

CHAPTER 5

*Colonialism & the Dissolution  
of Secret Reality*



SINCE SECRECY HAS LONG BEEN SUSPECT—a source of subversion, abuse of power by brokers and nefarious agents of the state, and social ill—we should not be surprised to discover that precolonial male agents of ritual secrecy and colonial agents from Western powers competed for hegemony in Melanesia. With endemic war, troubled relations between the genders, questionable subversive activities in secret cults, and weird stories of cargo cults prevalent following first contact, the view evolved among colonials of a civilization at war with itself—a worldview reminiscent of the cynical attitudes noted in chapter 2. There seems little doubt that this political perspective supported the colonial policy of intervention at certain times and places, as we shall see. Especially in matters of suspicious secret ritual practice, colonial agents provided force when necessary to support missionary zeal in the destruction of secret cult objects and practices. As these things go, the “problem” of secrecy was not a very large one for the colonial powers. However, long after the male cults and cargo movements had begun to dissolve, the antisocial cynical and romantic views of male ritual secrecy in these societies continued to belabor and undermine their cultural historical interpretation.

When social relations are built upon the contrast of public and private—and considering that trust between males was created through the homosociality of ritual secrecy in the men’s house, as it was in precolonial New Guinea—what happens with the introduction of colonialism? In a word: secrecy dissolved as the social order was radically breached from outside. Warfare was typically suppressed, and missionaries followed. As

ritual secrecy was a counterforce to the instability of warfare, its demise undermined the men's house and defused attempts to regulate gender and intergenerational relations. Radical change forced men to redraw the lines of their reality precepts. With ritual gone, what remained was the rhetoric and morality of public affairs—the other side of the public/secret duality. However, those discursive controls were not up to the task of managing intimate relations, including those between the genders. Increasingly, individuals were left to their own devices. Hence, a new subjectivity began to unfold, characterized by the development of the concept of a “jural individual,” harboring notions of “privacy” and private property, where once the tightly bound clubhouse territory of ritual secrecy reigned supreme. This change is the focus of this final chapter.

The study of secrecy must always highlight the analysis of unfaith—of what is challenged and incoherent within cultural traditions that relied upon the uneasy truce of ritual secrecy. And this unfaith is a difficult arena for the operation of Western science, and no less so for anthropology. Indeed, the very fabric of faith and fundamentalism is made from deeply seated beliefs and ritual practice of the person, and not just in the politics and public appearance of the cult. Faith in a sacred core of ritual is as significant for what it extols as for what it forbids. We have seen this repeatedly demonstrated in the exclusions of ritual secrecy and the means by which coherence is created in a hidden world that rejects secular ideas and sentiments as inimical to it. As the late Ernest Gellner put it, “Fundamentalism is best understood in terms of what it repudiates” (1992: 2). Nowhere is this insight of more value than in understanding male ritual secrecy in New Guinea and its postcolonial dissolution.

### *The Last Governor-General's Confession*

Seldom are we granted the testimony of the chief colonial officer who assisted in the dissolution of an entire tradition of ritual secrecy, and for this reason alone the account of the late Jan Van Baal's time among the Marind-anim is unique. For in the colonial history of Dutch New Guinea (before it was annexed by Indonesia in 1961 and became Irian Jaya) we have been given the gift of how Marind-anim secret practice was curtailed. Van Baal's story is troubling and incomplete, being the sole surviving record; indeed, this is the testimony of the highest authority of the colonial administration, since he would become the last governor-general of the

colony, and the last surviving viceroy in the world, facts in which Van Baal took glee. Beginning in the mid-1930s the great Dutch anthropologist was charged with administering a vast and wild territory, a task he relished alongside of his deep interest in Marind-anim society.<sup>1</sup> Van Baal was not only a man of iron will (the Japanese during the war interned him for a long time but could never break his spirit), but he was also an impeccable scholar and a Calvinist with a lifelong interest in what he called the “partnership” between God and man (Van Baal 1981). The combination of this and his politics (he once was a member of the Dutch Parliament) make his account all the more remarkable in its confession.

There is no doubt that Van Baal (1966), who was a tolerant and worldly man, was concerned over what he refers to as the metaphysical “dark side” of Marind-anim ritual sexuality. He might have been able to accept the heterosexuality of the rites, but the homosexual anal intercourse (involving “very young” boys, no less) and heterosexual defloration (perpetrated upon “very young” girls by groups of men) were practices that stunned colonialists, even the sympathetic ones. Certainly they must have shaken the heart of a liberal young Calvinist colonial officer from Utrecht, in spite of the preparation by Van Baal’s professor, the Swiss Paul Wirz, who reported cannibalism, head-hunting, and sexual orgies as if they were so very common (“If ever there was a scholar who went for the dramatic, it was Wirz,” Van Baal, personal communication, 1982).

Nevertheless, Van Baal was a dedicated ethnologist who soon discovered the centrality of ritual sexual practices in Marind-anim religion. So vital in the formation of the cosmos and in the cultural ontology of the body, fertility, and the soul, Marind-anim mythology was “obsessed” with these matters, Van Baal reported. For instance, Diwa, the great culture hero of the Marind-anim, is mythologically represented as carrying his long penis over his shoulder, an image that threatened the virtue of women and was not unconnected with warfare. “In fact, the myth is but seemingly a dirty story. Diwa’s molesting the girl is not merely an act of copulation but one of head-hunting as well,” Van Baal tells us (1984: 158). Whatever his private attitudes about sex, Van Baal suggests in this semiautobiographical essay that the mythic charter of Marind-anim heterosexual practice was immoral and bad, and needed to be stopped.

Of course, as a colonial officer, Van Baal felt an obligation to worry over such matters, particularly as he was charged with the pacification of the Marind-anim. Beginning in 1911, the Dutch had managed to rein in

the famed Marind war-raids upon their neighbors and distant tribes, conducted to capture children and women. Even so, the Dutch permitted the initiations that symbolically supported the continuation of these raids. Van Baal was, by his own admission, personally disturbed by these practices, especially the “ritual homosexuality” and “promiscuous” heterosexuality of the Marind-anim. It was not simply that Van Baal was antihomosexual, though perhaps at the time he had his compunctions about it. It was rather the idea that sex was done in ritual, a compulsion of dark passions stirred up by forces beyond the control of the individual agent, in the sense that an “orgy” was going on. Indeed, Van Baal (1963, 1966) uses the term *orgy* often and without apology to refer to the rites, and this trope provides a critical clue to its meaning for him. Sex, in the Calvinist worldview, was supposed to be a matter of marriage contracts and church weddings that preceded individual desires and charted its splendor, in the Old World view. This was nothing of the sort.

By the late 1930s, Van Baal had grown increasingly disturbed by the reemergence of the ritual practices from years past that represented “orgies.” He tells us that he played a critical role in thwarting them:

The Marind-anim male is a kind and highly sociable man, but aggressiveness lies at the bottom of his heart. It can be overheard in the sonorous songs accompanying their great, olden-time dances. I attended one on the last day of August 1937. Two solemn circles of men sang and danced in opposite directions. They were surrounded by a wider circle of torch-bearing women lighting the colorful shapes of their males so that everyone could admire their magnificent attire and dignified demeanor. It was beauty itself. Yet, well after midnight, the psalm-like sonorous singing took on an undertone of threat which gradually became stronger and stronger until, around four-o’clock in the morning, I became aware of a savage aggressiveness about to be unleashed from the hearts of these otherwise kind and jovial men. Half an hour later I intervened. (1984: 164)

Intervention meant using armed troops and suppressing the rites forever. This ended—or should we say presaged the end of—one of the remarkable cults of ritual secrecy in Melanesia. Their rituals of boy-insemination, once greater in scope and longer in duration within the scope of the life cycle than those of the Sambia, died with the cult (Herdt 1984a).

In whose name was the last governor-general acting, his own or that of the Dutch empire? The answer to this question leads us into the rhetoric of colonial intrusions into such practices, a matter with which we are now well familiar, due to the opening story of Lewis Henry Morgan, and his ethnographic dealings and then progressive campaigns on behalf of the Iroquois. He was troubled to some extent by the existence of the secret societies among the Indians, as we saw, and the reasons for his concern are relevant to the dissolution of ritual secrecy in Melanesia today.

The political ideology of colonial authorities such as van Baal typically depended upon a public/private rhetoric that imagines but one society or valid civic group, equivalent to a state, or nation, inhabiting the same time and space. As we have seen, the Norwegian anthropologist, Barth, appealed to this imaginary in his ethnography of the Baktaman. The notion of a secret force in the same spatial and temporal field could mean only one thing, subversion, and this could only spell trouble for administrative agents responsible for "keeping the peace." All the other contestants for a voice are then perceived as subversive to authority and legitimate power. K. E. Read's account demonstrates this view. There are numerous examples of the process in Melanesia, but consider the following report from a key informant to the late Roger Keesing (1992). He is explaining the actions of himself and his fellow Maasina Rule Chiefs in the famous Marching Rule movement suppressed by the British (under the Sedition Act of 1798!) in 1947 in the Solomon Islands:

They charged us with holding seditious meetings. That was the kind of law that was used by the Romans when the Jewish priests turned Jesus in. We were imprisoned for holding secret meetings . . . But we didn't hold secret meetings. How can meetings be secret when people come from all over the island to attend them? We were on our own island, trying to follow our own customs.  
(Keesing 1992: 117)

One can imagine such a complaint by Thomas Paine or another American patriot about the British during the eighteenth century! It is no accident that many of the American revolutionaries were members of the Freemasons. There was a kindred complaint, generations later, by the Iroquois who were forced to set up the False Face societies, vis-à-vis the followers of Handsome Lake, as interrogated by Ely Parker and his friend Lewis Henry Morgan. It is extraordinary to think of Morgan taking down field notes on

a secret society whose existence was only partially desired by the Native Americans themselves in antipathy to the colonization by a civilization that Morgan sufficiently disliked as to form his own secret society to escape from it!

And so on: what is subversive to colonial authority or authorities on the margins of society shifts with history, in the geography of conquest. The contradictions are perhaps always clearer in hindsight—and to outsiders. The difference is, of course, that colonial powers could not imagine unruly Melanesians engaged in ritual secrecy as being “equal” or agentic in the same way as our Founding Fathers or Morgan and his collaborator Parker. For there was no viable concept of the jural individual or cultural category of privacy in precolonial Melanesia (Simmell 1950).

#### *From Ritual to Contracts*

The particularizing cultural metaphors employed in understanding these distinctions are critical, since, as we have seen, the form of ritual secrecy is obviously divergent from contemporary Western models of jural individuals and metaphors of their contracts. The public/private distinction drawn in these matters is insufficient; as Marilyn Strathern has written, “The Western equation between personal subjectivity (and its exercise on others inert in respect of it) and the creation society/culture tends to regard the public realm/political life as an exercise of an enlarged subjectivity” (1987: 288). Indeed, precisely the opposite is true of ritual secrecy: Subjectivity is expanded in the hidden discourse and ontology of the men’s house, not in the public domain or its affairs. Ritual secrecy as ontology cannot be divided between “society” and “secret society” (Read 1952; see also Tefft 1992; Keen 1994), as we have seen, for this duality evolved from false impressions of primitive and modern, central state society versus “nature” society, evolutionary leftovers from the age of Morgan and Simmel.

New Guinea meanings of ritual secrecy center on the contrasts initiated/uninitiated, male/female, old/young, revealed/hidden, and—more global—inside/outside, as noted from the case studies in chapter 4. An ethnography of local politics among the Kwanga of the Sepik River has well shown the secular inadequacy of the public/private dichotomy: “Kwanga social structure creates a situation in which people always have reason to suspect a hidden meaning behind every remark or action” (Brisson 1992: 140). Moreover, as Strathern and Strathern noted of body paint-

ing and self-decoration in Mt. Hagen and across New Guinea, an “opposition between dark and bright elements is linked to the opposition between men and women” (1971: 172). Other social values, such as aggressiveness for males and fertility for females, they suggested, can be understood as diffuse signifiers of gender embodied on the skin surface via body painting.

These examples of meanings are constitutive of what we might call “ethnotheories of difference” in New Guinea: essentializing classifications and rubrics, typically the stuff of signifying differences between man and woman, and older and younger males, and at a higher level of abstraction, between self and Other. While the gendered differences have been most studied in New Guinea (M. Strathern 1988), age hierarchy and generational conflict have been less frequent in theory (Flanagan 1989; Foder 1984; Mead 1956).

Where the traditional schemas are shaken up badly and rapidly, as in the many examples of historical millenarian movements and cargo cults in Melanesia, it has been found that gender and age differences are reconstituted, but not necessarily undone (Lindstrom 1993; Mead 1956; Williams 1924; Worsley 1957). As Victor Turner once wrote of Melanesian millenarianism, “There is strong evidence that religious forms clearly attributable to the generative activities of structurally inferior groups or categories soon assume many of the external characteristics of hierarchies” (1971: 190–91). Turner noted the famous case of the prophet Yali, in Peter Lawrence’s *Road Belong Cargo*, as illustrative of how colonial ideas got wrapped around traditional beliefs and practices. Again, however, such a view threatens to normalize and homogenize a vast array of distinctive processes under a general umbrella (Lattas 1999). “A variety of desires for collective benefit coupled with apparently irrational strategies to attain those desires have attracted the label cargo cult,” Lindstrom has recently written (1993: 189).

Space does not permit detailed examination of the transformations that have occurred in the colonial period, but we should reflect upon a few points of interest in this matter. As we have seen, throughout New Guinea, systems of ritual secrecy rely upon notions of collective substance, metaphors of the body as polity, hidden dependence upon ancestors, spirits, gods and the like in defining the nature and being of ontology and the practices necessary to achieve this. As noted earlier, the cultural secrecy I classify as contract secrecy occurs in Melanesia as well. Typically, however, ritual and contractual secrecy tend to be mutually exclusive as symbolic

modalities within the same cultural-historical tradition. For example, boy-inseminating rites, as known from an ancient ritual complex in South Coast Lowland groups (Herdt 1993), are distributed within systems of ritual secrecy, while large-scale forms of ceremonial exchange systems in these groups are generally absent or poorly developed (Knauff 1993). Ritual and contractual secrecy may also occur within the same social field, though seldom within the same tradition, and, even more rarely, inside the same social actor. For example, the Gahuku-Gama and the Paiela (Biersack 1982) have secret ceremonies that lead, at least on their fringe, into contractual systems of ceremonial gift exchange, while peoples such as the Mae Enga (Meggitt 1964), with large-scale pig and shell gift commodity systems, institutionalized a bachelorhood cult that suggests male/female themes of the kind commonly found in systems of ritual secrecy.

Parallel cases concern the large-scale ceremonial gift exchange systems, such as the *kula* (Malinowski 1922), *moku* (A. J. Strathern 1971), and *tee* system (Meggitt 1971), which have long been known to involve elaborate codes of etiquette and incorporate aspects of ritual secret practices (Godelier 1999: 95–99). The latter are probably best understood as incipient forms of contractual secrecy, a context for negotiation and hidden understandings between individual actors as trading partners and, by extension, from one jural group to the other.

However, in the form of ritual secrecy, which appeals to idioms of nature and spirits as inherent in the order of the cosmos, conditional masculinity is paradoxically viewed as immutable, inherent, and fixed. In this sense ritual secrets are not a gift, as they cannot be “given away” or “exchanged.” Such ideologies and their contradictions were constitutive of personal and cultural reality in precolonial times (see chap. 4). Contractual secrecy is more discrete or immutable, and it appeals to self-interest—with justifications and rights a matter of secret contracts that facilitate these interests. Though all systems of contractual secrecy in technologically complex societies such as the United States appeal to the private and solitary actor in concert with his or her broker, such a conception is obviously culture-bound and too limiting for New Guinea systems. Again, Melanesian systems of *kula* trading, the *moka* and *tee* systems in the Western Highlands (M. Strathern 1988 reviews these in a parallel light), and possibly systems of sorcery, witchcraft, and shamanic practice (Herdt and Stephen 1989) are sophisticated but divergent forms of contractual secrecy based upon hidden meanings and networks of partners, brokers, and interest

groups. This latter model of sociality merged with group identity transcends the lone-child model of Western jural individualism. Both of these systems, however, appeal to divergent models of time, with the form of ritual secrecy typically based upon cyclical images of time, not the apocalypse of cargo cults.

According to this model, social formations of contractual secrecy do not emerge as historically salient until such time as the concept of a “jural individual” is established in a historical culture. While we cannot enter into all of the reasons underlying this claim, I would note that the concept of the jural individual is distinct from the notion of individualism as a principle in neoliberal democracies. A “jural individual” is a person-construct implying agreements and contracts as a semiautonomous agent, either in pursuit of self-interest or as a representative of a class or groups. Here, the individual as a separate ontological entity is critical to the enterprise of establishing how change occurs in cultural systems, and what the concept of agency implies for the transition from one form of secret exchange to another, based either upon embodiment and ritual secrecy or jural contracts.

#### *Cargo Cults That Undermine Secrecy*

Whatever the meaning might be of cargo cults and millenarian movements, many writers have interpreted these to inaugurate a new social reality—possibly a divergent or competing reality system, as we have defined it in this book—in reaction to colonial agents, sociopolitical oppression, and other sources of real-life challenges to the epistemology, social structure, power, and social practices (Lantenari 1959; Worsley 1968). As a means of defining cultural reality or hidden ontologies, however, the study of cargo cults was underanalyzed (Lindstrom 1993) until the recent work of Whitehouse (1995) and especially of Andrew Lattas (1999).

The tenets of a new order, the delights of new materialism, the pleasures or horrors of new social relations or rebellious sexuality, are all implied in these sensational and sweeping movements, which were typically opposed by the colonial administrations. The cargo cult may be construed as an emergent new form of agency with the potential for imagining the jural individual in colonial contact encounters. For the traditional power base of the secret society, the potential disruption that came from these cults was very great. The cargo cults neutralized factions within the village or rendered status distinctions between the genders and generations

relatively feckless. Male rule was thus overturned, sometimes quickly enough as to actually see the displacement of beliefs and practices from the one to the other. The change in sociality was also dramatic, being neither purely "public" nor "personal" (Lindstrom 1993). The vital lesson in this transformation can be so subtle as to elude us:

Sociability changes serious communication to noncommittal conversation, Eros to coquetry, ethics to manners, aesthetics to taste. As Simmel shows, the world of sociability is a precarious and artificial creation that can be shattered at any moment by someone who refuses to play the game. (Berger 1963: 139)

The millenarian is fundamentally a political activist and a social worker, and, as with all vehement reformers, he or she must articulate an alternate vision of reality compelling enough to make the public overcome its fears of experimenting with the future or its suspicions of fraud. The most revealing examples emerge from the times in which ethnographers were able to chronicle the historical transformation of peoples undergoing radical change. For example, the strange cargoism of the Oroko tribe is known to us from the great colonial Australian anthropologist Frances Edgar Williams's (1924, 1936) classic texts on men and bull-roarers in the Papuan Gulf, which contain fine examples of how ritual secrecy was breached in the throes of colonialism.

The Vailala Madness among the Oroko was among the most striking and zealous of millenarian movements to come to the attention of the colonial authorities in New Guinea. It resulted in the complete destruction of the traditional men's cult houses of the Gogola and most of their sacred art (Williams 1924). So far-reaching was the cargoism of this extensive social movement that Williams's diary account gives the impression of a people swept up in a kind of "disease epidemic" of "nervous disorders" that infected bodies and minds (Schwimmer 1975). The prophets' new visions were overlaid on top of the heap of the destruction of the old practices and the material culture that embodied secret reality. The ritual icons of the new sacred order, once used to create an alternative secret reality of more or less the same order established among the Gahuku and the Baktaman among others, dissolved this concept of Otherness by replacing secret practices with public ones. This breached the requisite social relations between the genders and generations that had previously been kept

immutable and separate. All this was swept away in order to ponder the urgent problems at hand: how to gain access to coveted material goods; what sorts of ideas to make of them; what rituals to implement these plans to secure the goods; how prophecy could reveal truth; and how to conjure magical power to take control of heaven on earth (Burriddge 1969).

Among the Orokolos, two ceremonies, the *Kovave* and *Apa-beheve*, combined the fervor of ritual secrecy and the generosity of communal feasting (Williams 1930). The combination was not an accident, since the Orokolos were remarkable in sponsoring initiations of boys and girls simultaneously, and extending a degree of secret participation to women, that goes beyond any examined above. When it came to the matter of their traditional ritual sound instruments, however, this was not the case. The bull-roarer, an instrument of enormous power, fertility, and destruction in this area, and which surely designated forbidden desires and objects of intimacy and homosociality among the men, was kept especially secret from women. Both ceremonies aimed also to protect the secret of the bull-roarer, ultimately sanctioned by death threats aimed at women. While the degree of the secrecy and the threats remain open to question, the colonial situation at the time definitely complicated the extent to which the death threat could be carried out. Colonization, in short, compromised many things in the men's secret reality, most notably its conception of masculinity and its difference theory of gender.

Williams was both a government anthropologist and a colonist, and we have some reason to suspect that he was not entirely impartial in his interpretations, though few would dispute his seminal contributions to the comparative ethnography of the Papuan Lowlands (Knauff 1993; Schwimmer 1975; Van Baal 1966). Williams was a pragmatist; his views of the bull-roarer were down-to-earth, perhaps the result of having spent too many years slogging through the Papuan bush on practical missions and medical patrols. "It is possible to unearth some esoteric meaning in the bull-roarer," Williams asserted. "But I would state with all possible emphasis my own view that mundane, secular interests are uppermost in the minds of most of those implicated in the ceremony" (1976: 87).

The men guarded the secret of the bull-roarer, a utopia that made possible performances of conditional masculinity and expressions of sexual control. "The women must not pry into it, and they are made to understand that prying will be punished by sorcery" (Williams 1976: 105). Indeed, these threats against women and children were constant, and the

men were sometimes cruel and mean-spirited about them. Williams reports that men found “some fun” about their threatening aggression, and the younger men in particular enjoyed “hoaxing” the women and children (103). The playful/cynical meanings of the term “hoaxing” in this construction imply a kind of buffoonery tinged with hostility, all throughout the men’s secret initiation ceremonies.

How much did Orokelo women know of the bull-roarer? Faith and unfaith: “The effect of this standing threat . . . is to make the women avoid all possible appearance of knowing the secret.” The charge of duplicity and complicity, so common in systems of ritual secrecy (Herdt 1982a), would have it that women were assigned and played a role in the performance of every ceremony—appearing and disappearing “at their appointed time.” Hardly the image of “rituals of rebellion” described by K. E. Read (1965) in his poignant account of a similar process among the Gahuku-Gama. But the Orokelo women would exit the village “in high good humor” to allow the parade of secret bull-roarers by men (Williams 1976: 104). “And when, in about 15 minutes, all was over, they returned as noisily as they had gone and resumed their cooking for the feast which was to end the day.” The ethnography reports that the women “do not resent” such inconveniences. I wonder. At any rate, considerable resentment seems to have occasioned the advent of the Vailala Madness two years later.

As the cargo cult got into full swing, male rule was systematically undermined and began to change the working of the women’s role. In particular, the women’s adherence to the ritual secrecy and its threats of death seemed to fade or wane. Colonial and missionary agents were absolutely instrumental to the effect.

It appears that a former missionary was preaching to a congregation composed of women and girls, whose minds he wished to disabuse of groundless fear. Intending therefore to drive home his point by practical illustration, to show them in fact what the *hevebe* really was, he produced one from his pulpit and swung it before their eyes. The result may have filled him with astonishment. For the female part of his congregation rose panic-stricken to its feet and in one wild scramble fled the church. (Williams 1976: 104)

Women at one time feared the bull-roarer, Williams remarked, and not just because it is was “intrinsically dangerous” and a devouring mon-

ster. As the Vailala cargo cult spread through the neighboring culture (Williams 1924), ruining the rituals and sacking their cult houses, all of the Orokolo ritual secrecy was still not spent:

When during the Vailala Madness the bull-roarers were exposed at Arihava while they remained secret in the conservative Orokolo next door, many women of the latter village were supposed to have learned everything in their visits to the former, and to have been talking and laughing over the secret in their homes. Then it was that they began to die off: the old men of Orokolo were taking their revenge. (Williams 1976: 105)

Even this revenge sorcery was supposedly not objectionable to most Orokolo women, Williams insists, because of their "low" social status. It is likely that his informants were in a position to know. However, we must still wonder if he might have been wrong and simply guessed. We cannot be sure, either way: there are no other notes on the cultural reality of the women. However, a more recent report among the Kwanga, involving missionary revelation, may cipher a similar difference. Karen Brison (1992: 152) reports that the revelations "undermined the authority of initiated men." But in a further twist, now familiar but still useful to add, she tells us: "It is not important if uninitiated men and women know the secrets, as long as they do not claim the right to know them by speaking of them in public." Such a distinction is illuminating and may go a long way in explaining the situation of the Orokolo described by Williams. Yet the account of the situation of Yagwoia men (see chap. 3) also suggests that knowing the secrets and stories is sometimes desired but thwarted; not just as a "language of claims" (Brison 1992: 152), but as a system of being and masculine conditional agency.

Williams has demonstrated how women's adherence to men's ritual secrecy encompassed two distinct, even competing, situations: the assumption of a ceremonial role, and the secrecy behind it. He tells us that the women did not hold a grudge but I think this is just a bystander's opinion. It is more likely that men's threats and sorcery made them hold their tongues. It would be too simple, I think, to divorce the men's authority to enforce their secret reality from the women's "lower" social status or the colonial authorities impinging upon male rule. The men's ceremony is more than "deception" or "domination," to use the pejorative moral tropes

studied in this book, and the women's role represents more than fear. That the colonial authorities treated the whole matter as a "disease" or a "nervous disorder" is perhaps not only an expression of the assumptive medical ideas of the times, particularly vulnerable to gender and sexual stereotypes (Herdt 1991a); it is diagnostic of how vehemently the village secret cult was in opposition to its encapsulation by the government. Whatever the case, as rapid change comes along, traditional regimes and systems of secret desire may unravel quickly. Change disrupted communities in which the balance of power was already loaded in one direction or the other, as Williams suggests in the cargo cultism of the Vailala Madness. The result of that adventure, the apocryphal myth tells, is death and destruction to the interlopers.

In such places—where male ritual secrecy was their central means of connecting male authority to public affairs and domesticity—is embedded what Murphy referred to as the "functional diffuseness" of social relations (1971: 144). To undo the diffuseness—the knots that bind public and secret into an extremely rich and untidy cultural reality—siding with the outside preacher, listening too much to the rebellious neighbor woman in her attempt to destroy the bull-roarer—is to unravel the entire civilization. Cargoism has become such a popular metaphor for these processes that we should not only call into question the basic construct, but also the problem of how we might construe the implications for reality-breaking. As Lindstrom (1993: 189) has argued, "The closer cargo cult comes to the self, the more the tone of such extended usage slides from melancholy to mockery. Comic book cargoism returns." As a new form of male agency for emerging jural individuals, cargoism destroyed what was formerly "sacred" masculinity to achieve a new private-property materialism consistent with a new theory of agency: an individualistic soul that is more gender-neutral and is less dependent upon the collective, drawn into messianic Christian afterlife.

It is this threat of the collapse of male ritual icons and their utopian ontologies that is the greatest result of social change, and in New Guinea we see the anthropologist involved, as well, which links up to other examples of transformation in ritual secret collectives across the island.

### *Fall of the Tambaran*

"Every anthropologist has some share in the experience of a prophet," Burridge once wrote, "and every prophet must have something of the anthro-

pologist in him” (1969: 160). The idea is helpful in introducing the last ethnographic case study of rapid change in systems of ritual secrecy. To bring the argument for an ontological approach to ritual secrecy full circle, we need to train our sights on an ethnographic project sufficiently rich that the unraveling of secrecy under intense messianic pressure becomes visible. The trilogy of Donald F. Tuzin’s work (1976, 1980, 1997) on the Ilahita Arapesh is rich and comprehensive, and it is close to the story of change in this corner of New Guinea, not far from Margaret Mead’s field site. Not only does it illustrate the intrusion of the outside to inside—when doubt and skepticism of the Other infects the men’s house, shattering its secret reality and thus the trust of men—it also reveals the fascinating shift from secrecy to privacy, and from ritual reality to the private contractual arrangements of individual jural agents, men with men, and men with women.

The role of the anthropologist-as-witness becomes quite critical in understanding these highly contested controversies and revelations on both sides. Of course, we have observed in the studies of Read, Langness, Barth, and Godelier, and others, as well as my own, the contradictions of more stable pre- and postcolonial systems. Moreover, the situations recounted by F. E. Williams on the Orokolo, and Margaret Mead among the Arapesh, reveal the challenge of understanding the change from ritual secrecy to something else. To return to Burridge’s comparison of cargo cult prophets and anthropologists:

Both must pare their experience into what is communicable. An anthropologist is trained to appreciate just this shift from one mode to another. Nevertheless, in the event he is never quite ready for it. How much the greater, then, is the shock and turmoil in one who is not wholly aware of the nature of the transition in which he is involved? (1969: 160)

The Ilahita Arapesh of the Middle Sepik River (studied by Tuzin from 1969–70, and again in 1986) provide the kind of fine-grained ethnography necessary to meet the interpretative challenges of the task. In a series of ethnographies, Tuzin (1976, 1980, 1989, 1997) has built upon the corpus of Margaret Mead decades before to provide one of the most exhaustive descriptions of religious culture and secret initiation ever to emerge from Melanesia. The high point of this work is *Voice of the Tambaran* (1980), a

masterpiece of religious anthropology, and the primary text on which to rethink ritual secrecy in precolonial Arapesh society. The incursion of a messianic Christianity provides the context for understanding what such a system looks like in decline; how the cosmology and ontology create unimaginable problems when the ritual secrecy system dissolves; and how a fundamentalist Christian cult displaced male secret intimacies, though it should not be thought of as a replacement in any simple sense of the term. Not quite old wine in new bottles, as Mead might have said; but certainly a perfume and bitter taste that lingers from the past. In brief, the Iahita ethnography reveals how ritual secrecy gave way to messianic fundamentalism, which in turn boosted the idea of the jural individual among the Arapesh, embodied through individualized moral guilt.

The Tambaran men's secret cult is a venerable institution that has long been known to historically link and typify features of the Sepik River societies of New Guinea (Mead 1933, 1935, 1938, 1977). In her first article on what she called the "*Marsalai* cult" among the Arapesh, Mead called the *Marsalai* a "localized supernatural," which was "usually embodied in a water creature" (1933: 39). It had the power to change its form into ghosts and to become a variety of other forms, including snakes. The spirit was "male," and it seemed to dislike women, especially menstruating women, since it was "offended by the body odours involved" (43). The *Marsalai* would punish offenders or trespassers bold enough to enter its haunts. The area-wide Tambaran men's cult as a system of power relations spread through most of the Sepik River area and invoked "the innate incompatibility between *Marsalai* power and feminine functions" (45). The cult houses and men's houses that paid homage to this spirit were everywhere, often topped off by the inexplicable sight of the wooden statue of a woman, spread-eagle. In fact, at the end of her career, Mead (1978: 70) suggested that the *tambaran* spirit and the Haus Tambaran were surely Sepik-wide culture traits (Bateson 1958; Forge 1979) foundational to cultural reality. Mead suggested that the spirit "and his many attributes are felt as continuing realities" (1933: 50), though this was soon to change.

Mead (1935) of course studied the Mountain Arapesh, while Tuzin later worked in the Lowlands, nearer the river, among a people historically distinct but related to them. The Mountain Arapesh, as is well known, were generally peace-loving, communitarian, and fond of children. They engaged in hunting and shifting horticulture, dwelt in small hamlets, and were no match for larger, more aggressive groups along the Sepik. The

Mountain Arapesh had a Tambaran cult (or at least their version of it) situated in the men's house, complete with spirit masks and initiations and the other accoutrements as noted previously in Mead's attempt to photograph the ritual sacra (see chap. 4). Throughout male development, the initiations into adulthood used secrecy and ritual ordeals in the confrontation between the boy and the Tambaran spirit.

Among the Arapesh, the *Tambaran* is the embodiment, in some noise-making devices, of the spirit of the male rituals. Adult men assert their solidarity, reaffirm their masculinity, and produce growth and welfare for all the people through these spirits. Women and children are thought to hear the *tambaran* as a being and the noise-making devices, flutes, or bull-roarers, which present its voice. But to the initiated men, the word is a sort of shorthand reference to the whole ceremony. The *tambaran* is called *wareb*, sometimes used to describe the cassowary incisor, sometimes applied to the flutes, while at other times referring to the masks now going out of style but that once formed part of the esoteric material (Mead 1940: 429).

Mead was unusual in her ability to accept the secret practices of the Arapesh more or less at face value. Was this the product of her cultural relativism? And what role did her gender play in this perspective? Certainly, Mead was able to make cynical interpretations in her New Guinea studies (e.g., her largely unsubstantiated claim that "the Mundugamor had no viable male cult"; 1935: 182). It might be posited that Mead was just partial to the Arapesh, which was true (see Mead's Preface to Tuzin 1976). However, Mead's inability to deal with the complications of secrecy seemed to come from her objections to how gender relations were handled. Secrecy existed as a necessary part of the men's cult in the creation of masculinity, Mead believed; its contradictions or duplicity did not particularly trouble her. Indeed she seemed to understand the contradictions as vital and necessary, in spite of the fact that the cult ordeals of ritual initiation challenged her picture of a relatively happy, peaceful, and nonhierarchical culture such as the Arapesh (Mead 1972, 1977). Again, by comparison, she had a lower estimation of Chambri culture, whose men's cult she once called "a sham" (1956). Ironically, Mead seemed to turn cynical in these cases only when the men's secret cults produced traits that were so self-preoccupied, aggressive, and quarrelsome as to undermine solidarity of commitment to the village. Mead was of course a woman of strong opinions, as much as she was a brilliant ethnographer; we can surely accept many of these statements as artful characterizations. Years later she could formulate area-wide

features of the Tambaran in historically interesting ways that showed a keen attention to contrast the cognate traditions.<sup>2</sup>

In 1969, when Tuzin began his studies, the Ilahita had a historically expanding and complex tradition of dual organization that was remarkable mainly because of the large size of the village and the tenacity of its Tambaran cult. Localized patrilineal clans articulated with high village endogamy to create conditions of warm and felicitous domestic life for families (Tuzin 1976). The dual organization, however, existed alongside of the area-wide Tambaran men's cult; a complex, age-graded initiatory system based upon collective secrecy of the kind that Mead had observed earlier among the Mountain Arapesh. However, the combination of all of these institutional forces, as Tuzin wrote at the time, created dynamic but unstable social conditions. While colonialism was not at first a part of this picture, it enters later, as Ilahita village transformed from being a regional center of the Tambaran cult "to being a regional center of the Christian Revival" (Tuzin 1989: 206).

The Tambaran was a "champion of village wars," Tuzin (1980: 319) has written, and the "president of a cult of war." To see the link between warfare and the institutionalization of ritual secrecy so clearly is critical not only to understand the precolonial basis of secrecy among the Arapesh; it also illuminates intertribal relations that ramified violence and contestations via exchange, ritual, intermarriage, trade, and expansionist warfare throughout the Middle Sepik area (Gewertz 1983; Harrison 1993). The stakes were thus high in how secret ritual could be used to gain or lose ground in territorial contestation and intertribal poaching (Forge 1990). When the colonial authorities began to make their presence felt in this particular area, beginning in the 1920s, tradition began to dissolve quickly. But the government was unable to effectively suppress warfare until the 1950s (Tuzin 1980: 288), suggesting that the Tambaran cult among the Ilahita Arapesh was able to sustain much of its sociopolitical and ontological force until seventeen years before the arrival of Tuzin in 1969. Where Margaret Mead had operated within the context of a functioning and only recently colonized men's house, at least among the Chambri (and this surely tempered her opinions of it; Gewertz 1981, 1984), Donald Tuzin's arrival was sufficiently later that long-term changes, intended and unintended, conscious and unconscious, had already begun to dissolve in the silent barn dance that is ritual secrecy.

The anthropological story of this society suggests that among the Ara-

pesh the Tambaran ritual secret formation was a military organization with religious features of a spirit complex and, unusual for Melanesia, a kind of high god. The same construction can be made as well for their neighbors, the Iatmul, and also for the Abelam, at least in certain of its symbolic features (Forge 1966; Juillerat 1990; Mead 1938; Tuzin 1976). The highly expansive Iatmul called forth a degree of secret ritual organization that was unmatched but had reached its logical apex and was perhaps already in decline, as can be inferred from the problems of schismogenesis that were central to Bateson's (1958) analysis of the famous *naven* ceremony—part of yet another Tambaran secret complex (see also Herdt 1984a: 44–46). Indeed, masculinity—its name, its silence and glory, especially its vulnerabilities—were always at stake in these ritual acts (Silverman 2001).

Thus, I would claim that the creation of elaborate initiation rites must be understood among the Middle Sepik River cultures as adaptations of conditional masculinity, particularly to the political requirements of filling and training the warriorhood, as previously studied among the Baruya and Sambia. The Arapesh opposition between the genders is in this respect quite typical (Herdt and Poole 1982; M. Strathern 1988). The elaboration of male secret ritual practices may be understood as a sort of progressive cultural increase across time, in response to these historical conditions of war (Bateson 1958). “Even in organizations where membership is compulsory, such as the military, great emphasis may be placed on rituals of induction . . . the greater the transition, in general, the more elaborate the rites” (Kertzer 1988: 17). The succession of initiations among the Iahita was indeed impressive, even by the standards of the Baruya and the Sambia, matching their symbolic richness, but surpassing them in mythological narrative and architectural beauty. Tuzin's study of the Tambaran cult is especially remarkable in showing how physical form, ritual, and myth are seamlessly woven into a system of revelations throughout the male life cycle to create permanent subordination to the spirit *Nggwal* (Tuzin 1980).

Tambaran representations in these Sepik River systems varied in their perceived political power, mythological greatness, and supernatural authority. Among the Iahita their supreme Tambaran is *Nggwal*. He was no ordinary poltergeist. *Nggwal* was both a great god and a monster, and omniscient—all-knowing and all-seeing. *Nggwal* was also capricious and devious; he liked to punish and seemed to savor the taking of human life as punishment for many wrongs in village life. He especially liked to punish women. Initiates could impersonate him on certain ritual occasions, but

only so long as they behaved themselves and were faithful to ritual rules and dictates; if they got out of line, he would punish them, too. This custom of impersonation made him into a being that disrupted village life. Neither Sambia men nor Baruya nor any other group previously studied in this book achieved such a pinnacle of religious hierarchy and spiritual violence. *Nggwal* was not opposed to unleashing an occasional reign of terror by taking possession of men's bodies, as they would don his ritual masks. He likes to incite "brutal hazing" (Tuzin 1980: 319) on the boys who are initiated into his cult. So institutionalized and notable was this cult of ritual violence that Mead (1933) and Tuzin (1980) viewed it as a formal custom, called *laf*, or "ritual murder." It is said that in this trance and guise that the men could honor the village by killing its enemies in other villages. But sometimes they also went in pursuit of their own kin. Any man who dons spirit masks is subject to the will of *Nggwal*. Such a man, it is believed, is no longer himself, having a divided consciousness and personal identity, half man, half Tambaran. This identity state as a part of the precolonial system is remarkable in its own right, suggesting the inkling of a secular social self (Tuzin 1997). The merging of the desires of the god and of the man, outside and inside the body, is a remarkable feat of the secret system in these parts. Being no longer themselves, but rather the god, they are empowered with the assassin's secrecy provided to them by the Tambaran spirit mask. The god *Nggwal* thus substitutes his reality for theirs.

It is hard to see in this dramatic and destructive custom the source of social solidarity in community and society that both K. E. Read and later Fredrik Barth imagined long ago as the function of the men's ritual cult. Read, Hogbin, Langness, and others tipped their view to one side and concluded in the end that these practices all amounted to a hoax. Nor is it easy to fathom this kind of ritual murder as a sort of failed search for Platonic Truth, as Barth has suggested on the more romantic side of the equation. Much easier to accept is a rather pure form of the male domination hypothesis extolled by Langness, but later documented by Maurice Godelier. All of these accounts, however, generally omitted the historical effects of colonialism on the particular place and time. The complicated shift from a precolonial to colonial system that shattered the sharing of a system of desires and objects that left the men vulnerable, divided, and alienated was told in chapter 3's comparison of the Sambia and Yagwoia. However, what none of these examples has done is to deal with the presence of cynicism *within* the men's own subjective experience of their rituals, and this is the special gift of Tuzin's ethnography.

In a poignant essay in 1982, Tuzin initiated discussion of the problem of ritual violence and moral skepticism among the Ilahita in a particularly American way: “Why do good people do bad things to one another?” (322). He noted the reticence of anthropologists to enter into the problem as a result of their understandable reaction to the moralistic evolutionary notions of the nineteenth century (reviewed in earlier chapters). Classic social theorists might be inclined to answer unabashedly as a product of their own folk views of human nature: Marx and Weber cynical, Durkheim optimistic, Freud darkly pessimistic. While there is much to admire in Tuzin’s account, as in many other cases we have studied in this book, it does not ultimately lead us to formulate an answer to the question, Why secrecy? Why did the Arapesh require the addition of ritual secrecy in order to achieve the ends of the Tambaran or to do “bad things”?

All of the elements that Mead and Tuzin incorporated into their ethnographies are important to interpret the cultural reality the Ilahita created out of necessity to deal with warfare in the past. However, history and colonialism were largely ignored, and here is where the later part of the story of the Ilahita makes no sense without the addition of the new colonial Other, which shaped the “double reading” (Lattas 1999: 314) of resistance and reuse of ritual secrecy in changing times. Once Australian authorities entered the Sepik to curtail warfare, their presence resulted in critical social changes. Among these was the increase of sorcery and ritual murder within the village itself—where formerly it had been directed to distant enemies, now it was turned against the village itself. *Nggwal*, castrated by the colonial authorities, turned bleeding and angry to prey upon his own people. We can now understand this unintended outcome as yet another manifestation of conditional masculinity gone awry.

The Tambaran in the traditional system imposed many burdens upon the men, even if he also offered them purification of their bodies and protection from their enemies. *Nggwal* constantly introduced conflict within the village. And his intense misogyny, registered in the hatred of menstrual blood and the willingness to do bad things to women while the men were possessed by the spirit, signified a profound gulf of internal differentiation within the village, especially regarding ideas about gender and the meaning of women. But Tuzin saw this as a personal and social burden for the men, and rightly so, since they generally liked and had cozy relations with their wives and greatly desired intimate sexual relations with women. (For those skeptical of the men’s desire for women, consider Tuzin’s 1994 report that Ilahita men practice cunnilingus on their women; for, as Gode-

lier [1986: 61] has said of the Baruya attitude toward this practice, “the very thought is unthinkable” in many other cultures of New Guinea!)

A problem of terrible conflict and contestation opens up in the dialectic between what men do, say, and think in the men’s house versus what they feel and do with their women in domestic settings. As Margaret Mead reported, Mountain Arapesh men love their children and enjoy playing with them, though later they have to initiate them, which causes great pain. The fathers can hardly bear to carry out the instructions to ritually bleed the boys or make them cry. Besides the tremendously trying ordeals of all the initiations that are required of all boys, there is another problem: the systematic hoarding of pig meat by men. This is even more difficult to explain as a necessary social practice, since the men never share this pork with women. Indeed, men say that the Tambaran has instructed them to feed only the boys and themselves, never the women. Knowing the god’s dislike of women, the women seem appeased by this account. Or do they?

These are surely the collective torments of secrecy. Tuzin documents the pervasive existence of indigenous doubt about the ritual cult practices of the Tambaran, not among women—that particular barrier we have seen before—but rather among the men as they narrate their secret reality. And this is what is remarkable about his study: Ilahita men are skeptical about the actions of the Tambaran and the ritual violence used to reproduce their secret collectivity. Tuzin was the first anthropologist of his generation to introduce into the picture of the men’s clubhouse an explicit concept of masculine guilt, which men confess about their secrets—a long-unreported phenomenon in Melanesian secret clubs (cf. Read 1955; Tuzin 1982: 332–33).

I must confess that I once was skeptical about this report, for the correspondence between the Ilahita account and my sense that it conveyed a kind of American reading of the emotions involved, though one not entirely out of keeping with Mead’s own moralistic emphasis in her earlier work (Gewertz 1984), was fairly strong. But my reaction was formed before I began to puzzle over secrecy and then sought patterns to explain the maddening complexity of secret ritual in New Guinea cultures. Not until I had begun to read the larger anthropological literature on West African secret societies (Bellman 1983; Horton 1972; Ottenberg 1989) was I struck by the parallels to Tuzin’s view of the Ilahita (remember, West Africa’s colonial history is much longer than that of Papua New Guinea). Colonial change, as noted in the circumstances reported by Tuzin, also

make “sense” of certain expressions, such as “guilt” and individual doubt—but only as long as these ontologies are placed within the dynamic of disrupted ritual secrecy which had destabilized the Middle Sepik area.

Now we can begin to understand these male subjectivities as precisely the reactions that would be predicted of men in the throes of the collapse of their secret cult, which previously defined collective reality, but now eroded with the emergence of the jural individual as a part of the systemic change. Tuzin has argued for demographic and social changes situated within a historical context, such that the Tambaran was introduced from outside of Ilahita culture and then was merged with existing structural social formations, albeit uneasily. As Tuzin (1982) reminded us, the Mountain Arapesh also disliked hostility between the genders, creating an internal contradiction: “a cult that stresses hate and punishment [is] out of place” (Mead 1935: 67–68). The Ilahita, however, went far beyond their mountain cousins in the torment of their contradiction. Where once they directed ritual murder to outside enemies and reserved masculine secrecy as a means of defending the inner sanctum of the Tambaran, the Ilahita transformed the violence and projected it upon the village—even toward their own families. Thus, Tuzin concluded that polarity between the domestic “spheres” or “ideologies” of men and the Tambaran secret cult generated out of itself created an unparalleled moral crisis: fabrication, lies, and the miserly hoarding of pig meat by men. All of this made the men feel bad, and hence, “guilty,” a sentiment reminiscent of Western middle class emotional constraints.

Two elements of precolonial culture do not square with this view, however. The first concerns the practice of ritual murder, while the other conditions the creation of homosociality and masculine rebirth of boys through initiation. Traditionally, a category of young warriors, called *hangabiwa wandafunei*—which meant “violent” or “hot-blooded man”—was “universally feared throughout the land. . . . Nothing can vacate a hamlet so quickly as one of these spooks materializing out of the gloom of the surrounding jungle” (Tuzin 1980: 50). The “spooks” in question were men in secret drag; the warriors donned the masks of the Tambaran to become possessed by the indwelling spirit. Notably, one in ten of these masks was known to be “angry” and “blood-thirsty.” How much the man was aware of this possession and its accompanying destructive emotions is not clear. He could take as fair game his own wife or child, if necessary, though obviously this was a manifestation of *particular* circumstances, individual choices. Always, the

women could be victims, but dogs and chickens would substitute if necessary. It was a matter of “honor” to kill in this way—indeed, it was fundamental to advancement—though originally, ritual murders were meant to wreak havoc only on enemies. Pacification by colonial authorities changed the situation, presumably in the 1950s. After the killing, men would hide the mask and return to the village, feigning innocence, seemingly as surprised by the violence as the others. “To this extent, the men are not entirely deceiving the women when they tell them that the *bangabiwa* are spirits incarnate” (Tuzin 1980: 50–51). Such an interpretation is surely conditional. Tuzin’s reluctance to engage in cynicism about the men’s violent performances is a product, we might speculate, of his insider knowledge that the men are apparently without choice in the matter of being possessed and must conform to the dictates of the Tambaran. A smidgen of doubt remains; might these particular males have actually enjoyed or found pleasure in their violent attacks upon women and children?

The use of ritual masks to disguise the social identity and probable motives of ritual actors is a common practice in Melanesia, wherein it is culturally understood that male couples are the minimal social unit (Schwimmer 1984), and skin has the meaning of being the surface of the self (M. Strathern 1979). Ritual impersonation of spirits was especially significant in cultural systems that required the ritual leader to stage hazing or farces in order to “test” the violent capacity of initiates, toughening them (Allen 1984). Indeed, it was even truer when ritual secrecy demanded men to hunt for the heads of distinct enemies, as among the Marind-anim (Van Baal 1966). Here, ritual secrecy was perceived to be evil and pernicious, and was, of course, the most intensely suppressed of practices by the colonial authorities, as noted earlier.

The idea of ritual cult masks used by a secret order to conceal the identity of aggressive or homicidal actors was by no means restricted to Melanesia. As Robin Horton once wrote more broadly of the “majority” of West African societies: “Execution of the society’s decisions is typically by junior members whose identity is concealed by masks” (1972: 102). He went on to elaborate a view of ritual secrecy that framed it as a “cluster of adaptations to the problem posed by the continuing presence in the community of strong and rivalrous lineages.” He identified properties of ritual secrecy that ensured the neutralization of lineage factions, that is, rupture in masculine solidarity. These secret measures, he suggested, were sanctioned by an appeal to the greater good of men’s cultural reality, an insight that sheds lights on the Ilahita variety of ritual murder.

But what is this collective secret reality? At the time of the *Wafit'wi* stage of male initiation, when the yam vines dry, the initiation subclass sleeps in a special ceremonial hamlet far removed from the women and the children. The men here create a true liminal world—timeless and utopian-perfect—without the differentiation of gender in the time and space world, and absent the kin rivalries that mark other settings. The men take to feeding and caring for the boys in a most extraordinary way. “They are said to be caring for the ‘woman,’ feeding her by placing food in her mouth” (Tuzin 1980: 85). The older males are called “young adolescent girls,” the name reserved for older women who sleep in the menstrual hut with a girl during her first period, a curious analogy. Toward the end the men take on transvestite appearance to represent in secret both “genders,” most unusual for the Ilahita, though reported for the Iatmul (Silverman 2001) and not all that rare in other New Guinea initiatory systems (Allen 1984). These transvestites mock-attack or castrate the boys with digging sticks and generally act in vicious ways toward them. The initiates’ ordeal culminates in their embrace of the “corpse” of a victim of sorcery. At this frightening moment, then, the boys are told “that if they reveal the secret of what went on inside the house, their future will be that of a corpse’s” (Tuzin 1980: 85).

It is a strange set of images, to be sure, but the effect of demarcating boys from women as Other is obvious; when viewed in perspective, the imagery of Ideal Man and Woman/Other, with which we are now so familiar from prior analyses, reveals the utopian yearning of the Ilahita. Clearly, the Ilahita men are fashioning an ideal cultural reality in an effort to exclude the messy imperfections of their desires and object relations with women on the outside. They simulate a reproductively self-sufficient world that is used as a foil against secular society and become a secret ontology to hold onto in times of trouble when they might be tempted to betray other men. The imagery of the corpse surely warns them of the wrath of the Tambaran and becomes an internal signifier of the secret world at such times. The all-too-perfect world of the ceremonial village is reminiscent of the search for an unconditional order of masculinity that can never be realized in the time and space world. And this leads us back to ask how change disrupted these customs in the direction of the present.

The culture area of the Arapesh was dynamic and volatile in the dim past, as Mead hinted, resulting from the stress of “Middle Sepik tribes invading their territory from the south” (Tuzin 1980: 318). People gathered to form large village fortresses and adapted customs to meet the needs

of demographically large communities. Initiation rituals were part of this adaptation. Mead tells us, for example, that during World War II, fighter planes bombed the Great Tambaran Haus in Tambunam, which resulted in “men being forced to show tambaran objects to the women and children” (1978: 74). Long before, however, European colonial encroachment had systematically opposed initiation customs, primarily under the guise of missionary activity (Roscoe and Scaglion 1990).

The record of this change is remarkable and shows the great extent to which each local culture and Tambaran cult responded differently to colonization in the area. In her original work, as is well known, Margaret Mead largely ignored this social history, consistent with the structural-functional theory of the times (Gewertz 1981). She was to some extent aware of the social change in Chambri, for example, but she did not utilize her own data on population decline, or the routing of the Chambri by the Iatmul years before, as evidence of change in her ethnography. The Iatmul were expanding aggressively, and they chased the Chambri off their territory and burned down their Tambaran cult house. Only after the Australians pacified the area and allowed the Chambri to return did the Chambri commence a feverish rebuilding of their own Tambaran cult. Arriving in mid-frame, Mead mistook this activity for a kind of timeless expression of female power among the Chambri, portraying the men as narcissistic and more preoccupied with art and religious dances, rather than assuming the “dominant” role of warriors or hunters. For their part, the Iatmul had undergone so much change under colonial rule that, by 1932, Gregory Bateson reported that their initiations had broken down because “all the available young men had left the village to work for Europeans” (1958: 275). Mead was cognizant of the change in Arapesh (1938), as hinted before in the story of her request to photograph cult objects (chap. 4). However, she never understood how truly compromised was the local security of men and how their masculinity reeled under the introduction of radical new gender relations.

Decades later, when the neighboring Abelam had abandoned their traditional Tambaran cult—which was remarkable in view of the advance of their sacred art and the role of the artist among them—they became enmeshed in problems of culture change. Indeed, Forge (1990: 169–70) remarked on the politics of reenacting traditional ritual among the Abelam. It is clear that the intervention of colonial authority and religious

missionaries was of concern to the Abelam in this history. Forge describes how the Abelam denied they were reviving the Tambaran cult—obviously raising the question of the audiences and discourses to which such denials were being made—a nod to the fundamentalist Christianity and prophet or cargo cults sweeping through the area already. Even further afield the Kwanga are said to have practiced initiations only sporadically for the last thirty years (Brison 1992: 40). All the while, of course, the Ilahita were not standing still, and time moved on. Tuzin's (1997) latest account of messianic Christianity adds another chapter to this history of shaken and ultimately failed ritual secrecy.

By their transformation, the Ilahita serve as a pivotal example because they epitomize Simmel's (1950) idea that the secret is the "moral badness" that wounds society. The messianic Christianity among the Ilahita seems to have wrought such badness. The natives themselves heap abuse on those who cling to ritual practice, and a counterhegemonic ideology of "threats, oppression, and domination" emerges among women, children, and lower-status or uninitiated men. Women, in particular, scorn men today because they feel they were "duped" by the "fictions" and "fraudulent" traditions of their men (Tuzin 1997: 161). Local evangelicals demystified the men's ritual cult and revealed it to be a "hoax," reconstructing the past from the pulpit, then staking the claim that men's secrecy was never more than a child's seduction by Satan (Burrige 1969). By his thorough examination of the ritual complex, Tuzin enables us to understand how colonialism undermined secret reality and to look at whether Simmel's cynical idea really works in New Guinea.

Throughout the Sepik River area the existence of gendered ritual practices was a historical-cultural reality, including residential gender segregation and strong ideas about the differentiation of the sexes and their bodies. Mead (1933) early reported women and men could live in the same house among the Arapesh, but they had to part company during times of warfare and menstruation, plus whenever boys were initiated. Indeed, Mead never fully explained why such a loving and peaceful people found menstruation and menstrual blood so appalling. As her former husband once explained:

Then there is Margaret Mead's well known contrast between the Arapesh and their neighbors. Both cultures see an opposition

between yams and menstruating women. Her Arapesh protect the women from the yams; the neighboring culture protects the yams from the women. (Bateson 1978: 78)

We know from the account of Scaglione (1986) on sexual segregation and ritual pollution among the nearby Abelam that the genders spent approximately six months apart each year (cf. Kelly 1976). When the yams were being cultivated, the genders had to separate and observe a variety of ritual taboos, including sexual abstinence. The spirits punished infractions, and we have seen the wrath of *Nggwal* at work in such matters. The reason is that the yam is a phallic symbol, a signifier of the man's anatomical identity, his virility and virtue; on this point a number of ethnographers seem to be in agreement (Forge 1966; Tuzin 1972). The spirits are particularly likely to lash out with ritual murder at women who offend their phallic pride (Silverman 2001).

But Tuzin's meticulous ethnography shows something else noted before—the presence of gendered ontologies emerging from initiation rituals. At least among Ilahita men, ritual initiation was constitutive of new subject/object relationships that displace the secular in favor of a secret reality, and this reality, in turn, imposed sweeping conditions to regulate interaction and intimacy with women. All of this is necessary for secrecy to “work” in situations where men's virtue might be compromised, where the construct of manhood could be breached.

When the men hold their secret pig feasts, the story given to initiates is that the gigantic, devouring *Nggwal* is present in the flesh—hence the impossibility of outsiders joining the banquet. Initiates presumably interpret this as a metaphor signifying attributes of the deity. Women are judged incapable of comprehending the metaphysical *Nggwal*; if told that *Nggwal* is invisibly present at the feast, they would not believe it and would insist on participating, thereby provoking wrath on a cosmic scale. For the men, *Nggwal* is present, eating the invisible essence of the food; when he “devours” his human victims, he does so either through a human agent—sorcerer or *laf* (ritual murder) executioner—or by striking directly, in which case the physical body displays no outward sign of having been “eaten” (Tuzin 1982: 348).

*Nggwal* does not just warn of the dangers of women, which seems to be the lesson of the teaching. The men are also being told that their separate reality is made necessary by the divergent natures and dispositions of men

and women, and the utter impossibility of knowing what all of this could possibly mean. This rhetoric actually underscores how the man's separate reality is a condition of the masculinity, their agency. As we have seen in all previous cases, this rhetorical position led either to the substitution of boys for women (the homoerotic displacement) or the use of violence (displacement by domination), or both. The effect is the symbolic imposition of an Ideal Man and Woman/Other imagery, not unlike the mythopoetics previously studied.

Secret ritual predicates masculinity and the practice of male agency upon maintaining a separate, secret reality. The Arapesh crystallize ontologies of the genders that reach the logical extremes of ethnodifferentiation within New Guinea systems of ritual secrecy. I do not mean by this that their secrecy is more extreme or misogynist than the others. I mean that the Arapesh seem to suffer the torment of awareness, of knowing that there is a difference between their secret desires and their public ones; the contradiction between their subjective "guilt" and objective practice is resolved or appeased by violence. It is all too common a theme in New Guinea. The symbolic solution of creating homosocial coherence among all the males by the use of boy-inseminating is not present and seems only dimly reflected in the transvestite "menstruating girls" feeding the young initiates in the liminal state.

This is where the symbolism of rebirth enters as the overriding theme of the secret reality of the Arapesh. The election of a high god and that god's warrant for extreme sanction of difference outside of itself—even murder—implies its own mode of the production of cultural reality in the service of the creation of something entirely different: the utopian vision of immortality for the men. This is what ritual initiation and the feasting of the Tambaran promises. However, the men cannot reproduce their perfect world without women, and thus ritual secrecy must perform and objectify the roles of "menstruating girls" who can procreate and feed young boys. Men feel that "women are the bane of a peaceful society," Tuzin reports, but say that only in secret homosocial discourse. The men must not "compromise their masculine unity"; and thus they use ritual secrecy to create a "paradisiacal world devoid of women and full of life's pleasures." Women in this Elysium, we are told, need not produce babies, since men have taken on reproduction too. "A man's supreme loyalty must therefore be given to his sex group and to the important secrets they guard," Tuzin offers. "No devotion to family may override this, and man must be prepared to

sacrifice—if necessary by his own hand—his mother, wife or child at the behest of the Tambaran.” The men go off into the bush with younger initiates, there to create a “perfect world” devoid of women that corrects for the imperfections of real village life among Ilahita. Tuzin believes, “The case reveals with particular clarity the strict Durkheimian sense in which *Nggwal* is the symbolic epitome of social cohesion: ‘the idea of society is the soul of religion.’” And from a different viewpoint, he adds, “The case exposes *Nggwal* as a corrupt deity . . . a judge suborned by the prosecution” (1980: 106, 304).

The Durkheimian appeal to the Tambaran as the ultimate symbol of Arapesh society is not entirely convincing. The Tambaran produced a perfect ritual secret world as an antidote to the imperfect village: society was wracked by internal competition and external war, forces that existed prior to colonialism. Yes, the Tambaran unified men; kept them apart from women and juniors; secured their cooperation in troubled times; and tended to suppress rivalries and the unfortunate spiraling conflict of an age-structured hierarchical system.

In another time, Bateson (1958) thought of this process as “schismogenesis,” but that is another word for historical systems that destabilized masculinity and rarely allowed for peaceful coexistence. The warfare all around was the driving force in these systems; once violence was perpetrated, it took on its own subjective and material characteristics. After colonization, this system was all shaken up, and masculinity evolved into a darker and more troubling performance that remains to be explored. The Tambaran secrecy created a force—on one level political, on another ontological—under the guise of male prestige and ritual rebirth based upon a local theory of being that desires immortality but without recourse to the bodies and procreation of women. Men in many cultures have strived for this kind of nationalism; they like to think a utopian regime will last forever, but its exigencies reside in the moment, and not even for that long without the protections and commitments of secrecy. That men believed in the *Nggwal* and his power was obvious; that they also say women could not comprehend him, or his effects upon the secular order, was also clear. The women’s motives, drives, feelings, and metaphysical conceptions differed from theirs, but perhaps not so much, or not sufficiently to create the homosocial solidarity they sought in times of war. Men’s claims to power achieved through the Tambaran were mighty and probably difficult to defend all the time. Ritual secrecy—collective, embroidered with institu-

tional and artistic forms, and distilled in a sophisticated pantheon, which forces men to obey it—is the protector of male rule. This total cultural reality bolstered a gender theory that was self-serving of this rule, as is true of virtually all theories of gender employed by men around the world. Thus does their secret ontology enable men to live in close quarters with those whom they regard as inimical to their being and welfare: the mothers of their children.

However, such an attitude burdens their village life in many other ways, introducing strife and ritual torment that is unusual in New Guinea but by no means unknown. Indeed, I suspect that it was just this sort of colonialism-induced state of affairs—with its strange incompleteness borne of the inattention to historical change—that Hogbin mistook for cynicism among the nearby Wogeo Islanders long ago in the 1930s. The Iahita men are tormented to reconcile their worship of *Nggwal* with the family relationships and domestic bliss they feel most of the time. Such a social ethic is difficult to sustain and may frame the problem more in terms of contract secrecy and individualism, and less as ritual secrecy. The problem is that those sometimes-possessed young warriors take on the Tambaran masks and go out to do violent things. Their own local cynicism breaks through, reminding us of Simmel's insights about secret societies. Tuzin continues:

The more senior and sophisticated initiates . . . are privately skeptical of these conventional metaphors. More than once it was intimated to me that just as the fiction of the physical *Nggwal* enables men to dominate women, so the invisible *Nggwal* enables the senior initiates to dominate the junior colleagues. The lie is itself a lie. Astonished upon hearing this, I asked my informant, "what then, was the truth about *Nggwal*?" To which he replied, "*Nggwal* is what men do." (Tuzin 1982: 348–49)

The anthropologist has here captured for us an extremely precious and rare historical moment of reflection by insiders about their own secrecy. Of course, it is a subjectivity constructed in dialogue with an outsider, but there is plenty to admire in the work that enabled its understanding. What I reject is the language employed—the universal concepts of "lie" and "truth"—which assume Western epistemology and an individualistic frame of reference, much like the reinterpretations of works by Read and Barth.

More important, the notion that ritual secrecy is empty—a kind of “lie” because there is nothing to it, being conditioned not by the gods but by men—is a fundamental misunderstanding of the cultural reality of the men. When Ilahita say to the ethnographer, “This is what men do,” why should it be read in a cynical frame to mean, “This is a hoax”? I think it is much more plausible, in keeping with his own ethnography, for Tuzin to realize that he was shown what the men see. What they see is their cultural imaginal—a secret reality earned the hard way for years and years—which they now see reflected back to themselves in the tradition of the men’s house. What Tuzin construes this to mean is something not entirely different, but his rendering is not the result of being an initiate, nor did he reside in the social relations of this village world forever.

The dilemma of the men, especially the elders, is plausible. The men’s secret ontology was in double jeopardy. It has its own shared aesthetics of a secret collective: what is sensed as ugly or beautiful, graceful or sluggish, exciting or dull. The ontology of secrecy is thus a particular sensibility, based in sensing and touching, not just in knowledge, but in subjectivity and desire, too. It represents back to its participants that others outside the secret collective have contrary images, sensations, motives, and even innate drives (such as the sexual). In short, the excluded Woman/Other has a different sensibility, and thus another kind of communal purpose, than the Ideal Man. Among the Arapesh, ironically, ritual secrecy has embodied the Tambaran in acts of ritual violence, but ultimately the men felt that their Ideal Man image was not made sufficiently in the image of the Tambaran to do his deeds.

This is what ritual practice protects but also removes awareness of—until social change intrudes, reminding the participants of their mortality, the loss of grace, and exposing their cultural imaginal, not as grand, but as personal wish-fulfillment. As Bellman (1984) has suggested, following Simmel, the paradox of secrecy is that it cannot be discussed but it is so intensely “sociological.” Secrecy creates cultural reality, just as social practice (read: ritual) re-creates secrecy.

The ritual secret formation of Ilahita men created an ontology that met the needs of their double lives: as domestic husbands and fathers, and as servants of the Tambaran. In the past, they engaged in this for reasons having to do with the historical integrity of their faith in their gods and the ritual practices devoted to them, that is, their religion. But why rely upon a cynical theory to interpret it? The answer is, of course, that Ilahita men

themselves do so; a kind of possibility not hitherto discovered in New Guinea. We are reminded of the sage words of Turner, who in writing of a kindred problem faced by the Ndembu of Africa within the Mukanda ritual, speculated of the moral ontology of its practice in individuals: "If one could have access to the private opinions of the ritual participants, it could probably be inferred that ideals and selfish motives confronted one another in each psyche before almost every act" (1968: 143).

Why must we recognize the "reality" (metaphysically) of the Tambaran, using the terms of Tuzin's account, but refer to it as a "fiction" or a "lie," as Tuzin does? Such has occurred in other ethnographies, as we have seen. Tuzin supplies the answer by telling us that he asked for "the truth" about the spirit; the procedure of interviewing his informants led him to a critical moment in understanding what the secret ontology meant. Yet by doing so, he unwittingly shifted narrative frames, so to speak, transforming what was the heightened social consciousness of a specially designed intentional secrecy, signifying itself, but almost totally unaware of the other, or the other's ontology. He shifts, then, to a secularizing and rationalized mode of question and self-examination, outside-looking-in, those precious moments shared with the ethnographer. It is precisely this frame shift that opens unawareness to awareness, and lays bare the open contradictions previously hidden in the secret faith. At such a moment, we are keenly aware that it is not what people believe in, but what they doubt, that moves their ritual secrecy.

Thus, the men can realize and express skepticism about the cultural reality of the Tambaran society, indeed, about the god himself, by taking the ethnographer's perspective. Note the avalanche of historical change filtering through the Sepik for decades prior, suggesting that moments of such kind were long dormant in their system. That Ilahita men could interpret their rule and uphold masculinity in these ways suggests that their system of secrecy was ontologically "leaking" already, born of a historical transformation—social change—that would sweep away the Tambaran gatekeeper.

Let us interpret the Ilahita secret collective, not as unique, nor as artifact of a particular ethnography, but rather as an exemplar of social change in many areas and cultures of ritual secrecy. I suggest that Tuzin's ethnographic description is insightful and largely accurate, yet I would interpret its form slightly differently, casting some doubt on the cynical theory of course, and drawing greater attention to the discrepancy between Ilahita

ritual and domestic ontologies, which I believe to have been the underlying structural cause of guilt, shame, and the comparisons Tuzin had reflected back to him by his male informants.

Ilahita traditionally had two separate realities, male and female, which corresponded to distinct spheres of social life, Tambaran cult and domestic household. These were fundamentally distinctive historical formations, and to refer to them as “ideologies” or “spheres” is mechanical. Among the Ilahita, these two ontologies were in uneasy and unstable relationship, mediated by a dualistic organization, warfare prerogatives, and later the problems of intertribal competition throughout the region. The divisions of society and culture created by ritual secrecy express conflicting and divided loyalties of actors, discrepant and discontinuous desires and intentions, which compete against each other. Thus, the reason that the Ilahita old men are simultaneously leaders of the secret cult and leaders of society is that they participate in two different modes of social cognition, requiring divergent constructions of reality. These are, basically, men’s feelings and loyalties as fathers and husbands, versus their loyalties as clansmen. Increasing awareness of outside social formations cut to the heart of the Sepik River societies (Gewertz 1983). Secrecy maintained them in a hierarchical relationship; but its historical nature was poorly integrated, gradually undercut by village endogamy and a widening social landscape of external influences, government, and tourism. Secrecy was a means of maintaining the integrity of these different “worlds,” with “moral badness” a cynical consequence of the gradual breakdown of differentiation between the sexes, and solidarity within the Tambaran cult. It will be obvious that each of these conditions created differences in male agency and different forms of masculinity among the Ilahita.

Thus I suspect that an unparalleled problem entered into Ilahita reality: the jural individual began to experience his secret reality no longer as “natural” or as the Voice of the Tambaran, but rather as “convention” agreed upon by men. It is a brutal insight. The difference in intentional realities is great, and while at first the changing reality may not have impacted the men’s individual motivations or will, eventually it could only lead to conflict and intergenerational disruption. Conditional masculinity, dependent upon ritual secrecy, broke down. Where all traditions of ritual secrecy we have previously observed in New Guinea have had to cope with keeping at bay the public and “polluting world” of the village, the Ilahita are illustrative of a different order of ontology—psychological transforma-

tion. Ritual secrecy in such a changing reality represents a subjectivity that is not about how to repel or ward off the intrusions of ordinary pollution into the men's house. It represents a new threat; how to keep oneself from unbelieving—losing faith, and shattering the received collective sociality of male secrecy.

The notion that the elders can propound the Tambaran customs as “what men do” is to suggest that the faith required of believing in divine and omniscient *Nggwal* had eroded to individual, even selfish agreements of self-interest, to hoard the pig meat and sometimes “lie” to women. That is what contractual secrecy is all about; men no longer privilege the physical body and the rituals to protect it, but rather, they privilege personal exchanges in secret that further the goals and aims of the actor. The problem became how to give the increasingly secularizing actor—more a private self and less the Ideal Man, a glorified collective masculinity—something in which to have faith and upon which to depend while confronted with the decline of the Tambaran. This is the step from collective to private experience: the dissolution of collective ritual consciousness into alienation.

When the jural individual becomes incipient in such a cultural system, it opens up far-reaching and nearly impossible demands that burden the person and ultimately discredit performances. If there are two competing realities, public and secret, the person can pick and choose from either. But which to choose, and when is best? Once the formula of ritual is removed, agency devolves; individualistic agency pursues, not conditional masculinity, but absolute and universal ends. The internal questioning leads to uncertainty. But the ability to seamlessly perform the acts necessary of the secret-sharer is a function of a heightened self-consciousness, as Simmel suggested, combined with a degree of unconsciousness that never flinches from the premises and contradictions of secrecy. Insight or soul-searching are virtual negations of secret ontologies for this reason. Thus, secret belief and a public conviction compose parts of a larger system of “common sense” cultural reality (Geertz 1984b), which are not rational-logical in the sense that rationality reflects a linear entrance into the time and space world. We have long known that the social and cultural constitution of the self or self-awareness can be heavily fractured and fragmented, as psychologists since Freud and William James have been wont to show (Bellah et al. 1985). Ehrenreich has drawn attention to the concept of “dissembling” in this regard—of the ability of the self to “hide under a false appearance”

(1984: 28). The ethnodifferentiations of ritual secrecy in New Guinea impose sensibilities that are divisive or oppositional in the body and subjectivity of the person, but without “mentation” in the sense of internal suffering or conflict. This is a special case of an intentional reality, resting upon cultural learning and displacements of energy, that defies reality postulates and ontological propositions of a logical kind (Shweder 1990).

What the women learned upon the collapse of the Tambaran is worth hearing from the latest account:

Women were now at liberty to admit to us, and to concur among themselves, that they had always assumed that the men were lying when they spoke of gigantic people-eating monsters, adolescent initiates being turned into flying foxes, and other improbabilities; it is just that they did not know, and did not particularly care, what the truth was beyond the men's fictions. Finding out what had actually been going on excited them about as little as being shown a urinal would excite a grown woman in our society: a male thing, a male “secret”—so what? (Tuzin 1997: 161)

The “so what” suggests a complete change in cultural reality, a totalizing cynicism expressed through American tropes, sufficient to confirm: these are not the *Ilahita* who experienced war and conditional masculinity and sacred ritual all those years before. This plaintive cry recalls K. E. Read's final account of the *Gahuku-Gama*. Both traditional cultures are gone. In what sense, then, can it be asserted that the women's subjectivities were uninterested in ritual secrecy or viewed the men's performances as fictions? These are the destabilizing images of a new social order that bears only a dim resemblance to the preceding one.

As Tuzin implies, the presence of “guilt” is certainly a complex subjectivity; it signifies the intrusion of an unwanted self-consciousness that was formerly alien to the ontology of ritual secrecy. What was once a virtually automatic and easy performance of these things is now thrown into turmoil, which spells sudden death to the near-perfect timing required of a secret performer. “Guilt,” one realizes, is a double-edged sword; it may be the expression of moral regret over a conflict concerning one's actions; but it may also express the failure of nerve that once meant confidence and success in the face of disrupted sociality. The latter is what conditional masculinity was all about. For the first time, jural individuals are faced with

splitting up “natural reality” into “genuine” and “false” motives, which were previously unconscious or unthinkable; the problem of the so-called true and false self pervasive to Western ethno-psychology now enters into the narrative on self/other relations (Winnicott 1971). Much of Goffman’s (1963) brilliant theorizing on secrecy and passing (as normal) was devoted to precisely this problem of protecting the socially esteemed self from this kind of moral discredit. Yet, as the structural-functional sociologist understood so well, this is not simply the result of an internal psychology or some computer chips that failed to ignite masculine identity. Guilt is a token of stigma, the torment of unsuspected social doubt. The Tambaran, however, is exacting, and he requires much more certainty of male rule than implied by this muddled performance. And the male actor knows it. He surrenders to a sense of incoherence; that one can never know the perfection of before, which secrecy could secure. That is utopia. And mercifully, the traditional male actor could not read the mind of *Nggwal*. “As to the gods,” Protagoras offered, “I have no means of knowing that they exist or that they do not exist. For many are the obstacles that impede knowledge, both the obscurity of the question and the shortness of human life” (Stone 1989: 237).

The shattering of secrecy is the inevitable consequence of social change. The cultural productivity of the Tambaran involved a gigantic and rich medley of sacred music and symbolic play, in the precolonial system, along with fabrications and a blustering social performance in the face of self-doubt in the modernizing one. This realization overburdens the self, which is an intolerable situation. It effectively locates secrecy inside the lone person, who now must accept the system of secret desires and objects as juridical “convention,” not natural “reality.” This step privatizes secrecy, locking it into the reaches of the hidden mind that Freud was to rediscover as the “unconscious,” a rationalizing step toward the Simmelian conception of secrecy that protects the self but can also be “moral badness.” The outcome is a different kind of conditional masculinity, not unlike the Victorian world outlined in chapter 1.

Under those circumstances, it was only a matter of time before the Tambaran cult would collapse, as it did in 1984 (Tuzin 1997). Among the neighboring Kwanga, the process occurred earlier and reminds us of Williams’s intriguing account of the Vailala Madness among the Orokelo, nearly fifty years before: “Revelation of cult secrets in a Christian revival movement and general disinterest have severely undermined the cult and

many believe that it will never be performed again” (Brison 1992: 40). Yes, the Tambaran is dead now, swept away by a messianic Christian religious movement that promises salvation instead of guilt, remorse, or ritual violence—at least for the time being, till someone realizes that it, too, is an imperfect society (Tuzin 1989: 206).

In a sensitive portrait of an Ilahita prophet, Samuel, a previously disparaged man who was rehabilitated and has become a luminary of the change at the apex of Christian revival, Tuzin provides a case study of these transformations. As an Ilahita ritual performer he was a failure. But after the death of his father and a kind of characteristic life-crisis rebirth, the man renamed himself after the prophet and was acclaimed as a leader of great proportion. This in itself was a sweeping change from the past, since Tuzin (1980: 304) informs us from his prior study that the Tambaran system could not tolerate prophets. Tuzin is scrupulous in showing the interpenetrating of a whole way of life with an ontology that dictated this contradiction. His careful and fascinating account of the prophet Samuel shows the difficulties that faced a man who had lost his father and could not live up to the high ideals of the Tambaran, ironically becoming a fundamentalist Christian in the aftermath of the collapse of the cult. Was Samuel forced to become a jural individual through his discredited social self? His psychological and medical problems led to the proverbial visions and spirit supports we know all too well from centuries of millenarianism and later cargo cults. A new intentional reality is created out of the problems and prospects of colonial life, especially, among the Ilahita and the many New Guinea peoples reviewed in this book, the promise of change in gender and age inequalities. “A prophet offers both sexes a wider and more satisfying redemption, and his sexual attractions and virility suggest an awareness of new babies as well as new men: total rebirth, a new community” (Burridge 1969: 161).

We are reminded of the incursion of missionaries among the Yagwoia in chapter 3, which resulted in the compromise of the younger men’s souls and ritual knowledge. Their ritual torment was also a personal suffering in the loss of secret reality. We saw that the Yagwoia elders felt they had no choice but to hide all of their ritual practices and desires from the younger generation, once they had lost control of the ability to stage initiations at will and to regulate the process of secret socialization. That was the price suffered under colonial rule. War was gone. There was no way to control the young men and women without that imperative, and the colonial

authorities had taken it away. You cannot undertake the necessary control of reality in such unstable conditions; you go off on your own, or resort to a utopian vision, leading to the promised land, or to failed promises, whatever the case (Wallace 1965). Have the Yagwoia and the Arapesh contracted for a new kind of personal being, of individual and private selfhood, in exchange for a Christian soul? Or as a part of the purchase of middle-class life in a developing nation such as Papua New Guinea (Gewertz and Errington 1999)? They may no longer be full of doubts and speculations, and no longer have faith in a Tambaran, but have contracted perhaps instead with a Christian God. Whatever the case, the resolution must make the transformation complete. "In such circumstances the *We—They* opposition inherent in a colonial situation must resolve itself in *Us*: a single and synthesized total community" (Burridge 1969: 56).

All or nothing: that is the way of ritual secrecy. Its effort to define and control reality and deal with the threat of war can never be halfhearted, because the project of building trust and sociality among men—and most important, of creating reality out of secrecy—is all or nothing. That is what the studies in many times and places of cults and prophecies show: When the prophecy of millennium and apocalypse fails, then the cultural reality as previously believed in and acted upon must fall, making way for a new order to come (Wallace 1972). The production of ritual secrecy is the means of producing culture in these faraway places, and when these colonial challenges and intermittent failures are introduced into it we are caught in the transformation from ritual secrecy to civil society.