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Made in Oceania: social movements, cultural heritage and the state in the Pacific

Book section

Original citation:

Scott, Michael W. (2011) The Makiran underground army: kastom mysticism and ontology politics in Southeast Solomon Islands. In: Hviding, Edvard and Rio, Knut M., (eds.) Made in Oceania: social movements, cultural heritage and the state in the Pacific. Sean Kingston Publishing, Wantage, UK, pp. 195-222. ISBN 9781907774065

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Available in LSE Research Online: Jan 2012

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The Makiran Underground Army: *Kastom* Mysticism and Ontology Politics in South-east Solomon Islands

Michael W. Scott

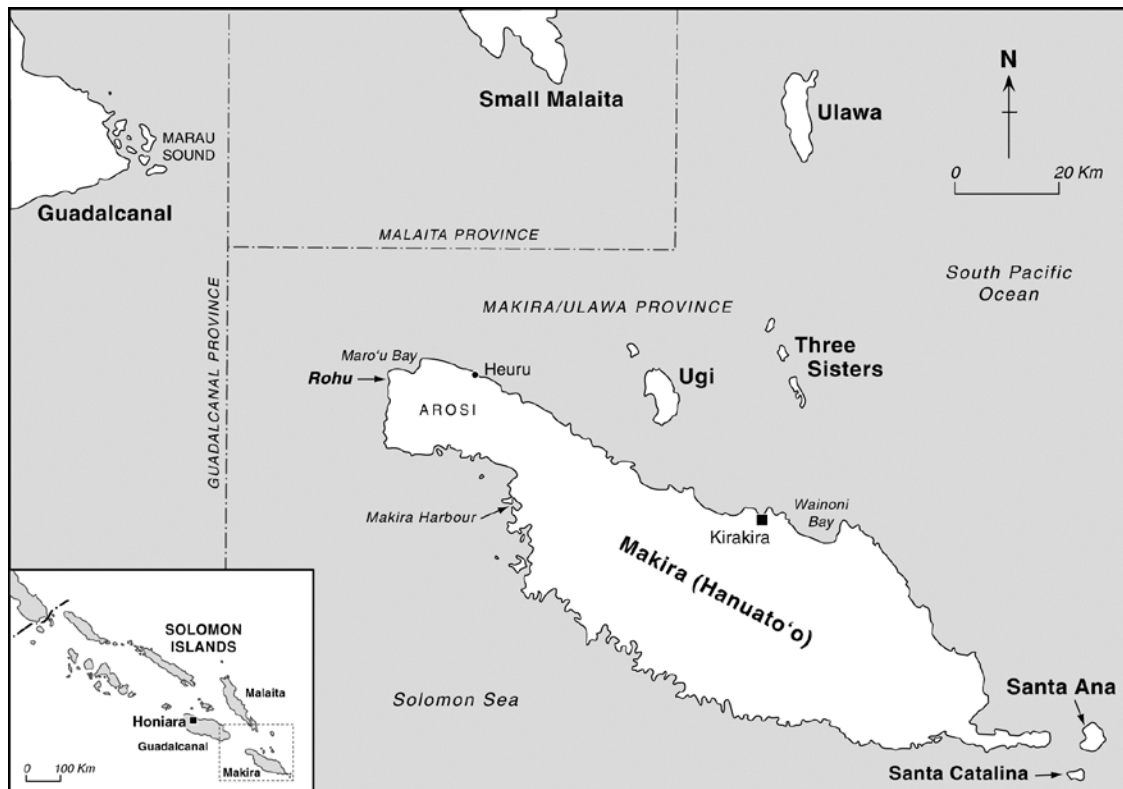
Calls for a Makiran state and the state of being Makiran

On August 4, 2007 the following news brief appeared in the *Solomon Times Online* under the headline ‘Kirakira Residents Awaiting “Mystery Army”’:

It has been reported that the residents of Kira Kira town have been waiting, for the past few days, for the appearance of a platoon believed to be a secret army trained in the jungles of Makira by specialized Western military personnels [*sic*]. Sources from Kira Kira told the SIBC [Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation] that the army was to have been part of celebrations to mark the provinces [*sic*] Second Appointed Day. The source from Kira Kira stated that the belief of a secret provincial army has been actively promoted by senior citizens of the provincial town, including Provincial Assembly Members ... Makira Ulawa Province has been, over the past few years, calling for independence from the rest of Solomon Islands. It is still unclear whether this idea of a secret army has anything to do with its desire to secede ... [R]esidents are eagerly anticipating the arrival of the secret platoon, which is said to be on the 17th of August. The 17th of August is also the Province’s ‘Chief’s Empowerment Day’. The Makira-Ulawa provincial government has moved the celebrations of its Second Appointed Day to August 17th to coincide with the event. (Sao 2007)

With the aim of investigating earlier rumours and accounts of this same ‘secret army’, I conducted a total of ten months of field research in 2003 and 2006 on the island of Makira, the southern-most large island in the Solomons archipelago. Building on my 1992-1993 doctoral research, I worked primarily in the linguistically and administratively-defined area known as Arosi at the northwest end of Makira, but also east of Arosi in the Makira/Ulawa provincial centre at Kirakira and in the

national capital, Honiara, on Guadalcanal. Recurrent themes I encountered included: the idea that the army is stationed underground in a subterranean base, the ‘door’ to which is located at Rohu on the northwest coast of Arosi; that the army is equipped with super-normal technology devised by Euro-Americans with the aid of dwarf-like Makiran autochthons called *kakamora*; that together the army and the *kakamora* are the guardians of a pure Makiran language and *kastom* (tradition or custom) that has become obscured and depleted among Makirans in the surface world; that Solomon Mamaloni, the deceased Arosi-born former Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, is still alive and in communication with the army, preparing to lead it above ground; and that this emergence will bring prosperity, the restoration of true Makiran *kastom*, and political autonomy for Makira.



I found also that different Makirans engage with the figure of the underground army in different ways and at different times. A small number of Arosi, some of whom I was able to interview, say they have visited the underground and have there received revelatory instruction about a momentous imminent future for Makira. One man, for example, described how white Americans had contacted him in his gardening area and led him, by means imperceptible to his bemused senses, into a vast

monolithic complex he supposed was the underground. Another man confided that he had once stumbled inside after treading inadvertently on a crocodile's tooth, causing a hidden point of access suddenly to open up before him. The accounts I gathered from such initiates, although by no means consonant in every way, share a consistent claim: they assert that the army, in accordance with a divine plan, wills for Makira to become autonomous as either a federal state or an independent nation that will be governed by the restored true Makiran *kastom* held in trust by the army and the *kakamora*. When this occurs, abundant resources and wealth will come out from and flow to the island and provide the foundation for Makiran development and regional ascendancy.

Having been privileged with this esoteric knowledge, initiates often feel compelled to seek out potentially receptive auditors, such as clergy, family members, earnest truth-seekers, or anthropologists with whom they might share what they have seen and learned in order to help Makirans prepare for what is to come. Even so, however, they also feel, as one man put it, as if under a 'taboo' not to 'spoil' the army by talking indiscreetly or lightly about it to just anyone. These Arosi are in dialogue with the army as an agent that makes demands on them and catches them up in an already transpiring process of *kastom* resurgence. They experience the army as drawing them into a movement that, if not yet a popular movement, is literally a groundswell, the unfolding of an irresistible force, a divine plan for Makira that is at work in their island and in all Makirans whether or not they will or recognize it.

Despite the burdens of discretion borne by initiates, their experiences and attempts to understand and communicate them are often the sources—usually at many hands' remove—of what other Arosi have heard and repeat about the underground army. But for this uninitiated majority, who say they are simply perplexed and uncertain about what they have heard, the army is not a consistent focus of attention. Some are intermittently motivated to look into the matter, to question others about what they have heard or seen, even to attempt to make contact with army personnel. Such interest in and inclination to give credence to the notion of the underground varies greatly, not only from person to person, but with respect to particular individuals over time. Mirroring the ways in which the army itself is expected to behave, talk about it tends to emerge during times of uncertainty or transition—such as the run-up to the Chiefs Empowerment Day described in the news brief quoted above—but recedes back underground during periods of relative regularity.

Given this diversity and fluctuation of orientations, no single interpretation can exhaustively analyze the Makiran underground army or even isolate what it most fundamentally is about. It invites and rewards multiple angles of contemplation and interrogation both from Solomon Islanders and from international researchers. With this irreducibility in mind, in this chapter I work towards fuller explication of the opening news brief by examining the figure of the underground army as a clear example of how ‘local cultural heritage’ in the Pacific continues to be ‘a central element in political innovation in and beyond the local’ (Rio and Hviding, this volume). Specifically, I explore how the figure of the underground has become a site at which some Makirans are encountering what they experience as Makiran *kastom*—translatable as a ‘local cultural heritage’ (cf. Lindstrom, this volume)—in ways that are informing political innovations and aspirations for alternatives to the current Solomon Islands state, especially aspirations for greater Makiran self-determination. In so doing I present ethnographic data that co-develop three interwoven theses. Although not treated strictly in sequence, these theses may be summarized as follows.

First, I argue that the underground army is a recent figuration of the ways in which some Arosi experience what they call the *ringeringe auhenua* (autochthonous way/custom; Pijin, *kastom lo*) of Makira not only as a set of values and practices, but also—even primarily—as an essential quality intrinsic to a socially emergent pan-Makiran category of being. Makiran *kastom*, and the underground as one of its many images, are coming to signify the agency—the power (*mena*)—of a distinctive Makiran ontology. For many Makirans this *kastom* is apprehended, less as an object or possession than as an alienated self, a past and obscured but nevertheless still present and recoverable Makiran character and efficacy within a continuity of being that encompasses the island, its truly autochthonous people, and its inherent nature or way. Within this insular continuity of being, the relationship between the Makiran person and Makiran *kastom* is therefore non-dual; the latter is always both self and other to the former, eternally internal and renewable even while historically externalized and subject to depletion (cf. R. Scott, this volume).

Second, I argue that this newer Makiran category of being, with its singular insular Makiran *kastom*, is forming up in the likeness of, even while tending to rupture, older matrilineally defined categories, each with its territory-specific *kastom*. Increasing Arosi consciousness of pan-Makiran being and *kastom* must be understood, in fact, as constituting a transformation of Arosi models of ontology that

both produces a scaled-up analogue to an Arosi matrilineage and has the potential to subordinate matrilineal difference to a higher unity.¹

This higher Makiran unity is coming into being among and in mutually determining relationships with diverse but sociologically comparable processes of region or island-based ontology consciousness in neighbouring Solomon Islands contexts (cf. Allen 2009; Scales 2007; White 2001). Accordingly, my third thesis is that, as part of this semiotics, the figure of the underground is a referent through which some Makirans imagine and articulate—not simply what anthropologists have sometimes critiqued as a strategic *kastom* politics in which elements of a *kastom* repertoire are selectively and opportunistically deployed (e.g. Keesing 1989; Tonkinson 1993)—but, more accurately, a *kastom* ontology with an attendant ontology politics. By this I mean a political theory according to which legitimate power in Makira, especially the power to understand and administer Makiran *kastom*, must be inborn not simply acquired and is thus, according to some, the rightful province of genuine Makirans only. Such a theory can give rise, furthermore, to what I will term a *kastom* mysticism the goal of which is similar in some respects to the goal of reunion with divinity, conceived of as a higher self, explicit in many religious and philosophical versions of metaphysical monism. Here, however, the goal is sympathetic insight into *kastom* through reconnection with the core essence of the island as greater essential self. Understanding themselves to be potential conduits of the greater *kastom* in which they inhere, some Makirans are seeking to be guided and to guide other Makirans by accessing the *kastom* within—both within the underground and within themselves. Their hope is to establish a Makiran state founded on the state of being Makiran, to realize true Makiran-ness as the fulfilment of an ontological condition that is simultaneously a divinely ordained destiny (for discussion of comparable processes among some Malaitans, see Kabutaulaka 2001).

For the ongoing anthropological enquiry into the relationship between *kastom* and agency (e.g. Otto and Pedersen 2005), the relevant resulting observation is that many Makirans do not experience themselves as free agents in relationship to the traditions of their island. *Kastom* is not something these Makirans know as a finite cultural heritage they own or over which they exercise full control. Even efforts at *kastom* recovery and codification cannot wholly capture it, and it is never alienable. Makirans may lose *kastom*, but *kastom* cannot lose them. It enfolds them and calls them back, revealing itself not only *to* them but also *in* them as part of their very

natures as Makirans. What Daniel de Coppet's (1985: 81) consultant, Aliki Nono'ohimae Eerehau, said of land among the 'Are'are of central and southern Malaita applies to *kastom* among Arosi: *kastom* owns people. The agency of the Makiran person and the agency encountered as *kastom* are two sides of the same ontological coin, in internal dialogue with one another through—among other points of reference—the figure of the underground.

As I conclude, however, this does not mean that there are no strategic operators on Makira employing *kastom* rhetoric to advance personal or local community interests. Rather, it suggests that even the obvious political manipulation of an icon of the force of *kastom*—such as the underground army—may sometimes also be an attempt to respond to a perceived vocation from that force. Calculated appeals to the notion of the underground may, at the same time, be the results of complex existential processes of working out the demands and promises of being Makiran and how best to lead Makira by following its dictates. Returning to the situation reported in the *Solomon Times Online* for August 4, 2007, I examine the case of one particular Makiran politician whose career illustrates this point. Strongly implicated in the fostering of expectations that celebration of a Chiefs Empowerment Day would occasion an epiphany of the underground, this politician and his activities challenge analytical attempts to distinguish between a strategic *kastom* operator and a *kastom* mystic. His discourse and aims, I show, are exemplary of how political innovations in Solomon Islands involve the movement of local cultural heritage back and forth, not only between the seeming opposites of instrumentalist and essentialist orientations, but also between the similarly elided spatial and processual opposites of centre and periphery, state and grassroots, top-down and bottom-up.

From matrilineal ancestors to underground army of the 'Motherland'

Among Arosi the idea that Makira is the site of a secret and extraordinary subterranean army is both old and new. Constituted as the colonial and neo-colonial transformations of many antecedent transformations of Arosi ideas about the power of autochthony, the underground army has long been a familiar element within a cumulative and dynamic modern Makiran folklore.

In its fully militarized form, the notion that a prodigious power somehow inheres within the island of Makira seems to have originated in the context of Maasina Rule, a post-World War II socio-political movement prevalent in the central and

south-east Solomons c. 1944-1952.² On Makira, Maasina Rule had entailed rumours that Americans fighting in the Pacific had established a modern ‘town’ in a vast hollowed-out cavern inside the island. These Americans, according to some rumours, were not foreigners but the descendants of Makiran women taken away by Euro-American explorers and labour traders in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (Scott 2007a: 105-129; 2008). At the height of the movement, some Arosi had hoped that these returning matrilineal cousins would assist Solomon Islanders to end British rule and achieve development and prosperity.

When I first conducted fieldwork in Arosi in the early 1990s, most people had dismissed these older rumours of an underground town—as well as other aspects of Maasina Rule—as having been misguided. I was surprised, therefore, when I returned in 2003 to find many people eager to discuss fresh rumours of what they termed a ‘security force’ said to come and go through a ‘door’ in the limestone cliffs at Rohu on the north-west end of the island. Alleged evidence of its activities included: nightly sorties over Makira by small low-flying aircraft between 1999 and 2002; glimpses in the bush and at Rohu of unknown people in military uniform; eerie lights coming from offshore and under the sea; passing submarines—some camouflaged as large marine animals—and a mysterious ship bearing the word ‘Motherland’ that seemed to be keeping the island under surveillance.

Some people furthermore suggested that this security force might be operating in league with beings known as *kakamora* (alternatively, *pwapwaronga* or *pwapwaangora*). Arosi folktales and purported eyewitness testimonies describe *kakamora* as small autochthonous people unique to Makira who live in caves and sinkholes and possess incredible physical strength, keen senses, and all-knowing wisdom (Fox 1924: 138-147). Some narratives suggest a link between *kakamora* and the preservation of the material integrity of Makira. In the most well-known tale about them, they prop up the western end of the island when it is about to sink (Fox 1924: 290); in another, they construct a sea wall to prevent inundation (Scott 2008: 143-146, 157). They also figure in at least one Arosi matrilineage origin narrative. All such narratives entail claims to autochthony through matrilineal descent from diverse phenomena said to have originated with the island. One example, which I have analyzed more fully elsewhere (Scott 2007a: 139-141), identifies a progenitor as having been a *kakamora*. In all of these representations, *kakamora* personify and reiterate the claim made in the Arosi name for Makira—Hanuato‘o—which means

‘The Strong Island’. Brought into relationship with renewed rumours about the underground army, however, these motifs appear to be undergoing reproductive reinterpretation in assertions that it is the *kakamora* who have taught the underground army its advanced military technology and have endowed it with their own super-normal attributes: omniscience, the ability to become invisible, and the prophylactic powers intrinsic to their autochthony.

In retrospect, I ought not to have been surprised by these reframings of the idea of the underground. In many respects, they make good moral and mythic Arosi sense as responses to the so-called ‘ethnic tension’, the period of civil conflict that disrupted Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2003 (Dinnen 2002; Fraenkel 2004; Kabutaulaka 2002; Moore 2004). Among the many causes of this conflict—which was localized mainly in and around Honiara—were disputes between those who see themselves as customary landowners on Guadalcanal and those they see as usurpers, especially economic migrants from the island of Malaita. The escalation of these disputes into coup, armed combat, and murder—conjoined with regional concerns about possible terrorist infiltration in an ‘unstable’ situation—resulted in the intervention of the Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in July 2003, a mission that remains in place today (Dinnen 2008; Kabutaulaka 2005; Moore 2007).

As onlookers to these events, my Arosi consultants have tended to sympathize with Guadalcanal land-claimants and to stereotype Malaitans negatively as inherently aggressive and grasping of both government positions and other people’s land and resources (cf. Dureau 1998; Gray 2002; Kabutaulaka 2001; Keesing 1994; Scales 2007). With the disruption of central government services and the breakdown of law and order that occurred during the ‘tension’, many Makirans experienced a heightened sense of vulnerability to the kinds of encroachments and depredations they believed Malaitans were perpetrating nearby on Guadalcanal and might soon bring to Makira. In this context, the old idea of a secret subterranean realm acquired new relevance as the domain of a security force, the purpose of which is to protect Makira from precisely this type of threat.

But the Maasina Rule-era rumour of a modern American town flourishing inside the island is not the only figure of power in the land informing current elaborations of the Makiran underground army. Equally important are Arosi assumptions about ancestors and their relationship to the Christian God, matrilineal

land, and *kastom*. It is chiefly as a scaled-up transformation of these assumptions, in fact, that the army acquires its character as a figure of a pan-Makiran *kastom* integral to a pan-Makiran ontology.³

Arosi experience their matrilineages as the bearers of autonomously arising, ontologically discrete categories of being. Arosi representations of primordiality depict diverse autochthonous phenomena—rocks, snakes, birds, spirits of the land, *kakamora* and other quasi-human beings—as existing independently in the island. In their initial condition, these originary entities lived in pre-social isolation from one another. Through processes of transformation and interrelation, they produced fully human beings whose activities of reproduction, place-making, and exchange gave rise to the diverse Makiran matrilineages emplaced in their theoretically unique and mutually exclusive territories. Despite these transformations and ongoing relationships, however, Arosi assert that each matrilineage—figured as an ever-extending umbilical cord—constitutes the unbroken continuation of a single, pure and autochthonous category of being.

A corollary to this Arosi experience of Makiran matrilineages as poly-ontological is an experience of Makiran *kastom* as territory-specific and thus likewise fundamentally plural. According to closely guarded genealogically ordered narratives, each matrilineage shaped and was shaped by the land that became its territory. Such narratives tell how lineage ancestors established villages, cleared areas for making gardens, planted or tended fruit and nut trees, and enshrined the bones of their dead. As these lineage pioneers came into mutually eliciting and defining relationships with the land and everything in it—especially a cumulative body of ancestors—they received, divined, and innovated the precepts and practices now thought of as the *ringeringe auhenua*, the *kastom* of each lineage in its land.⁴ Conditioned by a contingent matrilineal history, each territory-specific *kastom* entails distinguishing elements: conventions for rapport with ancestors; practical and verbal taboos associated with specific locales; a repertoire of personal names linking people to places, etc. These differences in *ringeringe* manifest the ontological differences thought to persist among the Makiran matrilineages, understood as transformations of an original plurality of island beings.

With their representations of matrilineal ontology and *kastom* as both fundamentally plural, Arosi accounts of how fully humanized and territorialized matrilineages came into being furthermore imply an ongoing relationship between

kastom and agency, within which agency is always both categorical and personal. Being an integral dimension of each ontological category, *kastom* may find expression in its category as a whole or in any of its parts. The territory-specific *ringeringe* of each matrilineage thus transpires continuously as the category interacts with itself via the fundamentally consubstantial agents of territorial land, local non-ancestral powers, plants, animals, ancestral pioneers, and the dead. These interactions parse and re-parse *ringeringe* as unique categorical character into *ringeringe* as tradition (knowable precepts, institutions, figural designs, practices, etc.), while simultaneously defining certain ancestors as those who, by their personal agency, innovated specific elements of heritage (names, shrines, locales, dances, taboos). Socially transmissible *ringeringe* is not the work of autonomous individuals; it is the product of a complex synergy among diversely manifesting agents within each category whose interactions (encounters, events, dreams, divinatory communications) and relations with other categories transmute essential categorical properties into propositions for living and cultural forms.⁵

All of that said, however, it is also the case that Arosi interpretations of Christianity are among a number of colonial and neo-colonial factors that clearly have the potential to subordinate these essential matrilineal, territorial and *kastom* differences to more encompassing levels of ontological unity. They often do so, however, in ways that reposition these older, still socially relevant differences as secondary rather than primary aspects of being (Scott 2005).

Arosi adhere to three main Christian denominations, and there remain today only a few elderly people who were not born into Christianity as their most immediate ancestral religion. Those living in the former Council Area still commonly referred to as Arosi 1 in the north and east are primarily Anglican, while most people in the former Council Area known as Arosi 2 in the south and west belong to the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC). Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) constitute a small minority cross-cutting this main denominational and former geopolitical divide.⁶

Apart from the SDA minority (see note 7 below), most Arosi—both laypeople and clergy—have long been at work on ethno-theological projects of rapprochement between their understandings of the pre-Christian past and Christianity (Scott 2005; 2007a: 301-326). Often asserting not merely consonance but virtual identity between the core content of *kastom* and the divine revelation contained in biblical religion, these projects regularly represent the God of the Bible as the true source of the

ringeringe (way/custom) of each matrilineage in its land. Implicit in Arosi discourses about such *ringeringe* is the claim that, whereas God revealed his will to Israel and Euro-Americans through Moses and the prophets, the Incarnation and the apostolic tradition, he gave the Makiran matrilineages equal access to knowledge of his will through endemic qualities, powers, and allegorical messages placed in their territories (cf. Rose 1996: 41-42).

Such claims to separate but equal *kastom* revelations can further seem to imply, however, that—local variations notwithstanding—each territory-specific *kastom* duplicates all others in at least some respects if each is the repository of God’s eternal universal way. Some Arosi make this explicit, saying that God mediated his *ringeringe* to Makirans, not through a code of norms and practices handed down from on high, but through Makira as a whole in the form of an essential, primordial, indelible quality—‘a good way of living’ (*baronga goro*)—that inheres in all things that have arisen in Makira, including the autochthonous progenitors themselves. This Makira-specific good way of living is thus the common inheritance of all autochthonous matrilineages, and, relative to it, the plurality of territory-specific *kastom* can begin to appear epiphenomenal.

In tension with Arosi representations of multiple ontologically disparate autochthonous categories, this interpretation can suggest that, just as the island and autochthony convey a common core *kastom*, they may also convey a common core ontology as well. Few Arosi attend to this tension, however, or to the fact that the notion of an island-wide good way of living can subordinate territory-specific *kastom* to higher levels of insular and universal *kastom*. Rather, many articulate ethno-theological constructions according to which God both placed his way in the island *and* made the matrilineages the special caretakers of distinctive versions of this way in their territories. In these both/and understandings, the plurality of territory-specific *kastom* is subtly encompassed within nested scales of divine revelation, but it is not lost.

Most non-SDA ethno-theological constructions portray the ancestral powers respected in the pre-Christian past as having been God’s deputies, whose primary role was to make known and enforce lineage and territory-specific *ringeringe* through signs, including retribution for infractions. Today many Arosi continue to regard these ancestors, known as *adaro*, as powerful moral agents enshrined in the land, who will defend the persons and customary privileges of their descendants vis-à-vis

strangers in their territory. Even in the early 1990s some people described these ancestral presences to me in military or para-military terms, explaining that they operate like radar systems or immigration control officers to police their territories and protect their descendants from potentially usurping or violating encroachments. *Adaro*, in other words, manifest *kastom* as the unique, God-given nature and efficacy of each matrilineal category in its territory.

It is important to emphasize that Arosi do not appear to conceive of the underground army as made up of, related to, or working in conjunction with ancestral *adaro*. Furthermore, although many Arosi expect *adaro* to be active in the land, I have never heard Arosi describe ancestors as carrying on an afterlife existence underground (but see Fox 1924: 234, 285). Nevertheless, analytically speaking, since the height of the ‘tension’ it has been as if Arosi are re-imagining the Maasina Rule-era idea of an underground town and its inhabitants as the insular-level analogue to their ancestral, territory-specific *adaro*. As these powers are to their respective territories, the underground army is a guardian entity policing the integrity of Makira—conceptualized as ‘Motherland’—and the rights of true Makirans within a nation-state undergoing crisis and its aftermath.

But the army is more than a border patrol. Like the *adaro*, it is a source as well as the force behind a distinctive way of life that is not merely the ‘law of the land’ but the law *in* the land. It is a bearer of *kastom*, according to accounts I garnered, in three related ways at once: it is the embodiment of true Makiran *kastom* because its personnel, like the *kakamora* with whom they are allied, enact and model true Makiran *kastom* in their language and behaviour; it is the physical locus of true Makiran *kastom* as a power concentrated at the core of the island; and it is the means by which true Makiran *kastom* will be restored to the surface. It is, in other words, a figure of *kastom* as a manifestation of the unique, God-given nature and efficacy of the island of Makira as a whole.⁷

This situation is both similar to and different from the one David Akin (2005) describes as prevalent—also since Maasina Rule—among the mountain Kwaio of Malaita, who have adamantly rejected Christianity. In an incisive contribution to recent debates on *kastom* and ‘the invention of tradition’, Akin analyzes the processes whereby *kastom* discourses have reconfigured Kwaio relations with their ancestors, demonstrating that *kastom* is cultural: the transformer and the transformed (cf. Sahlins 1999). He shows how *kastom* discourses preoccupied with codifying taboos

regulating women's bodily functions—a generic scale of *kastom* impinging on every household and an apt symbolic site at which mountain Kwaio as an embattled social body seek to regulate their boundaries with others—has foregrounded a generic category of pan-mountain Kwaio ancestors not previously salient in Kwaio moral consciousness:

In the past, there was no conception of a single 'Kwaio religion' across the area. Rather, distinctive composites of ancestral spirits and their taboos distinguished individuals and communities across the region, highlighting diversity, division, and structures of complex cross-cutting linkages rather than any overall unity. They still do this. But today 'The Ancestors' as an undifferentiated group have also come to symbolize the whole of mountain Kwaio society, a social entity that had no conscious existence as such until the colonial era. (Akin 2005: 199; cf. Burt 1982; 1994: 215; Naitoro 1993: 130-132)

Rather than as ancestors, who remain for Arosi icons of essential matrilineal and territorial difference, Arosi figure the character and active power of pan-Makiran *kastom* as an underground army. But despite this difference, as with 'The Ancestors' in relation to the mountain Kwaio, it might well be said that this army 'symbolizes' an insular Makiran identity, an identity that may have had little or no 'conscious existence as such until the colonial era' and that is still very much in the making within the social and political dynamics of the neo-colonial multi-ethnic nation-state (cf. Keesing 1989: 21). At the same time, however, from the point of view of those Arosi who engage with it, the image of the army offers more than a Makiran identity to be worn before others. It suggests a living *kastom* that is increasingly presumed to arise from their literal ground of being—underpinning their still important but now potentially subordinated matrilineal selves—even as it impinges on them as an overarching insular power with which they interact.

***Kastom* politics as ontology politics**

This is to say that, within the incipient category of Makiran-ness, the relationship between *kastom* and agency is developing as a scaled-up analogue to the relationship between territory-specific *ringeringe* and agency long modelled as operative within each matrilineal category. For many Arosi today, Makiran *kastom* is part of the essential nature of all true Makirans; it is a power that inheres in them in the same way that it inheres in all things autochthonous to their island: stones, endemic species,

non-ancestral ‘wild’ *adaro*, apical ancestral entities, *kakamora*, and now the underground. At any time, therefore, Makiran *kastom* may become manifest through the agency of any of these forms, at any of these interactive and co-conditioning scales.

Most Makirans presume that the *kastom* active in them is essentially other vis-à-vis the multiple forms of *kastom* active in people from other islands or regions; some Makirans, furthermore presume that their distinctive *kastom* entails—even demands—a *kastom* politics that is, more fundamentally, an ontology politics. This can consist in two key assumptions: first, that any truly autochthonous person of the island, regardless of his or her mastery of *kastom* as received tradition, has the potential to become an authoritative source of a living, renewable *kastom*; and second, that such a person is to be preferred—indeed, *is* preferred *by* the island—to hold, or at least discern who should hold, positions of power impinging on Makira. Such confidence in an essential affinity between a true person of the island and Makiran *kastom* does not depend on engagement with the figure of the underground, however. It informs other *kastom* revival discourses and initiatives as well. Accordingly, in this section I elaborate how this political theory is evident both beyond and in relation to ideas about the underground in ways that are shaping Arosi participation in democratic processes at every level of government.

The most explicit formulations of a Makiran politics of ontology that I encountered arose in connection with the imminent implementation of a political innovation known as the New Community Governance Regime 2006 (cf. Alasia 2008: 140). This Regime, in brief, comprises a set of ordinances for the creation and coordination of a complex range of village, ward, and provincial councils, authorities, and programmes. Among other things, it provides for every electoral ward to empower a Ward Council of Chiefs and to send one Ward Chief to serve on a Great Council of Chiefs in an advisory capacity to the existing Provincial Assembly. It was the inauguration of this Regime, in fact, that stood directly behind the preparations for a Chiefs Empowerment Day referred to in the *Solomon Times Online* news brief quoted above.

Ontology politics came to the surface when people, who to my knowledge have no particular interest in the figure of the underground, shared their views on how this Regime should be put into practice. One man, for example, expressed to me his concern that the people put forward to serve on the Ward Councils of Chiefs

prescribed by the Regime ought exclusively to be *sae auhenua*, people who can trace their descent from the putatively autochthonous matrilineages of the island. Ideally, they should be like him: ‘true’ (*ha’amori*)—by which he meant descended from such exogamous matrilineages through both mother and father. This man has been making a study of *kastom* with older Arosi for many years and is a clerk on a local ‘custom court’ that is attempting to recruit younger members and train them in *kastom* knowledge. Yet for him, such acquired knowledge alone cannot qualify one to judge *kastom* matters. Only a *sae auhenua*, he said, has the gentle, accommodating, and mild disposition necessary to respect, understand, and uphold Makiran *kastom* properly.⁸ Similarly, another man, who spoke at a village workshop devoted to explaining how the Regime would work (see further discussion of this meeting below) argued that the Great Council of Chiefs ought to have veto power over acts of the Provincial Assembly on the following grounds:

We want to bring back to life the *auhenua* [autochthonous] government. So if the Provincial Assembly passes a bill that does not follow the will of the island, the Great Council of Chiefs should have veto power. These [chiefs] are the *auhenua* of the island.

This idea that an *auhenua* person can be a conduit of ‘the will of the island’ constitutes, I suggest, a kind of *kastom* mysticism—a term I employ, not in a pejorative or dismissive sense, but in a specific analytical sense to denote an orientation to *kastom* as integral to one’s own being. Makiran *kastom* mysticism is literal identity politics: the political privileging of one who enjoys identity of being with Makira. The concept of the true person of the island, in other words, is as much a figure of the agency of *kastom* as the underground or *kakamora*. Such a person is another site, at the most intimate scale, where *kastom* lies hidden but can never die out. Because *kastom* is a quality and a way of being that was instilled by God in the island at its inception, it pervades all things Makiran and is always potentially available for fresh elicitations and personal epiphanies (cf. Bonnemaïson 1994: 322-323).⁹

Clearly, the figure of the underground army is not indispensable to or definitive of the Makiran mystical quest for reunion with lost *kastom*. Rather, as a figure nearly congruent with the scale of the island as a whole, it is a point of reference through which Makirans can experience *kastom* as an encompassing stream

of being in which they live and move and have their being, and which lives and moves and has its being in them. The army is both out there to be encountered and viscerally, intuitively linked to the true Makiran by virtue of this continuous closed ontological loop. An apt Arosi paraphrasing of a mystical reading of Luke 17:21 might be ‘the underground is within you’.

To illustrate this point and further develop what I mean by *kastom* mysticism, I turn now to the case of one Arosi man who told me that he is considering standing for election to the national parliament in order to serve what he understands to be the underground army’s peace-making agenda. Identifying himself as ‘a true person of Makira’, he suggested that his political ambitions are inspired by a sense of vocation from God and Makira, mediated through the agency of the underground with which he hopes eventually to communicate. My interlocutor in this instance was a young Anglican in his thirties from north-east Arosi who had been working for seven years in Honiara when I met and interviewed him there.

Our conversation took place on the evening of what has become known as ‘Black Tuesday’—April 18, 2006—the day Honiara’s Chinatown was burned and looted following the announcement of a new national government (Alasia 2008; Allen 2008; Kabutaulaka and Kabutaulaka 2007). In this context, which seemed to threaten a return to violent civil ‘tension’, this man confided his conviction that Makira holds the answer to the problem of civil discord in Solomon Islands. ‘We people of Makira can sort out the lasting peace in Solomon Islands’, he said. ‘Makira can do that. I believe this strongly, because we people of Makira are peacemakers.’

When I asked him how Makira could bring peace, he began circuitously to approach the topic of the underground. Eventually he answered that on Makira ‘we have a strange thing, like a *mamaani usuri* (a handed-down account of supposed actual events); people call it *bahai nai ano* (the underground).’ Then he cautioned:

[B]ut it is very sensitive, Scott. It is very sensitive, as I’ve told you. It is my culture (*kalsa*), it is my culture, it is our security. So when I like to tell the whole story I don’t feel comfortable, because it is an international global base and I think it stands ready for things to come in the future.

The future this man anticipates is ‘another tension’, ‘another crisis’. But there will not be ‘another RAMSI to come’, he predicted. Rather, ‘there is a peacemaker already here in Solomon Islands’ that will be more efficacious than RAMSI; the

underground army will emerge and succeed finally in bringing order to Solomon Islands.

The army will succeed, he suggested, because it has harnessed the power of the true Makiran *kastom* that is synonymous with the *kakamora*. ‘I think they use the *kakamora*’, he said. ‘That’s the only power they’re using.’ He soon went on to equate the *kakamora* with the ‘culture’ of Makira: ‘I say Makira is a special island. Most provinces have their own culture, but we Makirans have *kakamora*.’ They ‘hold the real *kastom* of Makira.’ It is this man’s theory that the white people in the underground are Europeans who have ‘adopted’ this culture. Like the *kakamora*, therefore, they are now endowed with special abilities. They are in control of ‘strong power’. They can ‘disappear and appear’. And they have become ‘very wise’; they know the true Makiran *kastom* that alone, according to this man, can end disputes and bring lasting peace to the Solomons.

Before this can happen, however, a leader who is ‘truly from Makira’ must prepare the island for its role as peacemaker by helping Makirans recover their true *kastom*. The Europeans in the underground have adopted true Makiran *kastom*, and now—as this man put it—‘it becomes active to them.’ Then he added: ‘But not to us, because we have a different culture; we don’t know *kastom*. We’re all over the place now. So, we have to go back to the original culture which they live according to.’ If Makirans return to their *kastom*, he claimed, it will become a source of power for them as well; they will become like the underground army and the *kakamora*. Makira will then be ready to take its rightful place as benevolent leader and peace-keeping ‘Motherland’ to the rest of the Solomons.

To this end, this man contemplates whether he might be the leader Makira requires, even though he acknowledges that he is not well versed in Makiran *kastom*. ‘I’m very young and I want to learn *kastom*’, he told me, ‘but I can’t, because I have a job.’ He is very disturbed by his own theory that Europeans working with the *kakamora* in the underground have accessed the power of this *kastom*, while he and other Makirans have lost it. At the same time, however, he credits himself as ‘a person of Makira’ with special powers of insight and prognostication and seems to regard being ‘truly from Makira’ as the chief asset he needs in order to lead Makira to *kastom* revival. Moreover, the *kastom* revival he envisions will rely not only on the knowledge of ‘old people’, many of whom have ‘lost the original culture’, but also on the experiences of younger Makirans—such as a cousin of his, to whom, he says, the

powers at work in the underground are already revealing *kastom* anew. Thus, in spite of his youth and ignorance, and on the strength of such signs of spontaneous renewal, he intends, he told me, to seek a seat in parliament at the next general election and to campaign on a platform of *kastom* restoration.

His plans were still in the making, however. He was not yet sure what the underground wants him to do. He was looking for ‘evidence’, for a sign from the underground that his interpretation of the situation in the Solomons is correct. He said he wanted to return to Makira first to look into it, literally, and seemed confident that the army would admit him. ‘It will show me a signal directly, and then I’ll know what to do and how to go about it.’

In the months prior to my interview with this man, I had been resident in Arosi during the campaigning and polling for the April 5, 2006 general election that eventuated in ‘Black Tuesday’. In that context, too, I found that the figure of the underground was a focus for *kastom* mysticism underpinning some people’s participation in democratic processes, but with significantly different potential implications for ontology politics. Attending campaign events and speaking with voters, I learned that some Arosi were reading the platforms of various candidates in terms of their own speculations and hopes regarding the underground. But these voters were scrutinizing candidates not so much for their supposed Makiran ontology quotient, as for signs that they might—either with or without their own knowledge—be instruments of the underground’s larger purposes. Their *kastom* mysticism lay, not in insisting that their future MP be a true person of the island (or in aspiring to stand for office themselves), but in taking it upon themselves to discern signs of who might be the army’s chosen means of advancing the destiny of Makira. They looked for supposed allegorical correspondences between aspects of various candidates or their rhetoric and elements of well-known Arosi folktales, interpretations of Arosi place names, distinctive Makiran landmarks such as caves associated with the *kakamora* or the many distinctive limestone formations suggestive of meaningful forms in the vicinity of the ‘door’ to the underground at Rohu. Some voters, for example, understood the terms of one candidate’s agenda for *kastom* revitalization as containing messages that, if elected, the candidate would work to advance the time when the original *kastom* of Makira preserved by the *kakamora* would re-emerge.

Such acceptance of the possibility that someone whose Makiran ontology might be cast into doubt could nevertheless serve the underground army and the cause

of Makiran *kastom* doubtlessly owes something to biblical narratives that depict God making use of the nations to further his plans for Israel (e.g. Isaiah 45:1-7). At the same time, this approach to choosing a leader likewise appears consonant with ethnographic evidence and ongoing understandings regarding how chiefs were chosen in the past (Fox 1924: 181-190; cf. Scott 2000; 2007a: 75-82). A traditional chief exercised authority over a polity comprising multiple exogamous matrilineages, but situated on land putatively held by the *burunga i auhenua*, the one matrilineage uniquely autochthonous to that particular territory. But such a chief was not necessarily a member of the matrilineage on whose land he managed inter-lineage sociality. His authority to administer the *ringeringe auhenua* of that place rested on an analogous presupposition that the *burunga i auhenua*, as agents of their specific *ringeringe*, could anoint a non-*auhenua* chief who would follow the will of their land for the benefit of everyone settled in it.

Additionally, beyond the context of the ballot box, evidence that the figure of the underground is mediating *kastom* mysticism in Arosi political life is also legible in the expectations with which some Makirans, as reported in the *Solomon Times Online*, awaited the Chiefs Empowerment Day in August 2007. The anticipation surrounding this event suggests that some *kastom* mystics were operating with the assumption that the army will respond to political measures that realize elements of its *kastom* restoration and regional-autonomy agenda for Makira. Again, this perspective looks familiar; it resembles some forms of biblical messianism. Just as some forms of biblical messianism assert that the messiah will come only after human beings have actively prepared the way by returning to strict observance of God's law, so some Makirans appear to regard the raising of *kastom*, especially the empowerment of chiefs, to be incumbent on human agency as a necessary precondition for the epiphany of the army. As the Chiefs Empowerment Day drew near, some people seemed, in fact, to entertain the possibility that the simple act of installing neo-customary leaders could summon forth the agents of the underground. But more fundamentally, this perspective is consistent with an ontology politics according to which the Makiran person and the underground army can work in tandem as different modalities of a unified category of being qua field of agency to bring about the resurgence of Makiran *kastom*. By giving political allegiance to those policies that promise to 'bring back to life the *auhenua* government'—wherever and by whomever

they may be initiated—the Makiran *kastom* mystic can quietly understand her or himself to be hastening the advent of the army and the fulfilment of Makiran destiny.

Politician J: the underground army across centre and periphery

Shortly after it appeared, the news item quoted at the opening of this chapter prompted several unverifiable assertions, posted to an online platform, that a certain well-known Arosi politician had been among those ‘senior citizens’ who had actively promoted ‘belief’ in a ‘secret provincial army’. It is not my aim here to prove these assertions true or false. Rather, by examining data from my field research that tend towards affirmation of these assertions, my aim is to offer a concluding case study of a person whose instrumentalist, yet perhaps equally essentialist, engagement with the figure of the underground appears to be motivating political innovations that are impinging on the configuration of the Solomon Islands nation-state. Highlighting recent phases in the career of this politician—whom I call Politician J—I trace how he has tacked back and forth between national and grassroots politics, enlisting the centre to facilitate the goals of the periphery and working from the top down to allow Makiran *kastom* gradually to emerge, quite literally, from the ground up.

Politician J stood for a seat in the Solomon Islands national parliament in the 2000 West Makira by-election that followed the death of Solomon S. Mamaloni (1943-2000) and again in the general election of 2001. *Ex post facto* data that I collected in 2003 pertaining to these elections indicate that Politician J and his supporters campaigned on a platform that closely associated Politician J with the underground army. Regarding who exactly articulated these associations—Politician J himself or only his supporters—I heard conflicting accounts. One of my Arosi consultants said he had heard Politician J openly claim to be able to tap into the power of the underground. Another consultant, however—a man who says that Politician J and his supporters had frequently solicited him for his vote—told me that, although Politician J did not make overt references to the underground, his supporters did so regularly in one-on-one asides to voters. When I interviewed some of these same supporters, their accounts of what they had said corroborated on many points the accounts of those whose votes they had been seeking to secure.

Some of this politician’s supporters, for example, had likened Mamaloni and their candidate to Moses and Joshua (hence, ‘Politician J’) as men whose successive leadership would bring Makira out of the crisis of the civil ‘tension’—understood as a

period of bondage under Malaitans equivalent to the bondage of Israel in Egypt—and into peaceful prosperity as a Promised Land.¹⁰ While he was in office, they had said, Mamaloni had smuggled money and weapons to the underground as a ‘preparation’ that would serve as a defence against Malaitan encroachment and a foundation for Makiran development. They had furthermore intimated that Mamaloni is not really dead, but has gone to the underground where he sits enthroned as ‘King Solomon’ at the head of the army. The implication was that, just as Joshua had succeeded Moses, Politician J, if elected, would succeed Mamaloni and, garnering the stored wealth of the ‘preparation’, establish ‘Makira State’ as the ‘Motherland’ from which blessings would flow to the whole Solomons archipelago.

After a brief period in national office, Politician J next secured election to the Makira/Ulawa Provincial Assembly where he became one of the principal architects of the previously mentioned New Community Governance Regime 2006. While the Regime was still in the process of development and approval, the newly elected Prime Minister, Manasseh Sogavare, launched his ‘Bottom-Up Approach’, a policy designed to involve grassroots communities in governance and development through the devolution of ‘powers, functions and decision making to the periphery’ (Sogavare 2006; see also Alasia 2008: 137; Kabutaulaka and Kabutaulaka 2007: 602). As indicated above, the New Community Governance Regime allowed for local communities to revive traditional forms of leadership and customary practices by means of a two-tiered system of chiefs’ councils comprising multiple Ward Councils of Chiefs feeding a single Great Council of Chiefs with direct access to the Provincial Assembly. While seeking support for the Regime, Politician J and others had explicitly promoted it as in line with Sogavare’s national policy.¹¹ Then, throughout mid to late 2006, once the Regime had been slated for ‘gazetting’ and was about to be implemented, Politician J, together with another prominent provincial politician, made a tour of their constituencies and held a series of workshops to explain this ‘bottom-up’ scheme to grassroots elders and village leaders.

I attended one such workshop in the north-west Arosi village of Heuru in September 2006. The meeting was chaired by Politician J’s associate. He opened with an explanation of how the Regime was—among other things—a framework for allowing communities to identify ‘traditional leaders’ according to their own criteria and for positioning these leaders as a ‘consultative link’ between the people and the Provincial Assembly. The purpose of this scheme, he said, was to ‘make *kastom*

grow back so that our identity will always be here, and then we will look for development.’ Referring to a diagram chalked on a blackboard, he laid out the basic structure of the Regime. Speaking of the Ward Councils of Chiefs, he elaborated that their ‘most important’ work would be to ‘coordinate genealogies and the *kastom* belonging to the ward, to straighten lineage and tribal rights, revive good *kastom*, and write every *kastom*, even if it isn’t a good one, because it reflects our identity.’ As for the Great Council of Chiefs, it would have only an advisory function vis-à-vis the Provincial Assembly. He acknowledged that the plan was not ‘perfect’, but indicated that the chiefs would ‘later be given more responsibilities and more entitlements.’

A day-long discussion ensued. Then, acting as vice-chair, Politician J stood up and offered a closing statement that amounted to the reportage of a portentous sign. He observed that, ‘one of our leaders for this vision’ died ‘on the third day ... after the announcement [of the Regime] had been made.’ But before he died, the leader had made this pronouncement: ‘I go now, but what is taking place ... is what I wanted. Children work to see its fruition.’ Intensifying this message, Politician J concluded with: ‘So we have to nurture and mature it to see its fruits.’

With these remarks Politician J was, I suggest, indirectly referring back to and developing remarks made by another workshop participant. Spokesmen for the participants from the two electoral wards involved had just given their summary responses to the workshop, and in this context a leading man from one ward had said:

It is a historic day for us. ... It has been the cry of our forefathers. Maasina Rule isn’t something to make fun of; it was the beginning of what this workshop is about. But the colonial government stamped down on them, and some of our relatives died in prison. I want to pay tribute to them. Thank you for coming to do the workshop. We highly value this workshop.

The phrase ‘the cry of our forefathers’ functioned subtly to compare the Maasina Rule period, in which some movement leaders were imprisoned, to the period of Israel’s bondage in Egypt (cf. Exodus 3:7; 6:5). When the speaker then paid tribute to these leaders, this parallelism suggested that, like Moses and other prophets of Israel, they had foreseen and laid the foundations for liberating transformations that would come only after they were gone. Heightening this theme, Politician J’s closing remarks implicitly cast the leader who had recently died as the last prophet of the Maasina Rule era whose death and blessing of the future marked the closing of an old era of

preparation and looked forward to a new era of fruition.¹² Like Moses (Deuteronomy 33-34) and Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), this leader stands at the threshold of fulfilment, glimpsing it and commending it to the care of others before making his exit.

Reiterating the same providential history narrated in his supporters' construal of himself as Joshua in relationship to Mamaloni as Moses, Politician J was presenting himself and the other architects of the Regime as heirs to the vision of the Maasina Rule leaders, ready to take Makira into the next phase of a divinely ordained destiny.

Such a providential reading of events, alone, is not proof that Politician J hopes that the underground army will intervene to secure the destiny of Makira. It is possible that he was simply seeking to encourage popular take-up of the Regime by infusing it with a sense of sacred gravitas. At the same time, however, he would have been aware that some listeners would make a connection between this providential reading of history and expectations about the underground army. He was addressing 'those who have ears to hear' and inviting them to read the underground into his remarks. It is significant, I think, that when I spoke with him during a break in the workshop, he told me that he hopes one day to take a higher degree; his proposed thesis topic, he said, is 'the wisdom of the *kakamora*'.

Almost a year later the imminent crowning, via a Chiefs Empowerment Day, of what Politician J had termed 'this vision' briefly brought national attention to Makira, not only as the locus of strange rumours, but also as the seat of one of many sporadically active secessionist movements in Solomon Islands and beyond. 'Makira Ulawa Province has been, over the past few years, calling for independence from the rest of Solomon Islands', writes Ralph Sao (2007). 'It is still unclear,' he continues, 'whether this idea of a secret army has anything to do with its desire to secede.' But what exactly is unclear to this journalist? Astutely, Sao seems to suspect a connection between a secret provincial army and the Makiran will to secede. Might such an otherwise logical connection be rendered unclear because the expectation that the army will arrive on the occasion of the installation of neo-customary chiefs seems so inappropriate? Is it not the case, Sao may be assuming, that such concessions to local *kastom* are supposed to strengthen national cohesion, not dismantle it? Why would a secessionist army appear just at the moment of local *kastom* recognition?

There is indeed something wrong with this picture according to the wisdom that has guided much national response to local autonomy movements. As in other Melanesian contexts, in Solomon Islands, calls for independence from several island

groups go back to the period of preparation for decolonization and have continued intermittently (Premdas, Steeves, and Larmour 1983; Standish 1979). Such calls were renewed during the crisis of the civil ‘tension’ at the turn of the millennium, and a number of provinces, including Makira/Ulawa, declared their intentions to secede from the nation-state. In response to these centrifugal pulls, the national government has sought to contain regional autonomy movements by expediting previously proposed plans to implement a federal system with various forms of devolved government (Moore 2004: 156-160; Nanau 2002; Scales 2007: 204-209).

But the seeming misfit between expectations of a secessionist army in conjunction with such devolution measures, supports the view that this model of opposite-tending central and peripheral pulls and goals, while accurate to some extent, does not tell the whole story. In this instance, it might appear that state- and elite-sanctioned initiatives to strengthen the nation-state by reviving ‘traditional’ chiefship—conceived of as a primordially unifying pan-Solomons cultural heritage with local variations (LiPuma 1997; cf. Babadzan 1988: 211)—inadvertently revealed that some Makirans thought reformation of specifically Makiran forms of chiefship might, to the contrary, mobilize the Makiran underground army to lead their province to independence. As the trajectory of Politician J confirms, however, it is impossible to separate the national from the provincial agendas at work here, or even the provincial-level agendas from those of ‘grassroots’ communities (cf. White 1997). The centres of government often include people from village communities—such as Politician J—some of whom may have sought power in the centres precisely in order to further visions of separatism informed by local elements and icons of *kastom*—such as the figure of the underground army—in the name of visions of greater national cohesion through federalism or the creation of laws and institutions that respect *kastom* plurality. Seemingly top-down, stabilizing, ideologically ‘secular’ agendas can conveniently camouflage—and more importantly may better be understood as having been shaped by—grassroots agendas with literally eccentric aims.

The pathways and policies of Politician J appear to constitute this reality. The political innovation of the New Community Governance Regime 2006 and the rumours that preceded the Chiefs Empowerment Day to which it gave rise were the outcomes, I suggest, of just such a complex mix of representations and objectives. They were the products of a partially hidden, partially revealed ontology politics that

is enlisting the state in the quests of local *kastom* mystics and inscribing the quests of local *kastom* mystics on the state.

Acknowledgments

This chapter is based on research carried out in 1992-93, 2003, and 2006. I thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the Social and Economic Research Council of the UK (Grant No: RES-000-23-1170) for their generous support. An earlier version of the paper was presented in the session ‘Cultural Heritage and Political Innovation’ at the Seventh Conference of the European Society for Oceanists, Verona, Italy, July 2008. I thank the session participants for their constructive engagement with the paper and especially the session organizers and editors of this volume, Edvard Hviding and Knut Rio. I am also grateful to Debra McDougall, Krista Ovist, Harry Walker, and the anonymous reviewer of this volume, all of whose observations and suggestions were invaluable for the development of this chapter. Thanks also to Mina Moshkeri Upton for producing the map at short notice. My main debt is to the people of Makira who have given me such generous research assistance and hospitality.

Endnotes

1. There appear to be many parallels between this transformation and the emergence of a distinction between *kalsa* and *kastam* in Manus Province (Papua New Guinea), as analyzed by Dalsgaard and Otto (this volume). Although I do not detect a similar differential use of the Solomon Islands Pijin terms *kalsa* and *kastom* among Arosi, there is nevertheless a tension, comparable to that between *kalsa* and *kastam* in Manus, between invocations of pan-Makiran *kastom* and the demands of matrilineal and territory-specific *kastom*. I would emphasize, however, that the ongoing tension in Arosi lies as much between two experiences of ontology as ‘between two types of morality’.
2. For accounts and analyses of Maasina Rule, see Burt 1994; Keesing 1978; Laracy 1983; Naitoro 1993; Scott 2007a.
3. The following paragraphs build on the analysis of the relationship among land, lineages, and ontology as laid out in Scott 2007a; cf. 2007b.
4. Arosi use the Arosi word *ringeringe* and the Pijin word *kastom* interchangeably. By my observation, however, people of north and east Arosi tend to prefer *ringeringe*, while people of south and west Arosi are perhaps more likely to say *kastom*, even in Arosi language speech.
5. It is within this level of the matrilineal and territory-specific category of being that the model of the Melanesian person as ‘fractal’ (e.g. Wagner 1991) or as a ‘partible’ ‘dividual’ (e.g. Strathern 1988) undergoing constant processes of ‘decomposition’ (e.g. Mosko 1992) is most unambiguously applicable to Arosi sociality. Despite evidence of the increasing social relevance of a pan-Makiran ontological category, however, it should not be assumed without qualification that Arosi view their

matrilineal and territory-specific categories as similarly precipitated out of an always already composite pleroma of relationships. Rather, within the recent ethnographic past at least, Arosi poly-ontology has tended to put the primordial categorical parts before any socio-cosmic completeness (see Scott 2007a; 2007b).

6. Arosi began accepting the Anglican Christianity of the Melanesian Mission in the 1850s. The South Sea Evangelical Mission (now SSEC) established its first school in Arosi in the early 1900s. Arosi SDA consultants recalled that men from the western Solomons and Guadalcanal introduced their denomination to Arosi in the mid to late 1930s.

7. There is an important exception to this assertion. In Arosi 2 I interviewed a locally well-known SDA woman, who says she has been approached by the underground army and that it is the army of Satan. As I hope to explore elsewhere, this inversion of the moral value assigned to the army may be correlated with the fact that, relative to their Anglican and SSEC neighbours, most SDA Arosi maintain a negative orientation towards *kastom* and many things associated with the pre-Christian past. Accordingly, this woman experiences the army as trying to ‘get her’, or win her for Satan, much as she sees aspects of *kastom* as pre-Christian error with which Satan formerly deceived her ancestors and into which she might be tempted to lapse.

8. The distinction made here between Makiran *kastom* as a received body of traditions and Makiran *kastom* as a general moral quality or disposition should not be read as the anthropological distinction between *kastom* as knowledge (Gegeo 1994) and *kastom* as ‘contentless symbol’ (Keesing 1982: 299). Several of my consultants differentiated between *kastom* as various forms of transmissible knowledge and *kastom* as ‘good character’ or ‘a good way of being’. They tended furthermore to treat the latter as an indispensable underpinning to the former.

9. According to lineage origin narratives I learned in the early 1990s, *kakamora* are simply one among several types of originary beings. Yet contemporary Arosi discourses appear increasingly to assimilate all apical progenitors to shape-shifting *kakamora* under alternative forms (e.g. rocks, snakes, endemic species), implying that all true Makirans are in some sense the descendants of *kakamora*. Given this conflation of originary beings into the one autochthonous Makiran category of *kakamora*, it could be said that, for Makirans, the new insular *kastom* mysticism is about getting in touch with your inner *kakamora*.

10. This comparison of Mamaloni to Moses reflects the unparalleled local importance of Mamaloni as an Arosi person who achieved national and international prominence. Before Solomon Islands became independent in 1978, he served as the first Chief Minister (1974-1976); after independence, he was Prime Minister for three periods (1981-1984, 1989-1993, 1994-1997). At the time of his death in January 2000, he was one of only two people to have held the seat for West Makira since the formation of the constituency. Not all Arosi view Mamaloni in this unequivocally positive light, yet even those critical or ambivalent about him reflect on his career as something phenomenal indicative of larger forces at work with as yet uncertain consequences for Makira.

11. This intertwining of national and provincial initiatives also marked the eventual celebration of the Chiefs Empowerment Day on August 17, 2007. By invitation from the province, Sogavare attended the celebration, at which he commended the provincial government's initiative as 'the essence of sustainable development that is driven from bottom-up' (Solomon Islands Government 2007). At this event Sogavare himself was installed as an honorary paramount chief of Makira (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation 2007). It is possible that some Makirans, contemplating these proceedings, interpreted Sogavare's words and participation as tantamount to signs of approbation from the underground army, despite its failure to materialize. It is widely known that Sogavare claims to have had conversation with Mamaloni since Mamaloni's death in 2000 (Sasako 2001, 2007). Many Makirans take this as evidence in support of the theory that Mamaloni is not really dead, and some may furthermore speculate that Sogavare's supposed meeting with the post-mortem Mamaloni indicates that Sogavare—although an SDA member from Choiseul—is an instrument of the army's agenda.

12. I was unable to confirm the identity of this recently deceased leader, but it is likely that it was either Talman Mona'aro, who died on July 13, 2006, or Kerehote, who died on August 27, 2006. Both men were among those Makiran Maasina Rule leaders, alluded to earlier in the workshop, who had been imprisoned in Honiara during the movement. Mona'aro had furthermore been injured in a notorious truck accident that killed two of his fellow Makiran inmates en route to a prison-labour site on December 24, 1949; a third Makiran died later owing to complications arising from his injuries.

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