A TEXT IN ITS CONTEXT:
F.E. WILLIAMS AND THE VAILALA MADNESS

Introduction

The Vailala Madness of the Gulf Division of Papua New Guinea (c.1919-c.1930) has often been cited by scholars as a vivid example of a cargo cult, but it has seldom been studied in detail. The only person who paid much attention to it during the period of its existence was Francis Edgar Williams, who was the 'government anthropologist' in that area. The major problem with studying the Vailala Madness is understanding it through texts such as his and learning how to use these texts for a more general understanding of such 'revitalization movements'.

This article gives considerable attention to Williams' history and career, since the information he provided was selected and shaped by his complex character and the social and cultural milieu from which he came. This will highlight some of the problems involved in using the texts on the Vailala Madness as a basis for contemporary theories about the development of revitalization movements and cargo cults.

Francis Edgar Williams

Francis Edgar Williams held the appointment of 'government anthropologist' to Papua New Guinea from 1922 until his death in a plane

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crash in 1943. His story has largely been ignored in anthropology. This is due in part to the way his theoretical orientation changed over time and the way his writing reflected a constant battle to reconcile his job with his anthropological background. The problem Williams confronted is one faced by any anthropologist interested in doing applied work: how does one reconcile the pervasive anthropological tendency to support an attitude of cultural relativism and the observer's role as a researcher with a government position which exists to make political as well as cultural decisions for others? Another reason is surely that because he stayed clear of university life he had no students to reinforce and remember his contribution. Regardless of what kept him out of the anthropological limelight, unravelling Williams' work by placing it in its historical context and in relation to Williams' personal experience will, as we shall see, be quite helpful in understanding the Vailala Madness texts.

a) His Upbringing and Education

Williams was born in Malvern, South Australia, in 1893. He was a student at the University of Adelaide, winning top honours and the Tennyson Medal for Classics, and was elected to a Rhodes Scholarship in 1915. He enlisted in the army and served as a lieutenant in France during World War I and as a captain in Persia. Although he never explained in his writing why he became interested in anthropology and Papua New Guinea, it is possible that his army travels and his upbringing in Australia made some contribution. After the war he went to Balliol College, Oxford on his Rhodes Scholarship, his tutor being Robert Ranulph Marett (Elkin 1943: 100).

A review of Marett's work reveals some appreciation for the functionalism which was in vogue in the 1920s, as well as a deep interest and admiration for Edward Burnett Tylor who, with his stress on origins and evolution, predated the functionalist school. But Marett by no means disregarded the move in anthropological theory away from the evolutionary, developmental, Tylorian approach towards the synchronic approach of functionalism. As he wrote:

> Fortunately it is beginning to dawn on the representatives of civilization that an imported faith cannot be substituted for a home-grown credulity except by means of a slow and deliberate process of psychological grafting. Such a technique can be mastered only by the help of an anthropology which applies to each primitive society what is known as the 'functional' method of studying their indigenous culture ... [we] describe this method as 'holistic' .... It is opposed ... to a method of origins which traces the back-history of the various factors (Marett 1932: 104-5).

This statement distinguishes the methodology of Tylor from that of the functional school, but it also implies than an 'imported faith' can be implanted via the functional method. This is a curious notion, since a study of indigenous culture using the strict

functional method which was so enthusiastically practised at that time would have insisted that everything observed was vital to the culture as a whole and could not be changed without the whole system falling apart. What Marett was implying but not articulating was a 'modified functionalism' which was to become a carefully presented theoretical focus in Williams' later works.[1]

Marett favourably acknowledged his student's 'modified functionalism' as a necessity for successful administration. He said Williams' approach 'hits a happy mean between too much and too little sympathy with the native point of view' (1928: ix) and that

> in its capacity of protector of aborigines, the administration must save the native from himself no less than from inopportune interference, whether well-meaning or not, on the part of the white man ... indulgence tempered with firmness offers the only means of reconciling stone-age humanity to its new lot (ibid.: x).

Marett's interests in this modified functionalism, a respect for native ways balanced with administrative interference to 'save the native from himself' and his great respect for Tylor all come out clearly in Williams' work.

The only other direct academic influence on Williams that can be discovered in the literature was a series of seminars he took with Malinowski in 1934 which is mentioned in a footnote in the obituary Elkin wrote on Williams (1943: 95). But from long before that experience Williams was working with Malinowski's and Radcliffe-Brown's concepts of function. As we will see later, the needs of the individual were a major concern in his Vailala Madness study, reflecting Malinowski's assertion that 'every institution contributes ... toward the integral working of the community as a whole, but it also satisfies the derived and basic needs of the individual' (Malinowski 1939: 292). And in his essay 'Creed of a Government Anthropologist' (Williams 1977) Williams reworked Radcliffe-Brown's 'organism:culture' analogy which he thought overstressed the idea of integration and system.

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[1] This sort of modified or generalized functionalism had also been developed implicitly in the work of Rivers in the early 1920s. In his contribution to *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, Rivers wrote, 'It may be constructive, to consider for a moment how far it would be possible to modify the old customs and institutions of the people, to preserve enough to maintain interest while removing all those features which conflict with the ideals of modern civilisation' (1922: 107). I am indebted to Dr George Stocking for drawing my attention to this text.

b) His Job and His Changing Ideas About Culture and the 'Creed of a Government Anthropologist'

Another major figure in Williams' career was his administrative superior J.H.P. Murray, the Lieutenant Governor of Papua. Murray took up his post in 1908. His stress was always on the government's obligation to the 'natives' and their development through European enterprise. In 1918, he set up the Native Plantations Ordinance, which allowed the planting of coconuts on a larger scale. The following year he introduced a Native Tax, the money raised being used for the natives' own benefit, i.e. in setting up mission schools, paying the government anthropologist and producing a monthly publication, *The Papuan Villager*, which ran from 1929 to 1941. His stress throughout was on government control and 'peaceful penetration' (Ryan 1972: 806-7). He held a rather typical administrator's view of native people as incapable of holding responsible positions, running their own government or caring for themselves. He needed to find an anthropologist who would be willing to evaluate, make decisions about, and perhaps interfere with, the natives' lifestyle, and therefore he could not employ a devout functionalist. Williams, as we have already mentioned, did not discard functionalism altogether, yet he had sufficient confidence in administrative decision-making and in his own qualifications to feel he could decide what would be best for the 'natives', and this made him the most appropriate person for the appointment.

Deciding that interference is occasionally necessary for the administration of native peoples is one thing, but how one should actually carry it out is another. Williams' feeling was that Christianity was not the proper substitute for native rituals and customs - his alternative suggestions included cricket and football (Williams 1932: 223). Murray, however, firmly disagreed with Williams on this point. In his 'Introduction' to Williams' *Vailala Madness*, he writes, 'I note that Mr Williams seems to doubt that Christianity is a sufficient substitute for the old ritual; in this he differs from Dr Rivers ... and incidentally from myself. It is not clear what he would recommend as a substitute' (1923: iv). But Murray was usually very supportive of his government anthropologist's views, and he must have come to approve of them more and more as Williams became increasingly critical of the functionalist position during his career.

Williams' book on the Vailala Madness was written when he had come fresh from university with a strong functionalist perspective. Much later, after years of experience, he wrote a very interesting article entitled 'Creed of a Government Anthropologist', which illustrates clearly his change in orientation. It also shows his attempts to resolve the conflicts that arise from being at the same time a colonial government worker and an anthropologist (a problem which underlies his works on the Vailala Madness, but is never articulated within them). In this article he suggested that society is in part a system and in part a 'haphazard agglomeration' which could afford to lose some parts without causing a serious threat to the whole (1977 [1939]: 150). While he sincerely appreciated the functional school for the attitudinal change it brought to

anthropology - away from an obsession with the 'quaint, amusing, obscene and blood-thirsty' towards a realization that everything in the society is important - he had come to feel that functionalism over-stressed systematics and that it had the wrong attitude about the applications of anthropology (ibid.: 400, 408).

In order to make his ideas understood he created 'new' analogies to counteract those of the most famous functionalists (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown's analogy that society is like an organism), which he had used in his earlier writings. Williams called a house a cultural microcosm, for when it accumulates too much property the excess, or 'tooglies' as he called them, are stored in the attic. They could be called 'domestic survivals'. Williams noted that a true functionalist would not recognize 'survivals', because if an item is not functional, then it is not part of the system. But culture, he said, is like our houses, 'clogged by an accumulation of the superfluous, or what might be called cultural junk', which is part of the culture but not of a 'system' (ibid.: 406). The reason for this, he said, is because culture is a 'product of an age-long history of chance' (ibid.: 405). He asserted that wherever one finds an individual victimized by the larger society, then interference is called for, and this includes activities such as sorcery and head-hunting, for example. In 1935 he wrote an article on Papuan head-hunting in which he insisted that sorcery's 'principal effects are to spread suspicion and enmity through and through society', adding that 'governments will assume the responsibility of protecting the weak against such imposition, and it is my conviction that they are justified in using punishment as a measure to prevent it' (1935: 227, 230). He realized that on this issue he was directly opposing Malinowski's assertion that 'sorcery on the whole is a beneficient agency, of enormous value for early culture' (quoted from Malinowski's *Crime and Custom* by Williams [1935: 228]).

Williams thought that a government anthropologist would be the best judge of what is suitable for the culture in question and that a person in such a position should work as both an objective observer and a critic and reformer (1977: 410): 'our much wider experience and scientific knowledge may enable us to see defects which remain hidden from the native himself' (1935: 411). Williams would have said that all these 'defects' should be treated as 'cultural junk' and be discarded.

The notion of 'survivals', as well as the notion that culture arises from a history of chance, makes one think of E.B. Tylor's contributions to anthropology. Let us recall that Marett, Williams' tutor at Oxford, stressed Tylor's ideas in his own writing and presumably in his teaching as well.

Having outlined key aspects of Williams' biographical and theoretical background, we can now turn to the Vailala Madness itself. The most extensive description of the movement was written by Williams very early in his career. A follow-up article was written after many more years in the field, around the time he wrote his articles involving notions of 'modified functionalism'. This should be remembered as we consider the movement itself in more detail.

The Vailala Madness

a) Williams' Description

The Vailala Madness was past its peak when Williams arrived in Papua as Assistant Anthropologist in 1922, and hence a desciption of its early and most 'infectious' development is missing from his report. Luckily we have brief but consistent diary-like descriptions of what was happening in the area during the 'hottest' period of the madness, which were sent to Williams by G.H. Murray (not to be confused with J.H.P. Murray), the Acting Resident Magistrate of the Gulf Division. Murray's reports began on 10th September 1919 and continued until 22nd May 1920, and they appear as appendices to Williams' book (G.H. Murray 1923).

Gilbert Murray was the brother of Hubert (J.H.P.) Murray, the Lieutenant-Governor, and after his time in Papua he became Professor of Greek at Oxford (Cochrane 1970: 36). The reports he wrote indicate that the very first news of the Vailala Madness was brought to him at the Government Station on 10th September 1919 by an unnamed visitor, reporting 'extraordinary conduct on the part of the natives from Keuru to Vailala' (Williams 1923: 65).

Williams wrote *The Vailala Madness and the Destruction of Native Ceremonies in the Gulf Divisions* in 1923, after living in Papua for one year. While the 'symptoms' were not as frequent nor as wild as they had been when G.H. Murray described the 'lunacy' and 'insanity' in 1919, the movement was still very much alive. In Williams' 1934 article 'The Vailala Madness in Retrospect', he said that he could not provide a precise date for its expiration, but could only say that by 1931 some of the 'native ceremonies' which had been discarded during the 'madness' began to reappear, which 'effectually closed the way' for its continuance (1934: 385).

Unfortunately, information on the distribution of the Vailala Madness is scarce, but it seems that large areas of the Gulf District of Papua were peppered with it. For example, Williams mentioned how the village of Orokolo resisted the movement, while a village only a mile away, Arihave, was a 'hot bed' of the cult (1923: 3). He did not try to find out why it was adopted by some villages and not others. What seems to be missing from the available reports are descriptive profiles of individual villages, including the states of the people living in them. We could call this an 'ethnographic void', for it makes it quite difficult to test how the material fits into later theories on how and why such movements develop. For the Vailala Madness, reasons for variations in its distribution and in how the 'madness' manifested itself in different villages must, unfortunately, remain mysteries.

G.H. Murray wrote (1923) that the movement originated in either Arihave or Nomu in August or September 1919 and spread eastward under the name of the Vailala or Orokolo Kavakava (madness). It spread rather selectively along the coast and then moved forty miles north along the Vailala river among villages not distinguished by the extant literature.

Williams and G.H. Murray both suggested that a single 'originator' must have been responsible for starting the 'madness', but

they disagreed about who that individual was. G.H. Murray suggested that the originator was Kori, a man of Arihave and Nomu, but after interviewing the local people, Williams insisted that he was Evara, a man who lived in the village of Iori on the lower Vailala (1923: 28).

The movement was seen by these observers in very linear terms: it began with a single person in a single village with a single psychological make-up, and then it spread and died out in a sequence also. Williams did not discuss the way in which contextual and historical factors (for example, the colonial occupation in which he had an acting role) may have created the setting for the first 'mad' individual(s) to act out a precedent for proper Vailala Madness behaviour. Williams' discussion of origins centred on a description of Evara.

Whether or not Evara was the very first person to experience the 'madness' (a reputation of which he himself was apparently very proud), he was certainly one of the key figures and leaders in his area. Williams interviewed him and wrote about the parts of that experience and the parts of Evara's personal history that he found most significant.

Williams' informants told him that the Vailala Madness spread rapidly through supernatural means. He disregarded this explanation and rationalized instead that the movement spread because visitors to 'infected' villages watched people's behaviour, learned of the doctrine and then reproduced the ceremonies at home. In addition, he said the movement 'extended so rapidly' because some leaders (he called them apostles) actively proselytized the new doctrine, occasionally even using force (ibid.: 30-1).

Behaviours associated with the 'madness' included twitching and shaking and moaning and uttering a mixture of Pidgin-English and nonsense syllables. The Papuans called the movement 'Head-he-go-round', 'Belly-don't-know', 'the Gulf Kavakava' and, of course, 'the Vailala Madness'; they called people who displayed these behaviours 'Head-he-go-round men'. Williams preferred to call them 'Automaniacs' (ibid.: 4). Schwimmer, in his introduction to a volume of Williams' work which he edited in 1977, criticizes Williams' use of this word:

> It is ... unfortunate that in his analysis of ritual, Williams keeps on using absurd, even semi-literate terms such as 'automaniac'. The cult leaders, in a state of divine or spirit possession, made involuntary movements which communicated themselves to their audience. In Williams' day this phenomenon was known as 'automatism', applying to the involuntary movement not only of persons but also of objects, as in spiritualist seances .... The noun automaniac is incorrectly formed from automatism (Schwimmer 1977: 38).

If the word 'automaniac' is unfortunate, it might be imagined that the constant reference to 'madness' is worse. Madness implies insanity and loss of control and calls for a cure. However, in the context of Williams' beliefs and eventual conclusions regarding the unfortunate destruction of prior native culture, such

a word would become extremely instrumental.

Williams suggested that 'Head-he-go-round men' fell into three categories:

> 1) Those who fell into the condition quite involuntarily. Some of these may be in greater or less degree 'mental' cases.
> 2) Those who, for motives of their own, simulate the Madness without giving way to it.
> 3) An important intermediate class of those who voluntarily induce the Madness and, for the time being, surrender completely to it.
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> It may be pointed out that the term 'Automaniac', which will be used generally as synonymous with 'Head-he-go-round Man', is in strictness applicable only to the last category (1923: 9).

The people who fit into the second category feigned the symptoms, he said, and could be recognized because their faces did not look 'nervy' (ibid.: 8-9).

The language spoken by the 'Automaniacs', which had been described as half Pidgin-English and half gibberish, was called 'Djaman' (German), and the people said that it was the language spoken in Raboul (ibid.: 6).[2] Williams stated that 'Djaman' was unlearned and that people claimed that it rose from the stomach of its own accord. He called this a typical case of primitive 'ventriloquism' (*à la* Tylor in *Primitive Culture*). He said too that the people would often blurt out Pidgin phrases which had a 'plantation ring' (ibid.: 6). Williams presented several short 'cases' in the book for illustration. Here is one example:

> At Vailala, December, 1922.
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> A young man, Karoa (of fine physique and appearance), was displeased because several others and myself had entered the 'ahea uvi' without consulting him. He poured forth a volume of gibberish which contained a good many Pidgin-English phrases, but was intelligible to nobody.
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> When his harangue was finished he stood aside, stuttering and mumbling in the familiar manner suggestive of teeth-chattering; he made a few symmetrical gestures with both hands, but for the most part motioned with his right hand before his solar plexus as if encouraging his stomach to rise. Meanwhile he heaved long sighs, and looked genuinely distracted. Finally he moved across to the flag-pole, and stamped round and

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[2] Papuans were taken for a short time at the turn of the century to work with geologists doing oil-surveying work at Raboul, near the Vailala river, for the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (Cochrane 1970: 48). Worsley has suggested that the 'natives' heard about 'Djaman' from their visits to Raboul, which had been German territory before 1914, and also through rumours which had circulated about the war. 'German', he says, 'was favoured as an anti-Government tongue' (1968: 88).

> round it, shouting such phrases as - 'Hurry up!' 'What's-a-matter?' 'Come on boy!'. Many people present watched Karoa closely, and, as it seemed, with a touch of fascination.

Williams observed that the beliefs, practices and material 'paraphernalia' associated with the Vailala Madness (the doctrine) lasted longer than the physical symptoms. Fundamental to the doctrine was the belief that a steamer ship was going to arrive with the people's deceased relatives and many gifts. The gifts would include tobacco, calico, axes, knives and food, and early in the movement some thought that rifles would arrive, with which the whites in Papua could be overthrown. The ancestors were expected to be white, and white men were often mistaken for them. Williams thought this stemmed from 'an imaginative hypothesis to explain the appearance of a totally strange variety of humanity' (ibid.: 16). He suggested that the former was 'typical of the native's desire to imitate the white man, and of that deplorable corollary - his contempt for his own race'. He quoted Evara saying, 'brown skins were no good' (ibid.: 17). The idea that blacks would become white after death most likely resulted, he added, from missionary influence.

Williams then described the 'heaven' from which, according to a 'Head-he-go-round man' of Vailala West, the dead relatives were expected to come. He described the elaborate feasts which were set out for the ancestors, the houses (called 'offices') and flagpoles from which the ancestors' messages could be received, the new rules set out by the cult leaders, and the divinatory powers of the 'Automaniacs' (ibid.: 17-33).

Part of the doctrine of the Vailala Madness involved the destruction of all the old ceremonies and their associated material objects. To Williams, this was the most perplexing and infuriating aspect of the whole cult, and rather than discussing it as an aspect of the doctrine, he devoted the entire second half of his book to it, trying to convince readers that the destruction was a tragedy:

> They have got in into their heads that the old customs are no good: they swallowed the notion wholesale in 1919, when they were mad, and they have not got it out of their systems yet.
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> No more thoroughly deplorable instance could be found of the power of suggestion than this, when at a time of uncontrolled excitement, age-long traditions were thrown aside in favour of the absurdities of the Vailala Madness....
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> They cannot as a rule bring forward any reason of a logical kind, but will in the great majority of instances say that the 'Head-he-go-round Men' had told them to give up the ceremonies, and that they had done so without question.
>
> Two other explanations are offered not infrequently: first, that the ceremonies are discouraged by the missionaries; second, that there is too much work to do for the white man (ibid.: 38).

Williams disregarded the reasons given to him for the destruction of ceremonies, but he never presented his own explanations. Rather, he spent a great deal of time describing the old rituals and then justifying his conviction that maintenance of the old ways was imperative.

Williams' lengthy detailed descriptions of the symptoms and behaviours of the Vailala Madness are crucial sources for anyone interested in either Papuan history or 'revitalization movements'. The choices he made as to what descriptions should be given and how the data should be organised, presented and analysed surely arose from his personal, practical and theoretical interests, as was noted earlier in this article. Certainly these should be considered carefully by all who use his historical accounts of the Vailala Madness, for we have no other studies to read for comparison.

b) Williams' Explanations

i) Vailala Madness 1923: Cult as Pathology

Early European scholars of 'culture' have tended to treat cult behaviours as pathological. The language in Williams' book, as well as in G.H. Murray's descriptions, shows that these two were no exceptions to this. Not only were 'native' peoples considered ill, but they were also considered child-like. Williams suggested that the nervous and physical 'symptoms' of the Vailala Madness should be attributed to the natural mental instability of the native and the phenomenon of 'mob psychology' (from William McDougall) in which an excited group loses all self-control. These characteristics plus, again, the 'imitative character of the madness' allowed for its quick spread (ibid.: 12-14). Since Williams conceived of the cult as symptomatic of illness, he felt he needed to provide a cure. The cure would have to be formulated according to what we might call his 'theory of the needs of the native mind'. This he offers clearly in the book's conclusion.

Williams concluded by calling for the revival of the old native ceremonies because he felt they were essential for the well-being of the Papuan, who needed them for a legitimate emotional outlet and a contrast to daily routine (ibid.: 55). He suggested that in primitive religion, faith, doctrine and philosophy are certainly secondary to the ritual:

> Where a ceremony may be carried out punctiliously in all its details and with a singular intensity of emotion, the participants may be going through it blindly, and with no realization of the meaning or symbolism which civilized observers will read into it.
>
> The inability of the native to explain ceremonial acts is a familiar difficulty to anthropologists. It is not that he wishes to conceal anything, but that he has nothing to reveal (ibid.: 58).

It was because of this conviction that Williams believed that Christianity was both unfairly and impossibly trying to substitute

its doctrine for 'native' ritual. Although his opposition to Christian teaching was new in the context of the 1920s, it did not really come from a pure cultural relativist position but rather from a position that the native had not developed enough to be able to handle doctrine safely. He was really only feeling that the 'native' was childlike and unable to digest such quick developments, or in his own words: 'It is to snatch away the baby's milk bottle and offer it a pound of steak' (ibid.: 60):

> Without seriously advocating any such measures, one might suggest that the Christianity that would succeed among the natives would be one with a minimum of perplexing doctrine, but full of sacrifice, communion feasts, flagellations and the like. The poor native hates thinking, but he loves carrying on (ibid.: 62).

To support his feelings theoretically he turned to functionalism. All efforts, he suggested, should be made to maintain the old rituals and discourage the new cargo cult, for since social functions (art, religion etc.) are so closely intertwined, even the removal of one part would destroy the rest. Like a true functionalist, he wrote in this, his earliest work: 'You have only to remove one wheel to stop the watch, or one stone from the social structure to have it tumbling about your ears' (ibid.: 64).

ii) Vailala Madness, Williams 1934: Revised Explanation

In 1934, when Williams wrote his follow-up article on the Vailala Madness, he was still using some of the illness metaphors to speak of the behaviours, but his perspective seems to have been different. He no longer saw the cult as a horrible disease which, according to the functionalist paradigm, would result in the total downfall of the people's culture. His experience there over the years proved to him that the cultures of the Gulf division of Papua were still very much intact, if only a little changed. The movement had virtually ended by then and its doctrines had started to pass 'into the form of legends' (Williams 1934: 377). In this later article he even suggested that the practices associated with the Vailala Madness doctrine, with its offerings and flagpole messages, 'had the markings of genuine ritual' (ibid.: 379). It may be questioned whether he would have had the same change of attitude had the movement not safely declined by then.

It would seem unlikely that direct intervention by the colonial government or by factions within the society could have taken place without being mentioned by Williams in his 1934 article. However, Glynn Cochrane, in his account of the movement's history, describes how the administration did indeed repress the cult by imprisoning its leaders in the villages. This, he says, destroyed its 'organizational framework' and led to a 'return to anomie' (1970: 66). Cochrane does not tell us where he acquired this information, but since he tells us in his 'Prologue' that he had access to unpublished governmental records in Papua, it is possible that this was the source. If he is right, then Williams had concealed this information from us. What could this mean? By 1934 he appeared to

be taking a more sympathetic view to the fading cult - or was this just what he put into print after the apparent threat had subsided, just as people will forgive and forget friends' undesirable characteristics in death? It seems impossible, but perhaps Williams' superiors acted without his knowledge. Or could Cochrane have made a mistake in his research on this issue? Again we can only guess, but our observation of discrepancies (such as this one) can only be possible and our guesses can only be more informed once we have studied Williams' biography and the complex situation in which he was writing and working as best we can with the limited resources that are available to us.

The idea of the Vailala Madness as illness fits with the goal of Williams' 1923 book, namely to find a cure quickly and end the development of the madness before the people died without their old cultural artefacts and rituals. The attitude in the later article leaned towards the modified functionalism he discussed in his still later article on the 'Creed of a Government Anthropologist'. He hinted at the importance of studying culture change long before it was was a recognized subject of interest in anthropology. He ended his 1934 article as follows:

> The Vailala Madness came as a violent shock to the societies of the Gulf Division, and the adjustments and reactions afford material for the study of culture in a state of unusually rapid metabolism.... There are more than enough native societies undergoing change at the present day, and the study of these has, I believe, a special importance, for here if anywhere we shall have a chance of discovering how elements of culture begin and how they grow (Williams 1934: 379).

Williams never produced any single theory about such movements of cultural change, but certainly no model had been provided for this in anthropology at that time.

Examples of More Recent Theories of Cargo Cults: The Vailala Madness as Evidence

One of the first examples to provide a 'systematic analysis' of a movement involving rapid culture change was made by Ralph Linton in his article 'Nativistic Movements' (1943). He defined as a nativistic movement 'any conscious organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture' (1943: 230). The peoples Linton studied in North America had a very different history and different contact experience with outside cultures from the peoples of Papua. The movement he studied consequently involved a different underlying strategy or goal, as the definition suggests, for surely the people who experienced the Vailala Madness were not working toward any amplification of their culture as it existed in the past. This is not to say that elements of their culture (e.g. traditional myths) did not blend with

Christian doctrine to form a new ideology and practice patterned in part on the old (Wilson 1975; Thrupp 1962; Cochrane 1970; and Eliade 1962). But part of a nativistic paradigm involves the expelling of foreign powers, and this was certainly an aspect of the ideology of the Vailala movement as described by Williams.[3] A.F.C. Wallace accounted for any discrepancies neatly when he suggested that cargo cults 'are antinativistic from a cultural standpoint but nativistic from a personnel standpoint' (1956: 278).

A far more comprehensive framework for studying these types of movement was provided in Wallace's article. He suggested that Linton's 'nativistic movements', the Vailala Madness, other 'cargo cults' and a score of other genres of cultural movements are simply variations of a larger category he called 'revitalization movements', and he suggested that these all follow the same process of development. He defined a revitalization movement as 'a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture' (ibid.: 265). One 'subclass' of the revitalization movement is the 'cargo cult'. Cargo cults, he suggested, 'emphasize the importation of alien values, customs, and material into the mazeway, these things being expected to arrive as a ship's cargo as for example in the Vailala Madness' (ibid.: 267).

Wallace stressed how the individual's perception of his or her culture, environment and self ('the mazeway') can change to reduce a situation of extreme stress, and that this is the revitalization process (ibid.: 266-7). He outlined the structure of this process, which involved five somewhat overlapping stages.[4] A reading of Wallace's article (with details about these stages) and Williams' text allows one to see how neatly the Vailala appears to fit within the scheme. The data offered in Williams' account fit beautifully into Wallace's model; it appears, therefore, to verify the 'response to stress' theory.

Theodore Schwartz, however, in his article on cargo cults, disagreed with Wallace's notion that cognitive stress is of central importance. He asserted that contact with the European culture was all that was needed to trigger the development of this type of revitalization movement. His argument centred on the idea that there had always been tremendous cultural emphasis on the acquisition of wealth in Melanesia, and that the doctrine of the cargo cult explained why the European worked so little and received so much cargo from distant places while the Melanesian worked very hard for the Europeans and received so little. The doctrine then provided the means whereby the Melanesian could obtain supernaturally the cargo he deserved (Schwartz 1976: 162-4; see also Lawrence 1964,

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[3] Note that some writers insist, on the basis of comparative research, that 'expelling' was not the essential desire, but that attaining moral equality was; see, for example, Burridge 1960.

[4] The five stages of the revitalization process revealed in this model comprise: 1) Steady State; 2) Period of Increased Individual Stress; 3) Period of Cultural Distortion; 4) Period of Revitalization; 5) New Steady State.

Burridge 1960 and Jarvie 1964 for similar arguments). Schwartz refers to his theory as one focusing on a notion of 'relative deprivation', which Aberle (1962) concisely defines as 'a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectancy and actuality'.

Schwartz also disagreed with Wallace on the nature of cult 'symptoms'. Rather than seeing the behaviour as 'pathogenic', resulting from actual neuro-physiological pathology, Schwartz said that it is 'pathomimetic', an imitation of pathological symptoms which are culturally patterned. The behaviours are modelled on pathogenic behaviours displayed at some time by individuals in the culture (e.g. epileptics, people ill with cerebral malaria, intoxicated people); they need not indicate social decay nor cognitive stress. Williams' ethnography may again be seen as 'historical evidence', but this time it supports hypotheses of relative deprivation.

Worsley dedicated an entire chapter of his book *The Trumpet Shall Sound* to the Vailala Madness (1968: 75-92), and in it he reviewed and paraphrased many details about the movement from Williams' texts. He ended the account by selecting a modicum of evidence suggesting Papuan hostility to colonial occupation and then wrote:

> But if avid for the White man's goods and knowledge, the natives saw the White man himself as the major obstacle between them and their goal.... The movement, then, expressed powerful native resentment at their social and political position in the new order of things (1968: 88-9).

Worsley picked carefully through Williams' text in search of supporting evidence for a theory of cargo cults as pseudo-political protests, and he found what he was looking for.

The point here is not to choose the correct or most convincing analysis of cause but to illustrate how difficult the explanatory part of a discussion of cult activity which took place in the past can be. One could select a variety of other authors to make the same point. These authors are often divided on the grounds of degree of generality or specificity.[5] The extreme 'generalists'

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[5] This is only one of several attempted classifications of cult studies (see Smith 1959; Christiansen 1969; and Burridge 1969). Burridge (1969) divides the different explanations into four groups: 'Psychological/Physiological, Marxist' (seeing them in terms of conflict and competition between groups and classes); 'Hegelian' (particularly interested in the larger shape of relations and the role of the prophet); and 'Ethnographic' (trying to explain why the movements occur within a very particular context). Possibly the first three groups are all representative, in different ways, of the 'generalist' approach, while the 'Ethnographic' is 'specific'. While some works fit fairly easily into these classes (e.g. Worsley, Thrupp and Lanternari as 'Marxist'), others are not so easily labelled. Wallace's work is discussed by Burridge within his discussion of the 'Hegelian' approach, but his stress model is also

argue that we can understand mankind and culture change better if we collate all our cross-cultural data on millennial movements, cargo cults, revitalization movements etc. and compare and contrast the movements' patterns and processes. Those in favour of specificity argue that this broad kind of picture is deceiving and that we can only understand a movement within a particular cultural and historical context.[6] People who fall into either of these camps or somewhere in between have referred to the relatively famous Vailala Madness and in doing so have focused on the same small body of 'historical' texts. It is ironic, but also rather unconvincing, when a variety of causal and descriptive theories are supported by texts composed by a single author who was himself selective in his descriptions. The few who have discussed Williams' own explanations have generally ignored the way their character changed through time.

More studies of culture change should be 'specific' in a different way, beginning with the contexts of a primary document's creation - in particular, the people behind the texts. Burridge has criticized writers in this field by saying that 'most are eclectics, fishing in a variety of psychologies and sociologies and ultimately imposing on the data their own millenarian intuitions' (1969: 118). He adds that this results in a plethora of explanations which echo the same points over and over again. At least proper ethno-historical and biographical work would lead to 'fishing' in a more informed direction.

Conclusion

This paper has underlined some of the difficulties in the study of a relatively old account of what we could now call a revitalization movement. The Vailala Madness has come and gone, and all we are left with are essentially two texts composed by one person, F.E. Williams, a complex character whose role as 'government anthropologist' in Papua New Guinea put him in an intellectually difficult position. There is a challenge for the historian of anthropology interested in examining primary documents to investigate further the manipulation of texts by Williams, based on a thorough

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psychologically oriented. Jarvie's work emphasises the prophet ('Hegelian' ?) and yet has a very Marxist ring. Inglis (1957; 1959) argues against general analyses in theoretical terms, but her work itself is not 'Ethnographic'. Belgrado van Fossen's paper fits into its own class, which we might call 'Cosmological'. The problems with classification are never-ending.

[6] Wilson (1975) sensibly suggests that while it might not be useful to use the general comparative method to get a broad notion of cause, no final explanation of a movement can be made without specifics (e.g. mission activity, local myths, study of specific leaders, the nature of culture contact etc.).

understanding of his personal history and socio-cultural milieu. In terms of anthropological theory, there is, unfortunately, no way of understanding in retrospect the underlying psychological states of the individuals involved in the Vailala Madness (the crux of the 'cognitive stress'-'relative deprivation' debate), nor the political or social motivations of these people, as one could perhaps do with a contemporary cult. The details we have of the movement can help to verify a behavioural process, but they certainly cannot tell us much about cognitive states. Thus supposedly contradictory theories all find the Vailala Madness a useful example.

On the whole, there has not been as much anthropological attention given to cargo cults and other revitalization movements recently as might have been expected.[7] The tendency in and strength of anthropology has been to stress continuity rather than change. Williams said that the 'stability of native custom has been practically a maxim of anthropology', and he saw that new cults argue against this (Williams 1928: 4-6). The Vailala Madness was thus a challenge for an anthropologist studying in the 1920s, a challenge which Williams attempted clumsily but courageously to resolve by the concatenation of prevailing functional theories with some of its antecedents in his notion of 'modified functionalism'. Although culture change is now considered an important topic in anthropology the challenge is not over.

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[7] It is interesting to note that only four per cent of the works in Wilson's comprehensive bibliography were written after 1967 (Wilson 1975). This topic of interest in anthropology appears to have been at its apogee in the 1950s and early 1960s.

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