

MONEY, MAYHEM AND THE BEAST: NARRATIVES OF THE WORLD'S END FROM NEW IRELAND (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)

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This article discusses the relationship between money, the nation, and new imaginings of apocalypticism in Papua New Guinea. Robert Foster has argued that money played an important role in the Australian administration's efforts to promote a sense of nation at the end of the colonial period. I explore the effects of the new imaginings beyond the nation that are occurring as Christian apocalypticism becomes a dominant framework for interpreting the world. New meanings and values are being attached to money, resulting in the destabilization of the strong link between money and nation that was observed by Foster. I argue that, within this new world-view, money is losing its symbolic potency, that new forms of identity are emerging, and that people's attachment to the nation is being weakened.

The question of introduced money in Melanesian societies has tended to be discussed in terms of its effects on earlier forms of currency and exchange. There has been much interest in the way that money is incorporated into exchange systems and what this might reveal about the nature of indigenous valuables and, indeed, of money itself. The emphasis has been on the ways in which indigenous systems cope with the influx of money. As Robbins and Akin comment in their introduction to *Money and modernity*, 'the transition to money use has been as diverse as Melanesian cultures themselves, reflecting complex cultural, historical, and geographical variables' (1999: 20). Most of the case studies in that volume examine the processes through which these societies absorb money into their particular ceremonial and gift-exchange systems, and the ways in which these bestow meanings differently from market economies. My aim is not to discuss questions such as whether Melanesian valuables are forms of currency comparable to money, or the relationship between indigenous valuables and the cash economy. Rather, I focus on the valuations being bestowed on introduced money, and their moral and political ramifications.

My starting-point is Robert Foster's analysis of the connection between money and the development of the Papua New Guinea (PNG) nation (1998).¹ Foster argues that the discourses through which the Australian administration sought to educate the people about money before independence played a key role in shaping local people's conceptions of nation and state. Here, I

extend his analysis to consider the subsequent effects of new religious beliefs upon these conceptions. As Foster says, the new post-independence money, which bears distinctive emblems drawn from indigenous forms of valuables, became an important component in the transformation from colony to nation. These emblems were a major factor in bridging boundaries of collective identity which had been formed around local and regional frames of reference.

In promoting the use of money, the colonial authorities stressed its advantages. Islanders were told that the new money was easily transported and could be widely used; it was universally recognizable and was thus held to be unlike traditional forms of wealth, not all of which were readily portable and could be utilized only within the localized society of the village, archipelago, or valley system – and even then sometimes only in highly circumscribed contexts (Foster 1998: 65). Thus, money was extolled as a more convenient form of valuable; its adoption was an essential ingredient of progress and modernization and was thus a requirement for a ‘well ordered and productive life’ (cited Foster 1998: 65).

A great deal of emphasis was placed on the saving of money by accumulating it in banks. What the authorities had in mind was not so much the dissipation of money as a result of wasteful consumption, as the physical disintegration of money that was hoarded in homes or pockets. The point here was that money was fragile and subject to physical loss or dissolution (Foster 1998: 67). This emphasis on the fragility of money, he suggests, ‘potentially fanned the flames of fetishism by making out of money not a signifier that referred beyond itself, but a material object that was intrinsically mysterious and potent’ (1998: 68).

The inauguration of the bank-book marks a significant moment in a strategy of education by colonizers in Papua and New Guinea, Foster argues. Not only is the bank-book a new token of identity, but it serves as a material mark of a moment of individuation, creating the individual account-holder as the primary unit of the modern society. Beyond this, in its promotion of the concept of ‘community wealth’, beginning from the village level and extending to the nation, the educational process creates a collection of those individuals into a community imagined as a collective individual – a ‘corporation formed out of many singular individuals – some of whom might be unknown to each other’ (Foster 1998: 70). In short, the strategy produces not only a singular individual with his or her own money, but a collective one which instantiates a distinctive nation as a unit of collective identity, with its own money. In confirmation of this, as Foster points out, this discourse leading from personal wealth to communal wealth can be linked explicitly to the colonial government’s programme for nation-building, as mandated by the United Nations (1998: 70).

Of course, as Jourdan has noted (1995), other ‘stepping stones’ are involved in the process whereby a diverse range of cultural and language groups can be incorporated within a unified vision of nationhood. This oneness of the ‘imagined community’ has the effect of enhancing its strength and power, especially in the economic, political, and social spheres, with the result that previously disparate groups can co-operate to their mutual advantage and can participate in the much larger world community (Anderson 1983).

My particular focus here is the relationship between money, nation, and the new imaginings of apocalypticism in New Ireland. I explore this through the narrativings of one local group, the Lelet, many of whom are attaching new meanings and values to money as they assimilate these new ideas into their world-view. Money is a particularly important element in the Lelet's expectation of final chaos and catastrophe, which they generally understand to be already occurring. However, their accounts of this contain indications that the connection which Foster has documented between money and the nation is no longer quite so straightforward. New forms of money are believed to accompany the new forms of global society that are emerging in these 'Last Days', a development that suggests new forms of identity that reach beyond the nation.

The Lelet

The Lelet occupy the Lelet plateau region in central New Ireland (Eves 1998). A rural community of several hundred people, they live in widely dispersed hamlets centred on four main villages which form the nucleus of social, political, and church life. Their lives are dominated by the rhythms of subsistence agriculture, cash-cropping, and regular attendance at church, and they have a long history of contact with Western social forms and ideas. The many influences and pressures which they have experienced in the last century have come mainly from the cash and market economy, Christian missionaries, colonial governments, and the 'post-colonial' nation-state.

The Lelet's history of Christian missionization began before the 1920s and all Lelet would call themselves Christian if asked. Christianity plays a pervasive and powerful part in their lived world, going beyond regular attendance at church services to provide a means for understanding the world and how people act within it.² As I have explored the history of Lelet Christianity elsewhere (Eves 1998), I will provide here only a brief outline of their more recent history. Since the 1970s, the dominant United Church has gradually taken on a more spiritualistic orientation under the influence of forms of evangelism and pentecostalism originating in the United States and Australia. This began with a large 'crusade' in Rabaul, East New Britain led by an evangelist associated with Billy Graham, the popular American evangelist. Several influential members of the New Ireland United Church attended this meeting and saw the potential of this form of evangelism for the expansion and consolidation of Christianity back home (Eves 1998: 108; Threlfall 1975: 226).

Recently, this evangelistic 'revival' has taken on a renewed impetus, adopting a variety of pentecostal beliefs and practices. These include baptism of the Holy Spirit, a process in which believers acquire the power to heal and to speak in tongues. Those involved are also enjoined to embrace a strict adherence to the Bible as their sole source of divine authority (Hollenweger 1972: 291-6). While Lelet pentecostalism has its own distinctive characteristics, it also shares many of the general features of other pentecostalist groups, such as interpreting the Bible literally and viewing the world dualistically, as a contest between God and Satan, good and evil, Christian and unbeliever.

One consequence of this dualistic framework is that a necessary step in becoming truly righteous is to be 'born again', usually expressed idiomatically in the lingua franca, Tok Pisin, as *tanim bel* or *senisim laip* (changing one's life).³ Converts must characterize their previous life as evil, and renounce it, before making a commitment to a new life, fully dedicated to Christ (Threlfall 1975: 226). This requires the abandonment of all practices believed to be the work of evil spirits and often those behaviours that are judged unrighteous or heathenish, such as drinking alcohol, using magic, and committing adultery. The reformatory project also requires people to adopt the practices and dispositions proper to Christians, such as regular attendance at church and avoiding all forms of conflict potentially disruptive of the community, such as disputes over land, or failure to contribute to community and church projects. Significantly for this article, for the Lelet being 'born again' is closely bound up with their apocalyptic vision of the world's end. The inevitability of this puts pressure on them to be ever prepared by becoming exemplary Christians, a necessity constantly reiterated in United Church pentecostal discourse.

The spread of pentecostalism has aroused much debate among Lelet about the boundary between Christians and non-Christians, and the forms of behaviour that are required if one is to be a genuine Christian. Although many Lelet would agree that a genuine Christian is someone who has renounced sinful practices, questions continually arise about whether particular kinds of behaviour are legitimate or unacceptable for those who have been 'born again'. Thus, while the pentecostalists might seek to apply a morally unambiguous dualism, in reality the boundary line is never clear and remains subject to contest. Pentecostalists might hold that one is either a committed Christian suffused with the power of the Holy Spirit, or a non-Christian in thrall to Satan. In reality, however, the righteous must struggle continually in an endless battle against Satanic forces (*samting bilong Satan* [TP]) which seek incessantly to tempt and corrupt them. Christians must therefore engage in continual self-scrutiny, enabling them to recognize and control unruly desires, as well as to acknowledge and repent any wrongdoings.

The Lelet also have a long history of involvement in the cash and market economy, dating from the German colonial period, when people worked on the plantations along the coast to acquire money to pay the annual head tax. For many years they remained on the periphery of that economy, participating mainly through occasional sojourns on the coast, but in the mid-1920s Australian colonial officials attempted to increase their involvement by encouraging the planting of 'English' potatoes which were ideally suited to the temperate climate of the plateau, and which could be sold in the towns. Lelet then began to grow various kinds of 'European' and 'Asian' vegetables for sale, although the lack of adequate transport infrastructure severely limited this form of development. Prior to the completion of a road to the Lelet plateau in 1979, all produce had to be carried over steep trails to the coast, where trucks plying the road would take them to market in the provincial capital, Kavieng. Colonial and PNG agricultural development officers also encouraged the planting of rice, cardamom, and coffee. Thanks to the road, the Lelet have been highly successful in marketing their vegetables and have become more prosperous than the coastal villagers. This is because, until

recently, coastal producers have acquired most of their cash by growing export crops like copra, which are subject to severe global price fluctuations.

The Church has supported such initiatives on the part of the Lelet, seeing material progress and the accompanying changes in dress, cleanliness, and orderliness as an important means by which people constitute themselves as Christians. As Meyer has argued in another context, 'conversion to Christianity required Western commodities. Rather than merely enabling people to buy commodities, Christianity itself was produced through consumption' (Meyer 1999: 156). This side of Christianity caused some unease, however. Both in the immediate post-war period and more recently, missionaries in the region have regularly commented on what they saw as the pernicious effects of 'materialism', 'love of money', and 'cargo cults' on the spiritual life of villagers. The missionaries considered these to be new evils which needed to be confronted along with the 'old superstitions' distracting people from the Church. As one senior Methodist missionary wrote in his Annual Report for 1963:

The devil is in here fighting for all he is worth for there is a golden prize to be won here – the soul of a whole people. His cohorts are well marshalled – materialism, self-indulgence, liquor, gods old and new – all done up in glittering labels of freedom, progress and prosperity (Methodist Overseas Mission 1963).

Some missionaries concluded that, although the desire of the New Irelanders to enjoy a higher standard of living was causing moral and spiritual values to be 'temporally disturbed', an 'ultimate enrichment' would result. Although participation in cash-cropping might temporarily distract people from spiritual matters, in the longer term it would bring spiritual benefits in the form of 'zest in toil' and hence the acquisition of a dutiful Christian work ethic.

The long and successful involvement of the Lelet in cash-cropping suggests that they have embraced this work ethic. The value of hard work was often expressed to me, usually in terms of wealth being generated through sweat, in the labour of gardening. People often expressed this as 'money is in the ground', meaning that money is to be made by growing vegetables for market. Some Lelet also made comments to me that appeared to echo the missionaries' dismissive attitude to so-called cargo beliefs, insisting, for example, that as far as they were concerned wealth cannot be generated by 'doing nothing'. As one villager remarked, 'you can't do nothing and expect things to come up like the followers of Walagupgup [the leader of a cargo movement popular in New Ireland during the 1970s]'. Such statements suggest that ideas about the securing of fantastic riches are still familiar and widely shared among the Lelet. A general readiness to abandon a crop because the rewards are considered insufficient also indicates that many Lelet have exaggerated expectations of the riches that cash-cropping will bring. This is consistent with their inclination to scrutinize the world carefully for signs of potential advantage or detriment.

Among the Lelet a strong connection exists between aspects of the religious imagination and the generation and acquisition of wealth. Despite their professed scepticism about so-called cargo ideas, many Lelet do retain a belief that wealth can be acquired by other and easier means than through the kind of diligent toil extolled by missionaries in the past and by local

church leaders today. The potency of money incites desire and, like other desires, this can be satisfied by recourse to supernatural or magical means. This appeals particularly when work fails to satisfy expectations, and so some Lelet have attempted to satisfy their desire for money through participation in development movements which have strong overtones of cargo cultism.⁴ They usually also continue to adhere strongly to their own magical framework, which happens to be particularly suited to the acquisition of money. This is most clearly evident in the forms of magic which entice or seduce money from others, or which facilitate the extraction of money in the process of exchange. While attempting to sell their vegetables to potential purchasers, people may employ magical means to induce buyers to accept inferior produce or to cheat their customers in other ways. This can be done by using magic to confuse the purchaser. For example, Lisiva, a man in his 30s, explained to me that he increases his sales in the market by rubbing his hands with a piece of the bone of a *lagas* (bush spirit) and uttering a spell (*ingsangsanga*). Buyers, he maintained, are induced to purchase his vegetables because he has held them with his magical hands. From ordinary produce, such as the tips and leaves of the choko plant, he can 'pull' about 150 to 180 Kina (hereafter, K) at market, a considerable sum for produce that is generally considered inferior. The power of the *lagas* causes people to become disorientated and unable to think clearly, so the use of the bone also enables Lisiva to short-change his customers.

A second example belonging to the magical realm makes use of the spirit of a deceased person. In a practice heavily inflected with Christian notions of the resurrection, a person can, if he or she is brave enough, take a bag full of money from a 'spirit' (*loronan*) as it leaves the corpse on the third day after burial. As it was explained to me, this should be done at midnight three days after the burial, because this is the time when Jesus arose from the tomb. Those wishing to do this must hide themselves well, something that is best achieved if they position themselves at the head of the grave so that they are behind the 'spirit' when it arises and departs. Several people were reputed to have tried this, but the only one to have been successful was a European agricultural officer resident at the research station at Lengkamen. I was told that this man lay hidden at the right time and that as the 'spirit' left he crept up behind it and took a flour bag full of money from its hand. The person who related the story to me, Buli, saw the flour bag, but not the money, which was said to have amounted to K5,000, a considerable sum (Eves 1998: 32-3; cf. Clay 1986: 114; Lattas 1998: 104-5).

The actual practice of magic is becoming rare since being 'born again' involves renouncing such practices, which are labelled 'satanic' by the United Church pastors and ministers. Out of fear of being shamed, the diminishing number who do persist in using magic are extremely secretive. However, while the denunciation of magic has had the effect of dissuading people from using it, it has had very little effect upon people's beliefs. There remains a strong and widespread belief in its efficacy, even if it is only occasionally practised. Even those who have long since forsaken its use would not dispute the efficacy of the powers involved in the cases discussed above. As a consequence, many Lelet pentecostals readily accept the tales of fantastic riches that accompany the apocalyptic narratives now circulating.

The early missionaries' teachings about individual salvation leading to an improved standard of living are still being echoed by the post-colonial churches. In contrast to the teachings of the early missionaries, pentecostalism, with its stress on other-worldly powers, has been comparatively tolerant towards what Comaroff and Comaroff have called 'occult economies: in the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends' (1999; see also Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998; Meyer 1998). Thus the United Church has recognized an efficacy in occult economies that the missionaries firmly rejected.

As is evident by now, most Lelet are highly desirous of obtaining money whether through cash-cropping, cargo cults, or magical means (cf. Knauff 1999: 13-14). Though their encounter with modernity and the cash economy has posed some problems, especially in exposing them to the envy, and thus the sorcery, of others, this is nevertheless a world in which they desire to prosper (Eves 2000a). Money gives access to the world of goods and commodities that Europeans enjoy, a world free from the hardships of their own lives (cf. Maclean 1994: 672).

Money is also a central feature of Lelet belief in the world's end, but the interest it holds here is different. This has implications for nation-building, as I shall argue below.

New money, new society, new world order

In their introduction to the edited collection, *Money and the morality of exchange*, Bloch and Parry caution against accepting the view that the introduction of money has an intrinsically revolutionary effect that subverts the moral economies of so-called 'traditional' societies. This proposition, they argue, has been adopted uncritically by many anthropologists. 'The effect of this', they write, 'has been to misrepresent the real complexity of the causal factors at work in the transformations experienced by many cultures as they are sucked into the world of the capitalist market' (Bloch & Parry 1989: 12). A similar point is made by Burridge when he cautions against the view that millenarian movements originate when money appears in a society previously without it. He agrees, nevertheless, that money has indeed been a significant feature of many such movements, saying, for example, that money 'seems to be the most *frequent* and *convenient* axis on which millenarian movements turn' (1969: 146; cf. Lattas 2001; Strathern 1979). While these authors rightly point out that the adoption of money should not be thought of as an inevitable catalyst of revolutionary social transformations, money has nevertheless been an important marker of such radical movements and transformations. This is demonstrated by Foster's comment that the changing history of colonialism in New Ireland is often told in terms of currency shifts. As one villager remarked to him: "'first we had marks, then shillings, then dollars'" (1998: 82). Similarly, new forms of money are a distinctive feature of the changes that are thought to indicate the world's end. Thus, money holds great symbolic power in the imagining of new forms of society and its introduction often becomes a 'signature event' (LiPuma 2000: 186). New forms of money are central to the global vision of the new world order

precisely because money has the capacity to facilitate the building of social worlds beyond the national world. A comparable point is made by Harris when she remarks that, 'The significance of money today extends beyond the limits of any particular culture; it is an international language, which since the development of the modern world market has by definition transcended political boundaries' (1989: 233-4). However, the specific values and meanings that are attached to money can vary considerably, depending on the cultural and historical specificities of the particular society. Furthermore, even within one particular society, the values attached to money are contextually variable. As is evident in the material presented here, rather than money being unequivocally good or bad, the way it is acquired determines its valuation.

Before discussing Lelet narratives of money, mayhem, and the Beast, I will outline the apocalyptic scenario on which they are based. As with pentecostalism elsewhere, Lelet pentecostals are led to expect a cataclysmic end to the present world before Christ returns with his followers to establish a kingdom on earth. Exactly how and when these events will occur is not established among pentecostals and there is much speculation about the significance of certain dates in this unfolding of history. Lelet pentecostal teaching is that we are now living in the 'End Times' or the 'Last Days' – the last days of human rule over the world. This is to be followed by the 'Great Tribulation', a seven-year period of tyranny and terror when the world will be ruled by Satan's proxy on earth, the Antichrist or Beast mentioned in the Book of Revelation (Fuller 1995). Those who have embraced Christ as their saviour in the manner of Lelet born-again Christians explain that they expect to be rescued by him in the 'Rapture', when he draws the faithful up into the air. As Robbins and Palmer have written, the notion of the Rapture gives the 'promise to the faithful that they will not have to endure the Tribulation' with its ordeals and suffering (1997: 11). Later, it is believed, Christ and his followers will return to vanquish the Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon. This inaugurates the millennium, Christ's 1,000-year-long reign on earth. As Harding notes, orthodox belief is that these 'prophecies are fulfilled only *after* the Rapture', and if they were being fulfilled now, there would be no Christians on earth to witness them (Harding 1994: 66, emphasis added). However, ignoring the orthodox chronology, many Lelet say that the rule of the Antichrist is currently being established. Thus, this temporal ambiguity invests present events with greater prophetic meaning than orthodox Christians would allow and, given that the rule of the Antichrist stresses the institution of a new global hegemony, questions of national identity, symbols, and sovereignty come to the fore.

The apocalyptic understanding of the future, termed 'premillennialism' (Boyer 1992; Weber 1987), is pervaded by a pessimistic fatalism predicting that Christ's return will be preceded by widespread social and economic disintegration and natural disasters (Eves 2000*b*). Encouraged by the many premillennialist pamphlets circulating in PNG, among the Lelet all unusual occurrences are assimilated into this framework; portents of the End Times as well as local and national events all become saturated with meaning and take on an increasingly globalized dimension. For the Lelet this has included such natural disasters as the widespread drought of 1997-8, the tsunami that

devastated Aitape in 1998, and an earthquake in November 2000, when I was in the field (cf. Stewart & Strathern 1999: 131, 137; 2000: 7, 16). In terms of social disintegration, it includes the increase in crime, the rise of 'Raskal' (criminal) gangs, the proliferation of AIDS, and proposals to build a brothel in Port Moresby. Further, people zealously scrutinize not only present but also past happenings for confirmation of the prophesies (Eves 2000*b*: 83).

A key marker of the End Times pertains to money and national economies, and the changes currently occurring in them are interpreted as the realization of the Antichrist's goal of global domination. The widespread public concern about the weak state of the PNG economy has led to a proliferation of apocalyptic discourse and much speculation about the state and its future role in the country. Money is central to the faltering economy and examples of rising prices are regularly cited as proof that the country is suffering an economic crisis. Some explain the price rises as a consequence of the devaluation of the kina, which has indeed meant that imported commodities have become much more expensive, but this is widely interpreted as a fulfilment of apocalyptic predictions. This view was enunciated during a conversation in the field in 1998 by a young man called Gideon:

In relation to the monetary system at this time, the devaluation of the kina – it has dropped in value and continues to go down. As a result, lots of things have gone up in price – all the things in the stores, all the bus-fares and air-fares have gone up. Lots of things have gone up in price ... Things are so expensive that people cannot live any more. These are all part of the predictions of Revelation.

Gideon went on to say that, in addition to price rises, a new world of haves and have-nots is developing, a world in which only the rich have enough. This will be particularly difficult for city people, he remarked, because village people can rely on their gardens. While such disparities are indeed a growing feature of the present, in the negative vision of the future held by premillennialists they will become far greater. Mapped onto the Christian dualism of good and evil, it is the evil who will have money and the good who will not. For many, money is becoming worthless (cf. Bienik & Trompf 2000: 119). As one man remarked, the 'kina has lost its strong', speculating that if it lost all its strength people would no longer be able to buy things and it would have to be replaced by new money, worldwide (see below). For some, the worthlessness of the national currency also increases the likelihood that another country will take over PNG. With the declining value of money, commitment to the nation-state diminishes and, in the context of a powerless state, the opportunity exists for others to take control. The lack of strength in the kina mirrors the diminishing strength of the PNG state, which is unable either to fulfil its role of looking after its subjects or to protect its national sovereignty.

Transformations in the monetary system are seen as strong signs that the nation-state is being usurped by powerful forces. The convergence of money and machines, or what Hart has referred to as 'virtual capitalism', allows opportunities for surveillance and control (2001: 312). The new forms of banking using computers, or 'electronic banking', are seen as a particularly effective way for the Beast (Antichrist) to restrict people's access to money and goods.

Components of the banking system, such as the bank-book-cum-identity card, which Foster argues was one means of establishing national identity, will be replaced by a more effective control system using a smart card or the *save kat* [TP]. As the following account suggests, the introduction of electronic banking has generated a great deal of suspicion and speculation:

When [electronic banking] arrived new in Papua New Guinea a lot of people opened their mouths [talked about it], asking such things as 'Hey, before we used to go to the bank and fill in withdrawal slips and they would give you money and we'd go shopping with it. Now you can go shopping at the stores and put your card inside this machine and after you can take all your things and go. Lots of people opened their mouths about this – 'How did all this come about?' For lots of people it had a question mark. When a group of people from the PNGBC [Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation] came to explain this new system a lot of them had difficulty answering questions from the people. Lots of people asked 'Why now?' and 'What kind of disaster will happen after?' We were not sure whether this group from the PNGBC were telling the truth or not. A lot of people asked if later on there would be some kinds of disaster that could arise. They didn't answer these questions and merely replied that it was the arrival of a new system ... A number of those who had money in the bank were afraid – not knowing what it all meant. At this time I went and got this transaction account because it has this card that goes with it. Without the card you can't get your money from the bank. If you want to write on a withdrawal slip and want to take your money out of the bank you won't be able to. You will be told to go and get your card. I think a lot of people in Papua New Guinea have already been exposed to this new system – electronic banking. Numerous people are making accusations that this is part of the one world government.

My informant said that many people saw the new system as the result of a law promulgated by the Antichrist to the effect that 'no one should be able to withdraw or deposit money without the number'. He said he had seen this law written out on a leaflet currently circulating in the Highlands;⁵ the author of this text, which is entitled 'Metropolitan Area of Span (*sic*) Paulo', is widely held to be the current pope, John Paul II. The number referred to here is the 'Number of the Beast', 666 (see Fuller 1995). Since some people have already received the card, and so may have received this number, events are unfolding as expected. In the negative vision articulated here, all new technological systems are scrutinized to see whether they are part of the global project of the Antichrist. Lelet pentecostals generally see new systems, such as electronic banking, phone cards, and computerization, as marking the imminence of that future and thus as facilitating the new forms of governance and control that are central to its realization. Though the nation-state might equally be suspected of instituting these developments in a bid to control its citizens, here it is interpreted as external global forces endeavouring to usurp the power of the nation-state. This view would now be reinforced by the fact that the PNGBC has been privatized and is no longer controlled by the PNG state.

The increasingly common use of bar codes on consumer products is also viewed as part of the new system in which access to money and goods is determined by the number. During the reign of the Antichrist all the numbers beneath the bar code are expected to change to 666 (cf. Robbins 1997; 1998). Some even suggest that this is already starting to occur:

The marks that you see on packaging, there are numbers that represent them. You look underneath and there are numbers. They say that at a later time they will change the numbers, change them to 666. All the numbers will change, so when you look at a tin of fish or something similar its number will have changed. Initially some will have 67, some will have 68. When it comes to the time, when they write 666 on everything, his time has come now ... One or two are coming up occasionally, but eventually everything must have the mark.

Others suggest that, because the reign of the Beast has not come fully into effect, at present the number is hidden and can only be discerned by acts of decoding. Once the Antichrist has established his reign, people will be called upon to declare their allegiance to him. If they do so, they will be given the number and will become part of his legions; if they refuse and seek to carry on worshipping God, they will be beheaded. The Beast's followers will be inscribed with the mark. This will be a number imprinted indelibly on each person's forehead and one hand by a machine; having the number will give people access to goods and money. It is sometimes said that this will ensure acquisition of unlimited quantities of money and goods, thus reiterating the vision of fantastic riches that has characterized Melanesian cargo beliefs and other 'occult economies'.

As part of the Beast's programme for world domination, the economic collapse of nation-states will be accompanied by the consolidation and centralization of power and financial control in the hands of the pope, who has been widely identified with the Antichrist by pentecostalists both within and beyond Melanesia (cf. Strathern & Stewart 1997: 5). This reflects both the general history of Protestant anti-Catholicism dating back to the European Reformation, and also more localized rivalries from the colonial period. The first Christian missionaries in New Ireland were Protestants, many of whom regarded the incoming Roman Catholics as rivals and intruders and this hostility has been adopted by subsequent converts (Eves 2000b: 85).

It is widely expected by many Lelet that a new global hegemony will soon be constituted. The political and monetary systems of countries like PNG will disappear, and the new 'world order' will be controlled from Rome. Many Lelet say that plans for this are already in train. While in 1998 some people thought the new regime would begin in the year 2000, it is now understood to be not yet fully implemented, though parts of it have come into operation. In support of the theory that the pope aims to take over the world, I was told not only that the Catholic Church was extremely wealthy but also that the money it collects throughout the world was being sent to Rome. It was agreed that some of this money was redistributed, but, as one Lelet man told me, the rest went into the pope's bank, which has so much money in it that the World Bank and other banks will be swallowed by it (Eves 2000b: 85). The great wealth of the Catholic Church was confirmed by the fact that their churches are much bigger than those built by other denominations. Further confirmation came from local Catholics themselves, who had told my informant about the destination of any money collected at church. That he heard this from the Catholics elevates the truth value of these stories far beyond mere hearsay, and gives credence to the other stories about the

global ambitions of the pope. In addition to raising large amounts of money through collections, the Catholic Church is said to have extensive investments in companies not only globally, but also locally. Although my informant could not give any examples of Catholic investments beyond PNG, he was certain that the pope was a major investor in the oil-palm industry, which dominates the economy of New Ireland. The truth value of these narratives tends to be confirmed more readily through local instances, for without such concrete examples they are often viewed sceptically as mere stories (Eves 1998; 2000a). Thus, whenever Lelet people travel to the New Ireland capital Kavieng, they are confronted with evidence as they pass several large oil-palm plantations, all with a huge array of machinery and permanent dwellings, providing evidence that the new world order is frighteningly close. Thus, in the words of the same man:

If you observe the work of Pope John Paul he is working towards taking control of a lot of things to do with the monetary system worldwide at this present time, because he has got a lot of shares in a lot of companies and he is investing a lot of money in a lot of companies – all big companies. In New Ireland the Pope has a hand in Poliamba, a large oil palm plantation. He has a hand here. He has big shares in this company ... This company CDC – the Commonwealth Development Corporation – has its origins with all the Commonwealth countries – such as Australia, Papua New Guinea – all the countries which stop inside the Commonwealth. The Queen also has shares in this company and has invested money in it. The New Ireland Provincial government has also invested money in it, so has the Papua New Guinean government and the Pope too. All these people have invested in this company. However, it is not at all clear because they don't do their work in a very visible way, they are afraid that people will be angry or something like that. They do it secretly with lots of back-door dealings.

Lelet pentecostals connect the papal conspiracy to take over the world with the globalizing trend of the world economy. Institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF are considered to be working at the behest of the Antichrist. The premillennialist 'new world order' sees the world united as one, and predicts an end to the nation-state as a form of collective identity. This suggests a weakening of the significant strategic link that Foster identifies in the project of creating a national identity. Under a 'one world government' and with a 'one world bank', the banking system will be reformed. The Beast will replace national currencies such as the kina by a single worldwide currency bearing his distinctive number. Consequently, the state-issued currency, which, as Foster says, helps to define the nation as a political unit, tends to lose its symbolic potency. The new money is said to have its origins with the Antichrist (or the Beast) and will bear his distinctive number, 666. Variants of this have been cited elsewhere in PNG, and also in the neighbouring Solomon Islands, indicating the widespread prevalence of this kind of apocalypticism in the Pacific. In other versions, the new money is said to have the image of the pope on it, and the number 666 as the serial number (Strathern & Stewart 1997: 13; Stewart & Strathern 1999: 136). For example, Strathern and Stewart report that people in Mount Hagen often discussed the possibility that the pope's head would replace the leaders of PNG on the currency (Foster 1999; Strathern & Stewart 1999: 187). Actually, the only national leader who is currently represented on the country's currency is its first Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, who is widely referred to as the father

of the PNG nation. Thus the idea of the erasure of this symbol of nationhood from the K50 note – the largest denomination of PNG’s currency – suggests a particularly radical rupture of the link between money and the nation. That Sir Michael Somare has recently been re-elected as Prime Minister only strengthens this.

These apocalyptic narratives resonate with the unease created by the experience of today’s world-scale economic and social transformations. Increasingly, ‘the world economy is controlled by a few firms of Western origin but dubious national loyalties’, as Hart says, and nation-states are losing their ability to manage their economies (2001: 316). ‘The world organization of money has now reached a social scale and technical form that make it impossible for states to control it’ (Hart 2001: 313). Many of those who subscribe to an apocalyptic interpretation of history expect the nation-state to be replaced with a new form of super-state, rather than control by competitive global capitalist forces.

A striking aspect of the premillennialist narratives that I have discussed here is the idea of a rapidly emerging transformation in the relationship between money and evil. It is also the case that in this unfolding teleology, money becomes increasingly marked as evil, and it is this point that I now wish to explore.

Money and evil

The connection that Lelet pentecostals make between money and evil involves something more complex than a simple opposition between ‘good’ gift exchange and ‘bad’ commodity exchanges. Money is polysemic in Lelet thought: it is invested with different values depending on context. It is also highly equivocal: on the one hand, it is highly desirable, much coveted and sought after, and on the other, it can lead people off the Christian path. Increasingly, however, through their narratives of apocalypse, money is becoming more definitively evil in Lelet thought and speech.

Yet money as such is not problematic for Lelet Christians. Members are regularly enjoined to make cash contributions to their church, thus indicating that the leadership does not regard money itself in negative terms. People are expected to make small cash offerings at Sunday services and must tithe one-tenth of their income each month to the church. The United Church thus receives about K20,000 a year from its Lelet congregations.⁶ In recent years, two of the four Lelet villages have also faced the great financial demand of building new churches.⁷ These are exceptionally large and go far beyond fulfilling the present community’s needs, reflecting a wider competitiveness, played out in the Christian context. As one man mockingly commented about the size of the new churches, ‘if everyone went to church, everyone could have a whole bench to themselves’. In this competitive environment, huge churches become visible markers of the intense commitment of the community to Christianity. This marking of allegiances is closely connected with pentecostal ideas about the importance of policing the boundaries between good and evil. Such concerns are all the more pressing in the context of the End Times, where actions and deeds can mark clearly who is a follower of

Christ. Indeed, Lelet feel that in these fateful times it is imperative to display their Christian zeal and commitment as fervently as possible.

At the individual level, there is an intersection between money, modernity, and Christianity, which requires that people who have money acquire the outward signs of being good Christians. The early missionaries put great stress on the outward appearance of the body, which was deemed to be a marker of one's interior moral state (Eves 1996). For them, conversion was confirmed by clothing, cleanliness, and orderliness – that is, a body that incorporated the habits and gestures appropriate to a Christian. The model for this, of course, was the white European Christian; even today Lelet tend to regard a scrubbed body and appropriate clothes as markers of a good Christian, especially when attending church.

This preoccupation with displaying visible proofs of a transformed life is also reflected in a growing enthusiasm for constructing modern houses. This brought a particularly noticeable change between my first period of fieldwork (1990-1) and later periods (1997, 1998, and 2000), with a large increase in the number of houses using durable modern materials. These houses are primarily for display; people rarely sleep, eat, or cook in them, continuing to use the old 'bush'-style houses nearby for these purposes. Further, they are carefully furnished with chairs and tables, largely unused, painted, and embellished with Christian calendars and other decorations, where the customary houses are rarely decorated at all. Beyond providing proof that one is saved, modern houses also constitute the proper domestic space for the realization of the ideal Christian family that is increasingly promoted. Although the modern houses are not commonly used in this way, the white European model of family behaviour is becoming more evident – for example, men often spend the night with their families rather than sleeping in the men's house, as was once customary.

Modern houses, some of which are quite ostentatious, may serve as signs that the owners are conscientious workers who do not pursue wasteful pleasures or fritter their money away on tobacco, betel-nut, or alcohol. Such houses serve not only to impress others but are also a source of proof for the house owners themselves that their prayers have been efficacious and that they are indeed in a blessed spiritual state (cf. Coleman 1996; Meyer 1999). However, being prosperous and being able to make a visible display does not necessarily indicate that a person is blessed. One of the wealthiest men on the Lelet plateau has a permanent house and two trucks but never attends church; he is therefore not generally thought of as a good Christian. Despite the efforts of the Methodists to link visibility, whether in the form of dress or other signs of modernity, to moral personhood, this does not always hold up in Lelet conceptualizations of the world. Displays of affluence can be interpreted in a number of ways. Money and the goods that it provides are signs of efficaciousness, of the ability to harness power in one's daily life. On the one hand, wealth may be seen as evidence that owners are good Christians; yet it may also suggest that they have powerful magic which they have used to enrich themselves. Though some Lelet agree that wealth is acquired through hard work only, many still hold that it can be obtained by magical or other supernatural means. Since Christianity has not really displaced the view that magical

powers are effectual, there is always the possibility that those who are successful in the realm of the market owe their success to these unchristian means. Therefore, questions are often asked about how people have acquired wealth, and suspicions are easily aroused (cf. Meyer 1995; 1998). Such a situation occurred during my fieldwork, when a man was accused by his brother of using magic to ensure that his trade-store was successful at the expense of others in the village. This man was reputed to possess much powerful magic and the charge was probably accepted by many people. Though a person's past may give some indication of the most likely explanation, no one can ever know for sure whether wealth has been gained by illegitimate means. This uncertainty about the origins of wealth comes to mark money itself as equivocal.

Previously, displays of wealth were carefully regulated and controlled so as to contain the envy of others, but this cannot be done with large items such as houses and vehicles. In the past, fear of sorcery discouraged people from making ostentatious displays of wealth, but these were forms of wealth that could readily be concealed. It might be argued that an house is simply too tempting. But the question that then arises is why these are appearing now, at a time when people have more disposable income. A more plausible explanation is that the fear of sorcery is fast disappearing. It may be that those who believe themselves to be blessed by the Holy Spirit feel that they have protection from sorcery attacks, though they may also be protected from this by other means, especially the use of magic. Thus the Lelet do not see money as an all-powerful source of evil.

The Lelet have not articulated a criticism of the hegemony of money. 'What is being condemned is not money, which is part of human relations, but certain ways of acquiring it (Krohn-Hansen 1995: 141; cf. Taussig 1980). Money is particularly problematic when it has been attained by wrongful means, notably when it is acquired through the use of magic. Though condemned by the Church, most Lelets' belief in the efficacy of magic has actually been reinforced in recent times by the apocalyptic narratives, which clearly link fantastic riches with the Devil. Nevertheless, these narratives do not constitute a critique of the accumulation of wealth as such.

It is therefore the ways in which money is used that can be problematic among the Lelet, particularly if people nurture their own desires to the exclusion of the social relationships in which they are enmeshed (Eves 1998: 39-40). As elsewhere in Melanesia, the negative rhetorical figure of the selfish greedy person (*lantupe* [M]) is common to the Lelet, the implication being that wealth should be redistributed rather than consumed by the individual (cf. Maclean 1994: 674-5; Munn 1986: 49; Robbins & Akin 1999: 36-7). In the present climate of religious fervour, however, perhaps even more damning is the failure to contribute adequately to the Church.

Failing to contribute properly to the Church calls into question one's commitment as a born-again Christian and carries the risk of being labelled a follower of the Devil. People will therefore gossip (*toktok plenti* [TP], *lavapase solo* [M]) about someone who trades a great deal but is not seen to contribute either money or time. They will question that person's commitment to Christianity, saying that while he or she knows about Christianity, others do not see the 'fruit' – that is, their knowledge is not reflected in their lifestyle.

Similarly, when someone's preparations for market mean that they will have to miss a church workshop, or their late return from the market requires them to miss the Sunday service, they are subjected to similar criticism. Such people are said to make a god of money, which, as one preacher remarked in his sermon, is a 'false god, which will not save you' (*Moni em i God giaman, i no inap savim yu* [TP]). Properly, people should put Christianity first in their thinking, not money-making.

The general Lelet preoccupation with the nexus between money and the end of the world can be seen as arising from their pre-existing fascination with, and desire for, money and their long-standing ideas about the link between wealth and supernatural powers. This preoccupation with wealth has led many Lelet to seek to acquire money by many orthodox and unorthodox means. The significance attached to money in premillennial narratives is very different, however. Rather than seeing money as more or less unproblematically desirable (though precautions against envy are necessary), many Lelet now speak in lurid terms about the link between money and the Antichrist. Thus, in the apocalyptic imagination of Lelet Christianity, in 'the new world order', money or the love of it is not 'the root of all evil', but rather it signifies the evil of Satan and, finally, hell (1 Tim. 6: 10).

These apocalyptic narratives entail a reimagining of the moral universe, with the dualism of good and evil being starkly realized. This also entails a reimagining of the place of money in that moral universe. Rather than being a world of uncertainty, doubt, and suspicion, a murky grey world in which it is impossible to be certain about good and evil, in this new world boundaries are clearly delineated. There is no opportunity for equivocation; either you are spared the tyranny of the Antichrist through the Rapture, or you choose to follow the Beast, which will assure great benefits and prosperity, although these will be short-lived. Followers' desires will be unbounded – but at a cost. In the 'new world order', rather than allegiance being to the nation, it is to the Antichrist and ultimately the Devil.

Conclusions: beyond the nation

In the discourses about the end of the world currently circulating in New Ireland, it is apparent that the connection between money and the nation identified by Foster is becoming increasingly uncertain and ambiguous; indeed, people's sense of national identity is itself being weakened. The apocalyptic narrative with its 'one world government', 'one world bank', and 'one money' means the supplanting of the nation-state. Within the expectation of one global sphere of economic interaction unconstrained by national boundaries, national aspirations seem pointless, and the symbols of national identity, such as coinage, lose their potency.

The locus of power has thus been moved into a world beyond the nation; the battle is to be fought in a wider arena. On the one hand, to enjoy success in this imagined world requires people to forsake their loyalties to the nation and declare their allegiance to the Antichrist. On the other hand, true Christian believers can be saved from Armageddon, chaos, and final eternal punishment by the Rapture and will ultimately reach heaven. Supporting (and

outdoing) each other in striving to make all aspects of their lives as completely Christian as possible, these Christians tend to see themselves as having a new collective identity that also transcends the boundaries of the nation. Most premillennialist Christians, including the Lelet, see themselves as united in one community of belief and aspiration with other premillennialists around the world. This new transnational form of identity does not actively oppose forms of identity founded on the nation, but moves beyond them, and implies a passive acceptance of the state rather than active allegiance.

National sentiment is also weakened in other ways. A major feature of the premillennialist discourse is the claim that the economy of PNG is in crisis. Far from reflecting straightforward concerns about everyday material insecurities, pentecostals' frequently expressed anxieties about escalating price inflation reflect a far deeper disquiet: this is rooted in the conviction that manipulations involving banks, prices, and commodities are central to the forms of mayhem which the Beast is already unleashing in the world. There is a belief that PNG no longer has a government – 'the government is dead' was how one man articulated this. Issues such as the privatization of public utilities, politicians' corruption, the poor state of the roads, the unclean provincial capital, the rise of crime, and lack of adequate service delivery are all discussed as signs of the End Times. They may even show that the government is already in collusion with the Antichrist.

Though people still identify themselves as citizens of the nation, they are exceedingly critical of the nation-state's failures to deliver the kinds of services which they desire. In an article exploring apocalyptic narratives among the Urapmin, Robbins labels this criticism 'negative nationalism', but I think this is too strong a term (1998: 104). Dissatisfaction with the performance of the state itself does not necessarily indicate a lack of national identity, for the state is not the same thing as the nation, and dissatisfaction does not necessarily indicate withdrawal of allegiance. People may experience many different allegiances or sites of identification at any one time. There are, for example, among the Lelet several different levels and forms of collective identity, including identification with the village, place, language group, region, lineage, clan or moiety, and church. These forms of collective identity may coexist unproblematically, but in some cases they may come into conflict, as for example when secessionist demands are articulated; in that case loyalty to the nation may be weakened.

Where the term 'negative nationalism' may be appropriate is in the phenomenon of colonialist nostalgia, the yearning for the time before Independence when people were still under the rule of the Australian colonial government. In their criticisms of the present state of the country, PNG people sometimes hark back to the colonial era as a time when things were better and life was more prosperous. As one man commented to me recently, 'If we didn't get Independence all the roads would be good and the price of things would be down below'. Many people say that social life was more orderly and peaceable during the colonial era and also that the quality of the available commodities was far superior. Thus, the Australian government is seen as having managed the economy, and the value of money, soundly, whereas the PNG nation-state is a failure.⁸ Some express a desire to return to the era of Australian colonial rule, a view which probably reflects the high levels

of expenditure by AusAID, the Australian government development aid organization.⁹

At the time of my previous fieldwork in 1990–1, I also encountered many expressions of this kind of colonialist nostalgia, and also much discussion of the price of goods, the faltering economy, and so on. As is the case today, these complaints reflected dissatisfaction with the PNG government's failure to provide for its citizens, echoing Foster's point that 'Papua New Guineans have always understood money as the index of both "the government's" power over them and its ability to supply desired goods to them, [and as such] criticism of the PNG government today is articulated through criticism of its money' (1998: 82–3). Though this remains true today, these criticisms are now framed within the global Christian narrative of the world's end. Previously, the opinion that independence was given too quickly gave room for optimism – that is, that the PNG nation-state could mature and improve. Now, the future holds no such promise.

NOTES

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¹ Considerable recent writing has dealt with the question of nationalism in the Pacific – for example, Foster (1995); Otto and Thomas (1997). Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the relationship between Christianity and the nation, given the importance of Christianity in many Pacific Island nations.

² Most Lelet belong to the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. This Church was formed in 1968 from the Methodist Church of Melanesia, the United Church in Port Moresby and Papua Ekalesia (formed from the London Missionary Society of Papua in 1962). A few Lelet belong to the Catholic Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church, while even fewer belong to another pentecostalist church, the Christian Life Centre (CLC).

³ Vernacular Mandak and Tok Pisin terms are differentiated by '[M]' (Mandak) and '[TP]' (Tok Pisin).

⁴ Some Lelet were involved in cargo-type movements such as the Mataungan Association, which spread from the Gazelle Peninsula to New Ireland in the 1970s and involved resistance to the rule of colonial authorities. Some were also involved in the TKA (Tutukuvul Kapkapis Association) and TIA (Tutukuvul Isakul Association), offshoots of the New Hanover Johnson cult. These adherents wrote their preference for the United States' president, Lyndon Johnson, on their ballot papers. Both movements tended to appeal to supernatural sources for access to wealth.

⁵ Thought to originate in the Philippines, the leaflet supposedly also warns that travelling, hunting, attending school, importing, and exporting will all be impossible without knowledge of the number.

⁶ The minister estimated, however, that given the population numbers they should be receiving K50,000–60,000.

⁷ The Limbin church was completed in 1998, after several years of fund-raising and much labour, costing approximately K80,000. The Lelet claim it is the largest Protestant church in New Ireland.

⁸ Many Lelet have adopted the colonial parental and familial metaphor that construes Australia as the benevolent adult and PNG as the child in need of nurturing. This recourse to fictive kinship has powerful local resonances in a society where adoption is a common practice.

⁹ In New Ireland, AusAID has spent a large amount on the Boluminski highway, which enables people to get their produce to market.

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L'argent, les plaies et la Bête: récits de la fin du monde en Nouvelle-Irlande (Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée)

Résumé

Le présent article traite des relations entre l'argent, l'idée de nation et le nouvel imaginaire de l'apocalypse en Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée. Robert Foster affirme que l'argent a joué un rôle important dans les efforts déployés par l'administration australienne pour créer l'idée de nation à la fin de la période coloniale. L'auteur étudie les effets d'un nouvel imaginaire qui transcende l'idée de nation et s'exprime dans un apocalyptisme chrétien qui devient la principale grille de lecture du monde. L'argent revêt ainsi une nouvelle signification et de nouvelles valeurs, avec pour conséquence la déstabilisation du lien entre argent et nation observé par Foster. L'auteur affirme que dans cette nouvelle vision du monde, l'argent perd son pouvoir symbolique, de nouvelles formes d'identité se font jour et l'attachement des peuples à leur nation s'affaiblit.

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