998 and 2000. My thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the National Geographic Society and the Hampton Fund of the University of British Columbia for their generous support. Thanks as well to the participants in the “Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change” workshop, especially Peggy Brock and Jacqueline Van Gent, who provided a marvelous opportunity in the lovely environs of Perth, Australia to discuss many of the themes developed in this paper. Joel Robbins, Eric Hirsch and Sandra Bamford provided both encouragement and very helpful suggestions at different stages of writing. My main debt, as always, is to the Maisin, especially in the case of this paper, the Reverend Samuel Ganeba, Franklin Seri, the late Rhoda Mary Sabara and Reginald Yaga. I wish to dedicate this chapter to the memory of Deacon Russell Maikin, whose sermon appears in its pages. Deacon Russell embodied the finest aspects of Christian faith and Maisin tradition. He is greatly missed by all who had the honor of knowing him.

References


Barker, John. 1986. From Boy’s House to Youth Club: A Case Study of the Youth Movement in Uiaku and Ganjiga Villages, Oro Province. In Youth


