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## **The Spirit and the Gifts: Dako, Benjamin Morrell and Cargo in the Vitiaz Trading area, New Guinea**

Jennifer Blythe

*McMaster University*

James Fairhead,

*University of Sussex*

### ABSTRACT

In 1830 an American trader, Benjamin Morrell, abducted Dako, the son of a prominent leader from Uneapa Island in the Bismarck Sea, took him to New York and, four years later, returned him to Uneapa. Dako's encounter with America and his return provides insight into the region half a century before colonization, and in particular into local mytho-practical knowledge at that time. This enables us to discern subsequent transformations. Myths concerning an origin spirit and guardian of the dead, Pango, which then dominated Uneapa cosmology have since 'disappeared'. This, we argue, is not because Pango has been superseded or suppressed, but because the parallel 'white' world over which the mytho-practical Pango presided has become ever more manifest as Uneapa has been drawn into a colonial, post-colonial and globalised world. Today, Pango refers predominantly to white people. Islander's experience of American 'Pango' was a shocking event at the time, but we show how trading with Pango established transformatory possibilities for reciprocal trading relations with the dead which remain the concern of today's Cult movement on the island.

Cargo cult. Uneapa, Vitu Islands, mythology, first contact, Benjamin Morrell, Dako

## INTRODUCTION: THE MORRELL-DAKO EPISODE AS EVENTFUL HAPPENING

Since Lawrence's (1964) classic study of a Melanesian 'cargo cult', many writers have interpreted these movements as indigenous modes of engagement with super-ordinary beings and the dead, albeit transformed by colonial and post-colonial experience. Melanesians identified technologically endowed Euro-Americans with creative beings in their own cosmology that were envisaged as light-skinned (e.g., Errington 1974; Stephen 1979, 1982; Lattas 1998). The perception that modern material culture derives from a familiar rather than an alien world helped explain why many Melanesians developed rituals to elicit modern materials from traditional sources. This interpretive frame has, however, been questioned for essentializing 'cargo cults' and envisaging Melanesian cosmologies as 'cargo cults writ large.' It is objected that relating 'cargo cults' to existing cosmologies downplays the myriad influences and creative responses embodied in these highly syncretic beliefs, movements and practices, most particularly those associated with colonization (e.g. Lindstrom 1993: 41-72; Hermann 1992).

These varying interpretations suggest a need for studies examining how political-economic and 'ontological' relations have unfolded historically. Debates about cargo cults have been informed by differing historical interpretations (e.g. Worsley 1957; Lawrence 1964). Recently, several authors have suggested that contemporary analyses of the history of cultic epistemology have focused excessively on experiences with the colonial and post-colonial state. Lattas (1998) argues that this emphasis downplays the importance of everyday discourses concerning trade, gender, race etc. – or in Foucault's words, of capillary rather than sovereign power (Foucault 1980). In the cults that he studies, Lattas traces how through

creative ‘self work’, experience of sovereign power associated with colonialism and after is entangled in local discourses (Lattas 1998: 2010).

In his analysis of ‘mytho-practical’ phenomena, Marshall Sahlins (1985) also considers how encounters with ‘the west’ were accommodated or transformed within local interpretive frames. Applied to cargo cults, his perspective suggests a two-phase ‘structure of the conjuncture’. First cargo-bearing Euro-Americans in Melanesia were interpreted in terms of local cosmological structures. Then, as ideas about the cosmos changed in response to the reconfiguring pressures of domination and non-reciprocity of colonial regimes, so did the interpretation. What were interpreted in the first instances as easily forgotten ‘happenings’, became memorable ‘events’.

In this paper, we seek to enrich this analytical discussion by discerning a deeper genealogy of cultic knowledge among Uneapa Islanders in the Vitu Islands<sup>1</sup> off the north coast of New Britain in the Bismarck Sea. We alert scholars to an early contact situation and use the re-emergence of previously neglected historical sources (Fairhead 2015; Lepowski 2015) in combination with oral history and ethnography to discern the relevance of this episode for understanding the modern cult on Uneapa. Referencing Blythe’s fieldwork in 1975 and 1986 and Andrew Lattas’ (2001, 2005, 2010: 137-166) published accounts of the Cult Mission we argue that it is possible to discern how key premises informing Cult Mission teachings are a specific transformation of pre-existing structures,

In November 1830, half a century before Germany annexed New Guinea in 1884, an American merchant explorer named Benjamin Morrell, abducted Dako<sup>2</sup>, the son of an important leader from the island of Uneapa. Intending to groom his captive to mediate trade relations in the Bismarck Sea, Morrell took Dako to the United States and exhibited him in museums and circuses to raise funds for a return expedition. Four years later, Morrell sailed

with Dako back to Uneapa with a generous cargo of Euro-American wares that enhanced Dako's prestige and facilitated a brief period of trade conducted through 'trade friendships' typical of the region. With Dako's assistance, Morrell built trading relations with the Kove of West New Britain, the Siassi Islanders of Aromot, and Sio villagers on the New Guinea mainland. But despite grand intentions, Morrell's ceased to visit the region after 1835 as his ship the *Margaret Oakley* was wrecked off Madagascar on its voyage home and Morrell absconded with some of the recovered cargo that he had taken on in China (Fairhead 2015). Dako and the other trade friends whom Morrell had cultivated waited in vain for his return.

Our evidence derives from many sources. The fame Morrell gained from putting Dako on show encouraged publishers 'Harper and Brothers' to commission Samuel Woodworth, an American poet and playwright, to ghost-write an account of the voyage under Morrell's name (B. Morrell 1832a) and engage Colonel Samuel Knapp to ghost-write an account by Morrell's wife, Abby Jane who had accompanied him (A. Morrell 1833; Exman 1965). The books drew on eyewitness accounts, the log of Morrell's schooner the *Antarctic*, and petitions that Morrell made to the U.S. Congress to fund an expedition to restore Dako to his island. A decade later, Thomas Jefferson Jacobs (1844) published a travelogue of his experiences of the return voyage. These ghost-writers and Jacobs introduced distortions and fictional incidents that – when combined with Morell's criminal exploits - sealed his reputation as a liar (Wray 1848: 219; Enderby in Hamilton 1869-1870; Stommel 1984), and called the reliability of all the publications into question (Ballard 2009; Pollin 1976). Nevertheless, these sources can be verified against contemporary media reports, archival documents, and ethnographic data (Fairhead 2015). Moreover, by 1833, Dako had learned some English and a pioneering ethnologist, Theodore Dwight, interviewed him over several months and wrote two accounts of Uneapa life and language (1834, 1835) and left other archival material (e.g. Dwight 1866). On the return voyage, Dako gave lessons on the Uneapa

language to Jacobs and another crewman, Selim E Woodworth, the son of Morrell's ghost-writer. The latter left a manuscript journal against which many of the misrepresentations in Jacobs's book can be corrected. Blythe recorded oral accounts concerning Dako while conducting fieldwork on Uneapa in 1986, before she had any knowledge of Morrell.

There is a long-standing cargo movement on Uneapa (Flannery 1983). Today the 'Cult Mission' is an independent church (Trompf 1991: 223), second only to Roman Catholicism in number of adherents. Founded in 1964 by Cherry Takaili Dakoa, cult practices focused originally on copra production and sales through a cooperative, the Perukuma Company. The movement became increasingly political and adopted beliefs about the origins of material wealth in the 1970s when it opposed the establishment of local councils and national independence. Members suffered persecution but reached accommodation with state authorities and their Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist neighbours in the 1990s.

Over the years, Cult Mission theology and practice have formulated eschatological hopes, symbolic representations and ritual forms too complex and dynamic summarize here (see Lattas 2001, 2005, 2010). However, entities from traditional religion such as the *vuvumu* (or *wowomo*) origin beings, some of whom are ancestors, and the ancestral dead in general are important actors. They inhabit a parallel, multi-local world that Lattas glosses as 'subterranean', interconnected with the world of the living and encompassing global extensions including America.

Rather than attempting to show in detail how the Cult Mission was influenced by and responded to the complex processes of colonialism, our focus is on the way 'first contact' foreshadowed later cargo-related developments, and in particular on how elements of the belief system were transformed.. On first arrival, the Americans were immediately identified with the important *vuvumu* Pango, who is known throughout the Vitiaz Straits trading region.

Now, however, all mytho-practical knowledge concerning this ‘god’, that was current in Uneapa cosmology during the early contact era has apparently ‘disappeared’. This, we suggest, is not because Pango was somehow superseded or suppressed, but because the parallel ‘white’ world over which the mytho-practical Pango presided became ever more manifest as Uneapa was drawn into a colonial, post-colonial and globalised world. The precise process and timing of this transformation would require a detailed study of plantations, missionaries and the effects of two world wars. Here we identify the question that such history would need to address.

Euro-Americans are still routinely referred to as *pangopango*. White visitors to the island, including anthropologists, have been considered ancestors. Dakoa discovered his own dead brother in the Australian anthropologist, Lattas (2005: 65), and the people among whom Blythe conducted research in the 1975-6 and 1986 suspected that she might be a deceased relative. Lattas reports that according to the Cult Mission leader, Dakoa, ‘underground’ whites came ‘as Germans’ to start the Bali Plantation and later introduced Roman Catholicism in the early twentieth century (2005: 65). Today these ‘whites’ covertly influence political and commercial processes and appear spontaneously in ships, planes, submarines and cars (Lattas 2001, 2010: 139).

We now trace how the cult beliefs involve an expansion of the concept of Pango that was present at first contact. We are interested in the evidence provided by these early encounters on how the Americans were perceived; in Dako’s accounts of local mytho-practical knowledge at the time that enable us to discern subsequent transformations, and in the analytical possibilities that this encounter offers to cargoistic interpretation.

DAKO IN AMERICA; OR, HOW EURO-AMERICANS BECAME *PANGOPANGO*

Although Uneapa was observed by Tasman in 1643 and by D'Entrecasteaux in 1793 and the islanders had surely learned of other contacts from trading partners, Morrell's visit to Uneapa on 13-14<sup>th</sup> November 1830 probably represented their first face-to-face encounter with Euro-Americans. The day after Morrell's arrival, the Islanders approached the *Antarctic* in a flotilla of canoes. According to Abby Morrell (1833), Dako led an attack on their ship. The ship's log (Keeler 1828-1831) and eyewitnesses (Tooker 1888) describe canon fire and carnage; how Dako escaped by jumping onto the ship's rudder, and how the Americans lowered a whale boat and brought him on board.

Morrell named Dako 'Sunday' and called another captive he took from the Ninigo Islands, 'Monday'. He intended to return both home after a short voyage to Manila (Philippines) during which he hoped to impress them with 'civilization' to make them willing trading intermediaries. Yet Morrell's agent in Manila refused to finance a return to the Bismarck Sea, so Morrell was forced to take his captives home to New York (Fairhead 2015; B. Morrell 1832a; A. Morrell 1833; Lafond de Lurcy 1844).

Fairhead (2015) provides a detailed account of these events and of Dako's years in America. In brief, Morrell's voyage was a financial disaster but in New York, he raised income and attracted investors for a return voyage by putting Dako and Monday on display at Tammany Hall and then at Peale's Museum on Broadway. This exhibition played into popular interest in 'cannibals' and American debates on human origins between supporters of monogenesis and polygenesis (single or multiple creations of humanity) (Keeler 1831; cf. Crain 1994; Obeyesekere 2005) and was a huge success, especially when Dako demonstrated how he could smash a 1½-inch board with a spear at seventy feet. The show toured to Albany, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. before returning to Broadway.<sup>4</sup>

Dako's experiences must have had a profound emotional and intellectual impact. We have no direct testimony from him, but a curious 'letter' under his name 'Terrumbubbyandarko' and printed in the New York papers offers insight.<sup>5</sup> Although Dako could not have written this letter, it was probably written by someone close to him. 'Dako' describes endeavouring to:

Find out something of the strange people into whose hands I had fallen. Who were they? Whence did they come? Whither were they going? And what were their intentions to do with me? Did they descend from the clouds, or had they habitations in the water? Were they children of the sun or the moon? It was evident they were moon-faced people, endowed with superior wisdom (Terrumbubbyandarko 1832: 1).

If Dako had a hand in this letter, he was seeking both to understand and explain who the Americans might be within the parameters of his people's cosmology. Forty years after Morrell left, in the build-up to German colonization, another man, Takaili was kidnapped from the same island. Kapau, from Tamongone village commented similarly on how hard Takaili found it to explain where he had been:

"They all stared at him and asked, "Where did you go to?" "I can't really say. It's something for the bigmen....We just went on and on", - I think he probably went to Lae or somewhere like that. He said, " I went to *Vunamoremore*" (transcript, 1986).

In Uneapa, *Vunamoremore*, is the edge of the world of the living and the destination of the 'ships of the dead'.

Further evidence for Uneapa cosmological categories comes from Theodore Dwight, who interviewed Dako at length. Dwight's accounts are noteworthy both as the outcome of a dialogue that took place in the formative years of American ethnology and as the oldest

description of Uneapa cosmology. Dako informed Dwight that his people “acknowledge one Supreme Being (Manaka), the creator, rewarder of the good and punisher of the bad” and how “their art of curing diseases and producing rain is also derived from him” (1834:186). Dwight thus equated the Uneapa creator and the God of the Bible, an equation that Christian Uneapa today still make.

While it is impossible to recover precisely what *manaka* meant to Dako, comparative linguistics and contemporary field data suggest that it entailed a wider semantic range than ‘Supreme Being’ (cf. Blythe 1992). Uneapa today, consider *manaka* (POC *mana* or perhaps *manaq* (Blust, 2007)) a self-manifesting force. Some indicated (to Blythe) that Manaka observed his people through the agency of the sun and prescribed the proper treatment of food and the avoidance of incest rather than Christian virtues. Moreover, *manaka* also refers to a genre of myth that describes processes of primordial and ongoing creativity, including the origins of places, animal and plant species, and precedents for social practices. The agents depicted in this genre of myth are not humans but *vuvumu*, the origin beings whom *Manaka* first created and from whom human Uneapa descend. Importantly, the generative modality indexed by narrative *manaka* is not something over and done with. Rather, these stories belong to a world that pre-exists humanity but also endures alongside it, intersecting with it at diverse interfaces: in the bush, inside caves, in dreams and trances, or beyond the horizon. New things continue to emerge from this creative source. Just as in the later cargo cult in Uneapa as throughout the Vitiaz Straits area, innovation is the preserve of the non-human world (Pomponio, Counts & Harding 1994).

Importantly, however, Dako also described to Dwight ‘a lesser deity’, Pango, who:

Presides over an inferior world, where everything is delightful, and whither the good go after death. They are, however, invisible to each other, and can communicate only

by the sounds of their voices. There is plenty of plants, flowers, animals, and objects agreeable to the sight: but they are all white. The entrance to this world is through a cavern in the island of Garubi (Garroobee) [i.e. Garove Island], inhabited only by two men, who, according to his description, may be Albinos. The inhabitants of that world are often spoken of as *tune puroco*, white men; because white is nearest to what is invisible. Hence, when Captain Morrell and the crew of his schooner, the *Antarctic*, were found to be white, they were supposed to be spirits. That invisible world is the land of music: Pango having given the people of the islands five or six musical instruments, one of which is the three-holed flute, and another the shepherd's reed. (Dwight 1834: 186-7, emphasis added).

Early ethnographic texts from around the Vitiaz straits region refer to Pango and his family. In some traditions, Pango married a Rook Island woman and they had two sons, Ngemet and Kapimolo with whom he travelled to the Willaumez Peninsula, then returned to Aramot (Reisenfeld 1950). To the Papuan-speaking Anem, Pango's son, Kapimolo is the creator of both Melanesians and Europeans (Thurston 1994 p.185) while the Kove related that Pango and another son, Begu, gifted them with shell-money, red dye and obsidian (Reisenfeld, 1950).<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, in these myths Pango and his sons travelled by sea and were associated with European ships in the Vitiaz Straits area (Reisenfeld 1950). Although there is no evidence independent of Morrell's accounts that Uneapa islanders made this association between these vessels and Pango, the islanders were deeply involved in the trading network and no doubt knew these stories. Uneapa oral tradition includes sightings of huge sailing ships, perhaps those of D'Entrecasteaux or Tasman which, with hindsight, Uneapa believe came to "mark" them. At death, Uneapa today believe that they after death they follow the 'Path of the Dead' to Koa Harbour in North Uneapa under the guidance of the snake *vuvumu*

Mataluangi (Blythe 1995) where they board one of two ghostly ships (cf. Lattas 2010: 76). Cargoists and non-cargoists alike describe these ships, Vanga Molo and Vanga Varu as European in type.

Dwight's representation of 'Pango' was informed by biblical cosmology and classical mythology just as it was for Manaka. There are problems with such interpretations, as, for example, modern Uneapa do not consider virtue the criterion for entering the traditional afterlife. He might also have misinterpreted Dako when describing the spirit world as white. Modern Uneapa note that spirits appear as they were in life except that they seem slightly 'out of phase' or 'insubstantial'. The term used, *puroko* implies pale colouring rather than whiteness. The Garove Island cave is indeed one of the many portals to the spirit world scattered throughout the Vitu Islands and the New Britain mainland, usually in caves, reefs or on mountain tops. Modern stories of living islanders who have entered these portals attest to the high standard of living enjoyed by the spirits.

Pango's violent attributes encouraged Dwight to represent him as a demon. In regional mythology he is implicated in volcanic eruptions and earthquakes in New Britain and New Guinea (Riesefeld 1950: 362; Pech 1991: 5). Dako himself told Dwight (1834: 187) of a volcanic explosion on Garove Island that destroyed a village at Pango's command. The volcano, Mount Pago (or Pango) in New Britain, is the land of the dead for the Nakanai Kevemumuki clan (Valentine 1965; cf. Lattas 2010: 70-72).

Like many Melanesian culture heroes, Pango was a shape-shifter (Riesefeld 1950, 361). In another account that Dako related, how Pango had appeared as a many-headed, fire-spitting monster whose cannibalistic depredations once forced the inhabitants of Uneapa to flee until the twin sons of an abandoned woman slew him, allowing them to return (Jacobs 1844: 95-103). Perhaps the *Margaret Oakeley's* cannons and guns used in the earlier visit to

Uneapa inspired him to tell this story. According to Jacobs, when Morell and his crew first made landfall on the island of Naraga on the return voyage they were immediately identified as Pango so Dako had to reassure his people that the visitors would not eat them (1844: 79-81, 86).

Morell regularly encouraged local beliefs in his own supernatural power by stressing his association with the moon. Jacobs noted that “When [Dako] told them about America, they listened in wonder and could get from his statements no definite opinion except that it was situated in the moon, and inhabited by spirits and hobgoblins (1844: 81).” Pango too, has this connection, as Uneapa perceive that the moon goes underground when it sets. In one myth, a boy brought up on the moon and lowered to earth is addressed as Pango but informs his interrogators that he is not a white man but the same as them (Blythe, unpublished field notes). Forty years after Morell’s visit, inhabitants of the Astrolabe Bay also interpreted the Russian Mikloucho-Maclay, to be from ‘the moon’ (e.g. Maclay 1975: 171, 173, 176, 205, 258). Associations of pale skin also enhanced the Americans’ status as spirits or *vuvumu*. One of the pairs of creative brothers common in Vitiaz Straits myths (and more generally in Melanesia) is usually both fairer skinned and cleverer than the other. In cargo cult myths, this brother is associated with Euro-Americans (Pomponio, Counts and Harding 1994).

Gradually, white people identified as Pango’s people in Morrell’s time became more routinely manifest in the world of the living. Black birders and recruiters introduced islanders to a wider world. Planters took up residence; Missionaries began their work, German and Australian administrators and occupying Japanese subjected them to new laws. Uneapa continue to call white people *pangopango* and ‘tok pisin’ was described as Pango talk (*polea pango*) but Pangu has ceased to be remembered as a ‘god.’<sup>7</sup>

## THE RETURN: DELAYED EXCHANGE WITH THE 'CHILDREN OF THE MOON'

Contrary to the notion that cargo cultists expect wealth without work, members of the Cult Mission on Uneapa labour industriously (Lattas 2001, 2010: 160-162). During the Cult Mission's nearly fifty-year history, its members pursued a variety of unremunerated tasks in which the commercial was inseparable from ritual practice. Besides participating in collectivized cash cropping, members engage in 'night work', which is the nocturnal monitoring of graves and sites associated with *vuvumu* to detect activity by underground whites. In a moral economy that redefines the meaning of work (Lattas 2001: 182), these forms of unpaid labour are defined as acts of love honouring the dead and include the time spent attending cult meetings and the suffering endured for the Mission. Secretaries painstakingly record these 'investments of love' confident that the whites underground do likewise, creating a symmetrical record of the love owed to each cult member in the form of cargo, especially money.

The idea of moral bookkeeping that determines each person's ultimate reward or punishment is deeply informed by Christianity. The translation of this Christian moral economy into wage labour, investment, financial accounting, and profit represents what Lattas describes as 'creating a religion out of capitalism' (2001: 183). Yet Christianity and capitalism do not sufficiently account for the forms of agency that Cult Mission members employ for eliciting good things from *vuvumu* and the dead.

To say members of the Cult Mission create a religion out of capitalism is to say that they extend a form of human economic relations to their dealings with *vuvumu* and the dead. While the people of Uneapa have always assumed that the methods and ethics of exchange with human others apply to relations with non-human others, they had never experienced such an extended and open relationship with supernatural entities such as that they began

with Morrell. We therefore now turn to an examination of Morrell's attempt to establish trade with Islanders in the Vitiaz region and the legacy of these events.

Morrell sought financial backers for a return voyage to the Vitu Islands on the premise that Dako would open up valuable trade for the U.S. and private investors. Morrell boasted that an investment of US\$30,000 would yield more than US\$300,000 profit (Morrell 1832b) and eventually attracted credulous investors. In March 1834 he took command of the brig *Margaret Oakley* and sailed to Uneapa.

Morrell treated Dako well. Dako lived in the officers' quarters, had the run of the ship, was popular with the crew and became renowned as a lookout (Woodworth Journal, 11 April; Jacobs 1844: 24). On board the *Margaret Oakley*, Selim Woodworth and Thomas Jacobs befriended Dako, who taught them the basics of his language, enabling them to communicate, at least on an elementary level, with his people. Uneapa and Kove vocabularies are extant in Woodworth's papers.

Jacobs describes a heroic homecoming for Dako with the Americans enthusiastically received among Uneapa. Woodworth's journal reveals a very different story. Dako went ashore and did not return. His kinsmen, astonished at his reappearance, prevented him from reapproaching the ship and wanted no dealings with the intruders (Woodworth Journal, 3 Feb 1835). Dako also had other issues to deal with. His father had died during his absence and as well as suffering the shock of personal loss, he would likely have had ceremonial duties to perform. Moreover hostilities had erupted between his community and their enemies on the island (Jacobs 1844: 81). Finally, Dako's wife, thinking him dead had remarried. As Katu of Monopo village, related to Blythe:

When the poor fellow came back he had no wife. He sat down and grieved. Then he looked for the cartridges for his shot gun. Then he stood there and began to shoot

pigs. When he shot the pigs, everyone just flung themselves down. They thought they would all die from the gun (transcript, 1975).

Morrell's intention was to trade trinkets (cutlery, mirrors, iron, beads etc.) for pearl and oyster shell, pearls, 'bêche de mer' (dried sea slugs), gold and sandalwood, and eventually to found an American trading colony on Garove (Jacobs 1844: 93-94). The expedition was thus firmly embedded within global capitalism and even after its failure, Selim Woodworth and Thomas Jacobs laboured for the same colonization dream for more than a decade. Indeed, they were blatant in their strategy for capitalist extraction, hoping to "*establish a special currency and American coin if it can be done, and as soon as the natives understand the nature of money, and begin to love it and appreciate it, we can then introduce a spurious article*" (Woodworth, papers). Such cynical exploitation, however, was not evident to the Islanders. Instead, Morrell's main trading practice was to disarm wary Islanders with substantial gifts of 'trinkets', gain their awe and trust with displays of power and generosity, and instruct them to amass their own resources for him to collect on future visits (Jacobs 1844: 117 seq.). Whether by informed intent or fortuitous structure of the conjuncture, this *modus operandi* actually conformed to the norms of delayed reciprocity later documented in the anthropology of Vitiav trade.

After Dako's disappearance on Uneapa, Morrell could not risk landing on the island where he had previously inflicted injury and death. Instead, he visited communities west and east of the Willaumez Peninsula attempting to develop trading relations in the Kove islands and mainland of West New Britain, but the people there were afraid of the spirits and - like the people in the Purari Delta described by Schieffelin & Crittenden (1991) in similar circumstances - wanted nothing to do with them. They had heard of Dako's kidnap and tried to rid themselves of the intruders through aggression, avoidance or leaving pigs as offerings

(e.g. Woodworth Journal Nov 25<sup>th</sup> 1834 – 21 Dec 1835). On the Kove coast of New Britain, Woodworth recounts, for example, how he cornered some canoeists, and:

“invited them to come out and receive some presents but they said that they were afraid that we had come to take them away to Eat, as God had done previously at Nyappa (Uneapa) by taking Darco, we told them that we were not God but people like them but they did not believe us, we also told them that we had just brought Darco home and that he had been in our Country; but all of our conversation was of no use; they would not show themselves; and all the time begging of us to go away (Woodworth Journal Nov 25<sup>th</sup> 1834) .

Eventually, Dako himself remade contact with the Americans. He had heard from his trade partners on the mainland that Morrell intended to return to New Britain, and asked them to invite the Americans to return to Uneapa. Dako’s intervention transformed Morrell’s fortunes. When Morrell returned to Kove, its inhabitants no longer feared the strangers and trade and adventure became priorities. Young Kove men wanted to board the *Margaret Oakley*, and one of them - Garrygarry, the son of a Kove bigman, eventually accompanied the Americans as far as Australia (Fairhead 2015).

At their eventual reunion, both Morrell and Dako allegedly shed tears—perhaps of relief as much as affection, as Morrell could now envisage serious trade, and Dako anticipate an increase in his local power and influence. Morrell then provided Dako with a ‘regular fit out’ of useful American items in return for a promise that a cargo of trade goods would be readied for his next visit:

The Capt. took him in the Cabin and gave him a regular fit out consisting of Axes of all kinds, adzes, knives, plane irons, Gumbles, Cloth, looking Glasses, Fish hooks, Beads, Pistol and all the necessary appendages as to a beautiful spear that we got in

the Isle of France [Mauritius], Cutlasses, Ornaments seeds, Crockeryware, tin horns, and pans and cups & a great many articles too numerous to mention. The Capt. also put a Grind stone all ready mounted in the boat for him, when he went ashore, to finish his canoe; he bid us all good by, and told us not to forget to be at the appointed time and he would work to get us a Cargo (Woodworth Journal, 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1835, see also Jacobs 1844: 90).

This array of items was a veritable treasure without precedent in Uneapa and has become legendary. As Katu of Monopo village told Blythe in 1975:

When the time came for him to return they filled up a box for him. It was really full. There were all kinds of things: laplaps, trousers, beads, all kinds of things for decorating the body, all kinds of paint—red, white, green. They took this man that they had captured and when it was time for them to go, they filled this great box. It was this high... They gave him all these good things, beads, a belt and other things. They gave him a shot gun and cartridges and some blades and brought him back.

Morrell had arrived in the Bismarck Archipelago in November 1834, was reunited with Dako on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1835 and later that month left for a round trip to Sydney, Australia, taking Garrygarry who instructed Jacobs and Woodworth the Kove language en route. The Americans toured the Bismarck Sea again in early June 1835, before departing for America in late July. They delivered cargoes to Dako in Uneapa, Garrygarry in Kove, leaders on the Siassi island of Aromot (known to the Americans as Gonoro, the nodal point for trade between New Britain and the New Guinea mainland), and at Sio on the New Guinea mainland. According to Jacobs (1844) the Americans were welcomed during these journeys, and stayed in Uneapa, Kove and Aromot villages where they treated illnesses, introduced crops such as maize, squash, vines acquired in Australia, and went hunting. In his book,

Jacobs altered the sequence of events reported in Woodworth's journal, either to generate a more readable narrative, to conceal commercially important locations, or to hide Dako's disappearance to enhance the book as an investment prospectus. Fairhead (2015) details these strategies. No evidence is available from local traditions about Morrell's exploits in West New Britain or the Siassi Islands, but detailed information about local geography show that they were undoubtedly there.

Morrell established rapport with local leaders by making gifts and received promises that islanders would amass cargoes of local items which he would later collect (Jacobs 1844: 293) in return for more Western trade goods. Morrell's trading methods were a function of necessity but he may also have capitalised on knowledge of regional trade practices gleaned from Dako. Dako was certainly able to describe trading practices: in the oldest ethnographic record of Vitiaz trade, Dwight (1835: 397-398) reports Dako's assertion that "an active trade is carried on between several of the islands, in something like a regular course, as the articles in demand are found so distributed among them, as to render extensive exchanges convenient and often necessary to the existence of some of the people." Subsequent anthropological study documents a longstanding, historically evolving trade network (e.g., Chowning 1978; Harding 1967). Uneapa traded pigs, dogs and baskets for obsidian from Volupai and for cassowary bones (used as currency) and for a range of manufactured goods from the Willaumez Peninsula and the Northwest New Britain coast. These partners also acted as middlemen, passing on red ochre that they had sourced from the Hoskins area and pottery, wooden bowls and stone axe heads and other goods sourced from the Vitiaz Straits.

We have no access to pre-contact expectations regarding 'trade' with super-ordinary beings but ethnographic accounts suggest ways in which humans established relations with the supernatural (e.g. Blythe 1992; Valentine 1965). In Uneapa, modes of engagement with the dead varied according to kinship with the deceased. Their relations with ancestors were

characterized by generalized reciprocity. The living made offerings of food to solicit help in healing the sick, overcoming enemies and ensuring the fertility of their crops. The ancestors responded based on family feeling. Spirit guides, usually close kinsman, assisted healers to investigate a client's sickness in the spirit dimension. This perception of beneficent ancestors is evident in the current cargo cult for whom helpful whites are lineal ancestors or deceased close kin. We do not know whether Uneapa speculated about kinship of the crew of the *Margaret Oakley*.

The more distant the kinship, however, the greater is the likelihood of hostility. People or spirits with whom kinship is weak or lacking may exploit - but can also be exploited. Uneapa dreamers steal designs, dances and knowledge from the dead when they can. Yet strangers can be transformed into kin through balanced exchange whether initiated through trade, marriage or both. Again relations with the dead resembled those with the living. Many lineages in Uneapa are said to originate from marriages between living humans and spirits. However, although relations with living kin are sustained over generations, balanced reciprocity between the dead and the living is harder to maintain. Trans-dimensional marriages inevitably ended in the departure of the spirit and the cancellation of exchange relations. Significantly, while exchange followed marriage, there were no previous traditions of relations with the dead where trade was primary. The relationship offered by Morell seems to be new - dealing with a visible, predictable Pango based on the principles of trade friendship was unprecedented.

Trade between Uneapa and mainland New Britain was conducted through partnerships modelled on kinship. 'Trade friends' (*tamara*) were either fictive or actual kin, since occasional marriages were arranged. Delegations from Uneapa and the mainland visited one another in turn, during which hosts gave presents to guests (McPherson 2007). As Blythe

learned on Uneapa, gift giving was ideally balanced but the calculus of reciprocity was disguised by a convention of delayed exchange that allowed the host to appear generous.

By using Dako, Garrygarry, and other Islanders as middlemen, Morrell exploited these conventions, revealing for the first time to those of Uneapa and New Britain that it was possible to establish '*tamara*-like' trade friendships with representatives of the dead; with Pango. It seems that this strategy of accruing credit with the dead subsequently 'got into the ritual' (cf. Smith 1982: 53-65), establishing the necessary preconditions for the Cult Mission's mode of exchange or what Lattas calls the 'underground life of capitalism' (Lattas 2001).

Throughout the period of successful trade, the Americans preserved their status as superordinary beings and sometimes behaved in ways calculated to reinforce it (Jacobs 1844: 124-125, 176). Morrell encouraged his intermediaries to introduce the Americans as coming from the 'moon' expressly to trade with them (Jacobs 1844: 147, 198). Strathern (1992) has suggested that, although New Guinea Highlanders in the 1930s initially believed that Euro-Americans were spirits, they switched interpretive registers when the whites proved their humanity by seeking exchange relations, offering Highlanders locally valued items, especially pearl shells. Morrell, however, offered very unfamiliar products—iron tools, paint, beads, calico, and medicines. He brought new medicines and treated inhabitants at Aromot and Kove with salves and plasters; 'Lees pills and Harlem oil'. His crew painted houses, canoes (and even people) on Aromot in unfamiliar styles and colours. Since innovations were the prerogative of the parallel world, these activities provided evidence both that the Americans were not normal humans, and that superordinary beings could be drawn into human-like exchange relations.

Accounts of ‘first contact’ in the PNG Highlands suggested that eating local foods, defecating, sexual relations and the fathering of children of mixed parentage also substantiated the common humanity of intruders (Connolly and Anderson 1987). Uneapa believed that *vuvumu* behaved differently from humans but that if they adopted human culture and particularly if they learned to eat human food, i.e. yams and taro, sexual relations with them would not be dangerous and marriages would be feasible. Jacobs insinuates that there were indeed sexual relations between the American sailors and island women and one of Dako’s friends proposed that Jacobs should marry his daughter. It appears that the islanders perceived that the Americans had adapted sufficiently to their world to represent opportunity rather than threat.

On the Siassi island of Aromot, if Jacobs is to be believed, the local chief, ‘Mahseelow’, presented the Americans to his people as if announcing the onset of unprecedented relations:

Beloved people; you have looked at Oorro (the sun) from day to day, and at Tieceo (the moon), Maryomber (sky), and Neto-Neto (stars) from night to night, and witnessed their regular revolutions. These are all controlled by Timboca who has now come to visit you in the person of Cap-in Mor-el, who is a mighty and powerful Mahhone (king), and has come to exchange the productions of Tieceo for those of Gonoro [Aromot]. He never eats his enemies, or fights, except on the defensive, and then he destroys the foe with the *ballum bally* of Oorro! (1844: 200; cf. Valentine 1965: 183-184).

Morrell also followed local trade conventions by working through sponsors. Dako and Garrygarry introduced Morrell to their trade partners and acted as brokers when the *Margaret Oakley* visited communities around New Britain and New Guinea. Advantages for these local

leaders included increased prestige and power within their communities. They may also have felt a sense of obligation to Morrell. Morrell initiated these exchanges by inviting islanders into his world - on board – where he gave gifts to prompt reciprocal gifts. These visitors may not have been entering the parallel world, but in local interpretation, it was close. Uneapa guests were suspicious that the ship represented a ‘*bottomless pit*’, the hatch perhaps being a portal to the underworld of the reef where the dead live. They believed the tin cups, bottles and tumblers were ‘*shells that grew on the coral reefs and sand spits of the moon*’ (Jacobs 1844) which was strikingly similar to Uneapa perception of the pots that they imported from Sio (Harding, 1967: 140).

Jacobs describes an example of Morrell’s trading tactics on Aromot: “The old chief accompanied us [on board], we showed him everything that we thought would please him and gave him many presents. He was very much pleased and promised to do all he could to collect shell against our return and went ashore again.” At Sio, Jacobs describes a similar mode of trade. The captain invited leaders on board, and entertained them ‘sumptuously’. He presented them many valuables, “and they informed us that gold-dust and diamonds abounded in the interior, and promised to collect them for us, and have them ready against our return (1844: 293).” That the reciprocation was to be gold dust and diamonds is surely a deceit aimed at the voyage’s sponsors although coincidentally gold does occur in Morobe Province.

An element in Morrell’s success was the novelty of his goods. By establishing gifting relations with Uneapa, Kove, Aromot and eventually Sio, the Americans supplied the trading system with objects over which they held a monopoly. The Americans had miraculous products, including explosive weaponry (canon, muskets, pistols, blue-flash flares and gunpowder); lanterns (and kite lanterns), iron tools, paint, and medicines. Accounts by Woodworth and Jacobs suggest that such novelty was understood within the pre-existing

mytho-historical and geographical model of the Vitiaz trading region. Here, local occurrences of raw materials, local knowledge and skills, and the economy is explained in myths (Harding 1967). Pomponio (1992: 44-47), for example, relates one from the Siassi islands in which the goods exchanged in the region were once distributed among the branches of an immense tree. When the tree was felled, clay pots, cockatoo and wooden bowls fell on the Tami islands and the New Guinea peninsula; bows and arrows, black clay pots, wide mouth pots, cockatoo, cassowary bird of paradise and black ochre fell to the north and west over the New Guinea coast. Short tailed pigs, hairless pigs, spears, tapa cloth, boar's tusks and obsidian fell on New Britain. In this way, each location acquired monopolies over certain goods which they traded within a divinely created economic order. The "differentiated cultural and natural landscape on which trading rests" was "the way the world was constructed (Harding and Clark 1994: 40)." The question for the Siassis and other traders was: how did the Americans and their goods fit within this divine economic geography?

Several incidents suggest that the answer was being sought. On Aromot Woodworth's journal reveals how "the king" took them and their Kove sponsor Garrygarry to a stage where the "council" held its meetings. After introducing them, he "*began to name the limbs of the tree that overhung us, he has a different name for each one.*" It seems the Aromot islanders were engaging in research, drawing attention to this tree to outline the order that it embodied; in the hope, perhaps, of 'placing' the Americans in this order of things.

At Sio, after the Americans gave presents to initiate a trade relationship, the villagers asked them to dredge their lagoon – which the Americans thought would be for pearls. Instead, they dredged up a large old pot (Jacobs 1844: 293). The Americans did not know (as Harding eventually related) that Sio islanders held a monopoly over pottery and maintained a pretence that their pots were shells of giant deep-water mussels (Harding 1967). They claim(ed) that they specialised in diving for these 'muscles' and passed off their pots as

empty “shells” to Aromot and New Britain. Morrell’s dredging incident can be read as Sio revealing their place in the order of regional trade. It also suggests that despite the American’s status as spirits, Sio thought they could trick them.

In summary, the encounter with Morrell presented a new opportunity for a sustainable relationship with the dead. A key difference between this eventful happening and the traditions of the past was that a trade rather than marriage was primary. The invitation to trade by the dead suggests a new mode of agency and created new expectations. When Morrell and his crew insinuated themselves into Vitiaz trade their mimetic performance of Melanesian ways suggested that the products of these supernatural beings could, like the goods of human trade friends, be elicited through delayed reciprocity. Later a marriage was proposed to strengthen the relationship.

As far as we know, the Cult Mission does not consider Dako’s abduction and return as significant, but the historical accidents of Morrell’s arrival and method of trade (and subsequent trade encounters with the white world) appear to have “got into the ritual”. The modes of agency governing trade interactions with human others came to encompass interactions with non-human others, prefiguring the work of the current Cult Mission on Uneapa.

#### AFTERMATH: COLONIZATION AND CARGO IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Our evidence confirms the importance Lawrence attributes to the *longue durée* and local logics in the study of cargo cults. It suggests that Lawrence’s (1964: 31-32) reconstruction of pre-contact Rai Coast religion in which he argues that relations between humans and super-ordinary beings are analogous to inter-human relations is relevant elsewhere. Prior to colonization, Melanesians in the Bismarck Sea region not only endeavoured to engage ancestors and other powers in beneficial relations, but also chance

visitors such as Morrell. We also suggest that pre-colonial contact with Euro-Americans in the Vitiaz trading area played a greater role than has been generally recognized in the genesis of contemporary beliefs about cargo, exchange and the ancestors.

Uneapa memory of Dako's encounter with Morrell is selective. When Morrell arrived in 1830 his cannon and muskets wrought devastation, but his return in 1834 and 1835 left a different memory. Eventually relations with Morrell were very favourable to local people. He provided substantial gifts at many locations and much to the anger of his financiers, left the region with an insignificant cargo of shell. Perhaps under the influence of later good relations, the violence of the initial kidnapping was forgotten. Katu, speaking of Dako to Blythe in 1975 related:

“The whites had not caught him to injure or kill him. No, they just wanted to give him knowledge by teaching him. So they took him to the ship and looked after him and helped him and dressed him in clothes. Then he stayed with them. They kept teaching him till he was able to communicate. Months passed and then a year and they kept teaching him until finally he knew the language well. They thought he would be a good ally and put him to work until they were ready to bring him back.” (Blythe, Transcript, 1975)

In Katu's narration, these whites sound much like the Cult Mission leader, Cheri Dakoa Takaili's friendly whites with whom the cult endeavours to forge relations (Lattas, 2005). Experience with Morrell likely encouraged the islanders to be welcoming in subsequent contacts. When King arrived off Naraga in 1842, people happily traded with him - in stark contrast to the reception that Morrell initially received (King 1844). When the Germans made contact with the islands in the 1880s, the islanders welcomed them too. The memory of

Dako's exotic cargo that is still recalled by islanders after well over a century, may also have been an incentive.

“When Dako came back he showed all the things he got from the whites, clothes for example. They divided the clothes into little pieces and shared them out. They made them into decorations – like flowers. They weren't for covering the body – no. They had nice colours! They were beautiful things” (transcript, 1975).

We are not saying that these first contact events led to the cult. Indeed we have no evidence that either Dako himself or Morrell are themselves important to the Cult mission or to earlier cults, unless one takes a wider view of what 'cult activity' was. Blythe, for example, was told of two instances of prophetic dreams which predicted religious changes on the island and the coming of the church. In the 1930s, men from Uneapa solicited the Catholic Church to send a catechist (Blythe, 1995) and the islanders swiftly converted. The tendency to identify white people with the dead remained and the appeal to white missionaries has to be considered in this context. With the Second World War, a third “event” occurred when Americans gathered in force at Kilenge and impressed the people of West New Britain and the Vitiaz Strait with their equipment (Zelenietz and Saito, 1990). Thereafter the Americans became the focus of regional cargo cults. Subsequent religious experiments on the island included the Batari Cult, Seventh Day Adventism, an imported Kove movement, and finally the Cult Mission (Flannery, 1983)

Despite massive change, a legacy of Dako's time can be discerned in the Cult Mission. First, it is tempting to trace back its adherents' concern to achieve balanced reciprocal exchange with the dead to the possibility of achieving the 'just' relationship with the *pangopango* experienced with Morrell. Lattas (2001) relates how the cultists explain the harsh experience of colonial and capitalist exploitation as building 'credit' in the white world

which has delayed in its delivery of just returns for the islander's work. Cult members record all the work they do to 'honour' dead kin, considering it a debt which the latter will eventually repay. Cultists attribute the reluctance of the dead to deliver as yet, to their own moral and social misconduct according to a complex corpus of religious and development discourses (Lattas 2001, 2005). The cultists reject the violence, cannibalism, sorcery and warfare of the past, and blame these for the dead's neglect of their reciprocal obligations. Consequently they have adopted the accumulation of money, "cleanliness" and an appreciation of femininity which, they understand, should revive an equitable relationship with the dead (Lattas, 2001, 2005).

The sources surrounding Dako's Odyssey reveal that myths concerning Pango dominated Uneapa cosmology in the 1830s. These have 'disappeared'. This, we have argued, is not because Pango has somehow been superseded or suppressed, but because the parallel 'white' world over which the mytho-practical Pango presided has become ever more manifest as Uneapa has been drawn into a colonial, post-colonial and globalised world. Today, Pango refers predominantly to white people. The precise process and timing of this transformation would require a detailed study of plantations, missionaries and the effects of two world wars. Here we identify the structural change that such history would need to address. Whilst Dako's experience of Pango was a shocking event at the time, and established the transformatory possibilities for creating the reciprocal relations with the dead which remain the concern of Dakoa's movement, the actual encounters surrounding Dako's abduction no longer seem exceptional.

We have argued that it is important to understand the 'archaeology' of knowledge concerning Pango to understand the emergence of today's 'cultic episteme', but we have also argued that this particular transformation has been configured by the mytho-geography of the parallel world, and in particular by the mytho-geography of trade and innovation; how the

world of Pango fits within the divinely created economic order. In Marshall Sahlins' (1981) terms, the response to Morrell's arrival took place within a transformative 'structure of conjuncture' that created new possibilities for relating to the parallel world. But while 'transformative', this encounter is no longer a memorable 'event', in Sahlins' terms. In Europe, the ideas of Darwin or Descartes were at first disruptive and transformative 'events' but subsequently their reasoning became routine. Similarly, on Uneapa, first encounters with the parallel world of white people were disruptive. However as relationships with 'Pango' become ordinary, the pre-transformation paradigm ceased to be relevant and elements, once meaningful, were forgotten, even though memory of the encounter persisted. Sahlins (1995: 177-189) also noted that people in some New Guinea Highland societies interpreted first contact situations as encounters with supernatural beings, but once Europeans were categorised as human their engagement in these encounters was forgotten. In Uneapa, by contrast, reinterpretation took a different direction. Here first contact was remembered but it was the nature of the supernatural entity, Pango, with whom Europeans were identified, that was subsequently transformed.

Modern Uneapa do not remember Morrell and believe that Germans rather than Americans abducted Dako returning him with a splendid cargo. The Morrell-Dako episode was more than a happening, in Sahlins's sense of the term (as it was transformative) but it is no longer the memorable event that he envisages.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The Vitu Islands are also called the French Islands, Witu Islands, Bali-Vitu and Bali-Witu.
- <sup>2</sup> Americans also referred to Dako as Darco.
- <sup>3</sup> Dako and Dakoa are distinct, common names on Uneapa.

<sup>4</sup> Dako and Monday suffered different fates. hardly spoke, attempted escape and died of ‘consumption’ in 1833 (Fairhead2015).

<sup>5</sup> Terrumbubbyandarko is a variation on Tellum-by-by Darco, a name Jacobs attributed to Dako.

<sup>6</sup> Riesenfeld (1950: 273-274; cf. 361-365) asserts that Kove say they owe their origin to Pango and Moro, who ‘were also the creators of death’ and endowed their people with different sets of material assets.

<sup>7</sup> Stories about Pango may have been transferred to other heroes, such as the snake *vuvumu* , Mataluangi who escorts souls to the ships of the dead.

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