Dreams and Self-Knowledge among the Mekeo of Papua New Guinea

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Not only do ideas concerning person and self vary cross-culturally, but according to some anthropologists the very cultural concepts for developing subjectivity and an inner life are absent in tribal societies (e.g., Clifford 1982; Goody 1977; Hallpike 1979; Strathern 1988). Hallpike (1979:392) points out that the special contexts provided by Western culture for reflecting upon subjective states—for instance, fictional forms such as the novel—are evidently absent in tribal societies. Clifford, however, is inclined to regard the very notion of an "inner life" as an invention of "fairly recent, and far from universal, application—even in the West" (1982:6). Perhaps we might consider the possibility that reflective discourse on subjectivity is not absent in all but Western cultures, but rather that it takes different forms. The importance of dreaming in this respect has been suggested in a number of recent studies (see Basso 1987; Ewing 1990a, 1990b; Herdt 1987; Kracke 1981, 1987; Tedlock 1987).

In this article I attempt to show that for the Mekeo of Papua New Guinea, cultural beliefs about dreaming give rise to a concept of a

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divided self, one that serves to put individuals in touch with aspects of the self usually denied in conscious awareness; and by bringing such denied aspects into consciousness, self-knowledge is increased. This is not, of course, to assert that such is true for all Mekeo, but only for those persons who pay close attention to dreaming. I begin with a brief summary of Mekeo beliefs concerning dreams, and then outline the concept of the divided self. The main part of the article, however, is devoted to a discussion of the dreams of a single individual.

The Mekeo, who number about 7,000, are a people of coastal Papua, inhabiting a fertile riverine plain approximately 80 miles to the northwest of the capital, Port Moresby.[1] Descent and inheritance are reckoned patrilineally, hereditary status and leadership are important features of the society, and hereditary, publicly recognized holders of death-dealing ritual powers provide the punitive sanctions behind chiefly authority (Hau'ofa 1981; Stephen 1974, in press). Mekeo are thus culturally very different from the aggressively competitive and egalitarian, so-called big-man societies often thought typical of Melanesia. The region has experienced over a century of European contact (Stephen 1974). The influence of the Sacred Heart Catholic Mission since the 1880s, especially the educational facilities provided by it, combined with the comparative proximity of the region to Port Moresby, has meant that Mekeo have had a relatively sophisticated experience of the wider world represented by European contact. Nevertheless, a rich indigenous culture persists. The patterns of local grouping have scarcely altered since the 1880s; the hereditary leaders have prominence after nearly a century of external control; the ritual powers of individuals usually identified as "sorcerers" are still greatly feared; and a rich corpus of esoteric magical knowledge continues to flourish. Dreams play a highly important role in the practice of magical ritual, but I am concerned in this article with the dreams of ordinary people who possess no significant ritual knowledge.

DREAMS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

Superficially, at least, Mekeo beliefs concerning dreaming are similar to those widely reported for tribal societies in general (Stephen 1981, 1987, 1989, in press). Mekeo believe dreams pro-

vide contact with the spirit world and enable communications with dead relatives, ancestors, and nonhuman spirit beings, revealing information about things hidden from ordinary perception and providing omens concerning future events and activities. The most common response Mekeo make to questions concerning the significance of dreaming is that it provides warning. Dreams, people say, warn of danger, illness, or imminent death for one's family and oneself. Dreams also provide omens concerning favorable things, yet people seem much more concerned with them as indicative of impending danger or misfortune.

Though in special circumstances a dream may be interpreted literally, the usual assumption is that it holds a hidden or disguised meaning. It constitutes a sort of riddle or conundrum—the Mekeo word is *palapole*—something that must be puzzled out. Elders and ritual experts are thought to have special skill in dream interpretation, but many ordinary people confidently interpret their own dreams unaided. Although there exists a widely known repertoire of dream symbols, it used only as a rough guideline by those who pay close attention to dreams. The most important criteria in deciding the meaning of a particular dream are the actual waking circumstances surrounding it, the personal circumstances and experience of the dreamer, and the subsequent waking events. Even experts admit that not all dreams can be deciphered. The images of the dream are believed to represent happenings in the dreamworld, and it is simply not thought possible for living human beings to have direct knowledge of these events. When one points to the puzzling and contradictory aspects of dreaming, people simply shrug their shoulders and say, "That's because it's a dream." At best, dreams can provide a veiled glimpse, a distorted, often reversed image, of what transpires in that other world. For Mekeo the meaning of a dream is usually hidden, and always uncertain, at least until events in waking reality reveal its import.

Though dreams are believed to contain important information emanating from the spirit world, it would be false to assume that most people regard dreams in a positive light, or that dreams are freely and easily communicated with others. In fact, dreams are regarded as intensely private matters, and are rarely communicated to anyone outside one's immediate family or closest friends.

Attitudes vary greatly. Many people simply have no concern whatsoever with dreams; they say off-handedly that either they do

not dream or, if they do on occasion, they immediately forget it. Others say they would like to remember their dreams but have such a poor memory that they never can. Staunch (well-educated) Catholics insist that they pay no attention to their dreams because it is against the teachings of the Church to heed to them. Yet others aver that their dreams have shown them terrible things such as the deaths of their loved ones and friends, so that they are now frightened of dreaming. Then there are those who react sharply and suspiciously to questions about their dreams with the exclamation "I'm not sick! Why should I be dreaming?"

This last response startled and puzzled me at first, until I discovered that there were thought to be only two explanations for frequent or prolonged dreaming—illness on the part of the dreamer, or deliberate inducement of dreams via ritual in order to practice magic. Thus in trying to ask people as frequently as possible about their dreams, the implication of my inquiry was that they were ill—physically or mentally—or else that they had covert magical knowledge they publicly denied. When I tried to discuss dreams with people who knew me only slightly, faces would stiffen and they would quickly drop the subject, or they would turn away coldly as from someone who had no appreciation of personal privacy and social delicacy. Dreams, I had to learn, were not only private and delicate matters, but also dangerous ones; thus, to my disappointment, I was to find it very difficult to collect dream reports. Why dreams are so private and so dangerous becomes apparent when we understand something of the concept of the divided self, to which I now turn.

THE DIVIDED SELF

Mekeo culture sharply divides the public, social persona from the private self. There is indeed a cultural playing upon the themes of *ofakaega* and *ogevake*—that is, public/visible and private/hidden (Stephen, in press). These themes are symbolically reflected, for example, in the spatial arrangement and use of the village settlement, and in the public ritual of chiefly feasts. On the surface, Mekeo social interaction is expected to be conducted in a calm, orderly, controlled manner. People are expected to mask their private emotions, their jealousies, desires and aggressions, and conform to the social norms in public. But beneath this smooth,

unruffled surface lie intense jealousies, hatreds, and fears. People live with the ever-present fear that even their close relatives can, and do, seek to harm and destroy them via sorcery. But such fears are never, or very rarely, expressed in public. I have, for example, sat chatting comfortably with two men who talked and joked like old friends, only to discover later that one of these men believed the death of his small daughter had been brought about by the other man's hiring a sorcerer to kill her. No wonder, then, that one so often hears people say, "That is what he says with his mouth: but what is in his mind, we really do not know!" People expect others to hide their real thoughts and emotions, and strive to do the same themselves. Disguise and trickery *(fogefoge)* is a constant theme in humor, folktale, and myth. Indeed, people think it clever to trick others, and expect others will treat them likewise.

This theme could be elaborated at length. Here I can only emphasize that there is a high cultural value put upon being seen to conform to social convention while concealing all those private emotions and desires that threaten to disrupt the ideally smooth surface of social interaction. Thus the public persona one presents to others is not only different from, but a deliberate mask of, the private self.

Yet the division between public persona and private self is *not* the divided self to which I have referred. This is a division within that private self one attempts to keep hidden from others. For Mekeo, dreaming reveals the existence of another aspect of the self, a self so hidden that it is known only indirectly through the distorted lens of dream imagery—a self not only hidden and disguised from others, but even from oneself.

The actions, desires, and perceptions of this other self are represented in dreams. But, as we have seen, dreams are not literal but rather disguised representations. What this hidden self does is reflected in the imagery of the dream, but the imagery must be interpreted to reveal its underlying meaning. And since the imagery of the dream is always to some extent ambiguous and impenetrable, so are the actions of the hidden self. People may lack the knowledge to interpret the actions of their hidden selves, or they may simply choose to ignore them. Regardless of the attitudes different people take, the actions of the hidden self in the dream realm are believed to exert a powerful influence over one's waking, conscious experience. Though one cannot (except through ritual

means) consciously control the actions of one's hidden self, and one is often not even aware of them, they have important—indeed crucial—repercussions in waking life.

This dream-self, or hidden self, can act in ways that totally conflict with the conscious desires of the waking self, thus subverting the conscious will. And its actions may prove destructive to the physical body and waking self. For example, a woman's dream-self may be tempted into an adulterous affair. Though in waking conscious thought the same woman has no desire for a forbidden relationship that will inevitably threaten her marriage and her children, it is said that her conscious resolve will be overcome since her dream-self has already given in. Likewise, though a person does not wish to be sick or die, if the dream-self is tempted to spend its time in the company of the spirits of the dead *(isage)*, or the water spirits *(faifai)*, or wanders off somewhere and gets lost, then the physical body of that person will sicken. And if the errant dream-self cannot be persuaded to return, the person will eventually die.

We begin to see now why dreams are considered to be such private and dangerous matters. It is because they reveal this problematic and potentially dangerous entity, the hidden self. Dreams, however, not only contain knowledge about the hidden self, but the *act of dreaming* is dangerous. This is because dreaming allows the possibility of the hidden self's separating from the bodily, waking self, and thus the likelihood of the two aspects of self coming into conflict. As long as the two parts of self are united and in harmony, the individual is healthy, strong, and purposeful. But when the two are split, and the hidden self pursues its own desires regardless of the interests of the waking self, then the waking bodily self will suffer. Hence we see why the healthy person is thought not to dream, and why frequent dreaming is considered sickly and undesirable, unless one is a ritual expert. Rather, as Freud (1971) proposed that a mentally healthy person would not need to dream, so Mekeo seem to feel that only a dreamless sleep is healthy and safe. Dreaming is always potentially dangerous, they believe, because it allows the possibility of a split between the bodily, waking self and the hidden self; Freud, of course, saw the dream as *reflecting* a conflict between different parts of the self.

The situation is yet further complicated, and the dangers of dreaming greatly increased, by the fact that ritual actions are believed to operate upon the hidden or dream-self. Thus not only

may one's dream-self of its own accord indulge in foolish or dangerous activities, but it may also fall under the influence of powerful magicians who can bend it to their will. Thus the woman dreaming of a forbidden lover is probably under the influence of some love magician whose rituals have succeeded in tempting and seducing her dream-self, with the result that her bodily self will be unable to resist him in waking reality. Similarly, powerful adepts can send the dream-images of dead relatives to call the victim's dream-self away with them, with fatal results for the dreamer's waking, bodily self. The dream realm thus holds infinite danger for the dreamer.

For Mekeo, beliefs in magic and sorcery are closely intertwined with the sense of a divided self: of a self that can be divided against itself, of an aspect of self that is outside conscious awareness and control, and more vulnerable to external manipulation than conscious awareness.

Yet we have not yet quite exhausted the dangers held by dreaming. Not only do dreams reveal the actions of one's own hidden self, but also the actions of other people's hidden selves. Furthermore, one's own hidden self appears in the dreams of other people; and what it does therein is just as significant as what occurs in one's own dreams. If other people dream of your hidden self in an erotic manner, or if your hidden self behaves in an abusive or aggressive way to them in their dreams, this indicates a truth underlying your consciously held motives and desires. Thus the private self that you strive so hard to conceal from public view may be exposed by the actions of your hidden self as perceived by others in their dreams. Others may have secret knowledge about an aspect of yourself that is hidden even from you—you can never really be sure what anyone else might know about you. Were people to disclose their dreams freely, they would expose an endless web of fears, suspicion, and intrigue. It is little wonder then that such socially explosive material is rarely communicated in public, and that dreams are usually discussed, if at all, and only with one's intimates. It is also understandable why dream reports were so difficult for me to collect.

To summarize my points so far: Dreams reveal the existence of another self, a self that is neither controlled by one's conscious waking thoughts and desires nor even fully available to one's conscious understanding. The self that appears in dreams may act in ways, be driven by desires, totally foreign, even abhorrent, to the

conscious, waking self. Nevertheless, the actions of this dream-self have a powerful influence on the waking self. Furthermore, there is the problem that these actions, as depicted in the dream, cannot be taken simply at face value but must be carefully interpreted to reveal their hidden meaning. We are now, I think, in a position to approach the central issue of this article: the divided self and self-knowledge.

CELESTINA'S DREAMS

Discussion to this point has dwelled upon negative aspects to the extent that I may have given the impression that no one could possibly regard either dreaming or the hidden self in a positive light. It might also seem that the notion of a divided self must engender a deep-seated feeling of insecurity. Yet in fact many ordinary Mekeo persons, possessing no ritual knowledge, do regard the actions of their hidden selves, as revealed in dreams, in a very positive way. Indeed, many people who pay attention to their dreams can be seen to gain greater self-awareness and self-knowledge thereby (see Stephen, in press). In illustration, I would like to examine the dream reports of a married woman in her mid-thirties, whom I will call Celestina. This single example (presented here in greater detail) is drawn from a larger work (Stephen, in press), to which I must refer readers who are inclined to question the representativeness of this case study. The nature of the self-knowledge Mekeo derive from dreams can only be explained by a close examination of specific cases such as Celestina's.

The following dream material was collected during a long interview with Celestina in which I asked her to discuss any dreams she had had, recently or in the past, that had been of significance to her. The interview was conducted in Mekeo, and tape-recorded. The dream reports were later transcribed and then translated into English by me. Some examples she described occurred many years before, others were recent. This material has clearly been subjected to much secondary revision and conscious elaboration. The interview was not conducted in a clinical context (cf. Herdt and Stoller 1990), nor was any attempt made to collect the dreamer's associations to the dream material. Because of the extreme delicacy of the topic of dreams, I did not dare to try people's patience by pressing them on this account. Instead, I tried to be as unobtrusive as

possible, and simply encouraged the person to talk. Celestina's husband, Paul, who was present throughout the interview, had been my assistant during earlier fieldwork and thus was well known to me.

An intelligent, forthright, and strong-minded person, Celestina regarded her dreams in a very positive light as significant experiences importantly related to her waking existence. The encounters of her hidden self with spirit beings in dreams brought her knowledge, she believed, of imminent sickness and death threatening her children, her family, her kin, and her self. Dreams also identified the causes of illness and showed her how to overcome them. Her apparent preoccupation with death, sickness, and recovery and healing is typical of the dreams most Mekeo reported to me, and are not specific to Celestina. Indeed, her dreams reflect typical patterns of dream motifs and concerns (Stephen 1981, in press). The spirit beings revealed in her dream encounters are the two main classes of Mekeo spirits: spirits of the dead and water spirits.

A selection of her dreams is sufficient to show how attention to the actions of her hidden self helps Celestina to deal with her own inner conflicts. They reveal a complex hidden self. On the one hand, it plays a powerful and creative role, accurately foreseeing death and sickness, and also obtaining effective cures. But at the same time its actions put Celestina's bodily self constantly at risk. Her dream-self is forever being attracted and lured away by the images of the spirit world, especially dead relatives and the water spirits.

DREAMS OF DEATH

Omens of death are the most commonly reported of all Mekeo dreams. But very rarely is the death literally depicted in the manifest content of the dream. Instead, the meaning is interpreted symbolically to indicate death. Thus, for example, Celestina reported several dreams of people lying still under mosquito nets, which she interpreted as predictions of the deaths of those concerned. I begin by outlining three dreams of death, omitting the full texts for reasons of space.

In the first dream, Celestina visits the city of the dead, but returns before actually entering it. She finds a beautiful place where everyone is happy and there are many wonderful things to be seen. At the time she dreamed this she was in fact sick, and she inter-

preted the dream to indicate her recovery. Celestina observed that her dream-self was tempted to stay, but then rejected the delights offered in the spirit world, because she thought of her family whom she would have to leave behind. In other words, death seems attractive, and only responsibility to her children draws her back to the (unwelcome, it seems) demands of waking reality. This fascination was depicted even more strongly in two more examples, where spirits of the dead return and try to take Celestina with them. In both cases the revenants were female relatives whose deaths earlier dreams had accurately predicted.

One such dream occurred about a week after the demise of the woman who appears in it. The dead woman returns dressed up for dancing, decorated with flowers and wearing a beautifully patterned grass-skirt, and tells Celestina she has been waiting for her. This attractive and beguiling image turns abusive, however, when Celestina's dream-self declines to accompany her. The two quarrel. Celestina observed to me that her dream-self had been tempted to go; it went, she said, but then refused, and turned around and came back. Her conflicting desires—to go with the dead, and to remain with the living—are dramatized in the dispute between her dream-self and the dead woman. When she first dreamed that this woman was going to die, she informed her of the bad omen. But the woman bitterly rejected the warning, declaring that Celestina would die, not her. Nevertheless, the fatal omen proved accurate, and in this subsequent dream the deceased returns to insist that Celestina must die. Her emotional conflict is worked through in the movement of the dream. Feelings of anxiety over the death are portrayed in the abuse of the dead woman and her insistence that Celestina must die too. Yet in the end, Celestina's dream-self rejects the demand as unjustified by pointing to her primary responsibility to raise her children, and thus remain with the living.

A third example harped upon the same theme. The dead girl who returns was also a relative. Her death, too, had been foreseen in an earlier dream. Looking very lovely and dressed in beautiful clothes, the dead girl returns to claim Celestina. Initially, her dream-self cooperates, and Celestina carries the girl through the village on her back. But finding her burden too heavy, she sets the girl down to talk with the other people, while she returns home. The next day, in waking reality, Celestina suffered an accident in which she nearly choked; this she explained as the consequence of

the spirit of the dead girl's holding her dream-self around the neck while being carried in the dream. She told me that the dead girl wanted her to die and go with her, but because her dream-self put her down and returned home, she escaped this fate. Here again we have the seductive image of the dead attempting to lure her dream-self away. And again, her guilt feelings are portrayed in the struggle, and then resolved when her dream-self rejects these destructive urges.

Celestina makes a telling comparison with Joe, a man in his late fifties and an alcoholic, who took a very negative view of dreaming. So deeply was he troubled by two dreams occurring in his youth that accurately predicted deaths of relatives, that he resolved to ignore all dreams and erase them from his memory. These days, alcohol helps; he says it keeps him happy while he is awake and stops him from dreaming while he is asleep. It seems Joe's only means of handling his guilt was to attempt to totally ignore that hidden part of himself that had access to such disturbing insights. I should emphasize here that the belief is not that the death was actually *caused* by the dream—it is simply a warning that the death is likely to occur. But nevertheless, people find it extremely uncomfortable to have such premonitions concerning the fate of loved ones and close kin. Unlike Joe, Celestina attends carefully to such dreams. She, too, is much bothered by them, but she is able to use her ongoing dream experiences to work through the inner conflicts they provoke.

DREAMS OF WATER SPIRIT LOVERS

Dreams provide not only omens of death, sickness, and misfortune, according to Mekeo belief, but may actually identify the causes of illness and bring about healing. This instrumental use is part of ritual techniques (Stephen 1987, in press). Yet ordinary people, such as Celestina, often lay claim to dreams resulting in healing or recovery from sickness. Water spirits (faifai) usually feature prominently in such dreams. Although certain ritual experts are believed to influence water spirits, in specific contexts of actual illness faifai are more often seen to act of their own accord than at the bidding of human agents.

Many different illness are attributed to this cause. Since people are always going to the river to bathe and fetch water, water spirits are thought to have ample opportunity to cause damage. They are

said to capture the dream-selves of human beings and imprison them underwater. They may tie up or, since they often take the form of pythons, coil themselves around the bodies of their victims. Such are the images seen by the *feuapi,* the healers and diviners who seek out and rescue the trapped dream-selves.[2] Faifai are not, however, described as deliberately ill intentioned, nor are they simply dangerous, but are rather figures of power, possessed of suprahuman knowledge and capabilities. Any prolonged contact with them, especially for those not ritually prepared for it, can be fatal. They are said to fall in love with human beings sometimes, luring the beloved away to live with them in their underwater abodes. The human lover's bodily self sickens and dies if the dream-self cannot be persuaded to return. Spirit lovers appear in dreams as young and alluring white women and men (the ones bringing ritual knowledge and power are usually old, ugly, somewhat fearsome in appearance, the men bearded, the women toothless). Both men and women are said to have such dreams, and several people discussed them with me, although women are very reticent about revealing dreams of an erotic nature.

Toward the end of my interview with Celestina, as things began to slow down and she seemed to be running out of ideas, I asked whether she often dreamed of the water spirits; she had already referred to them several times. She responded immediately, and emphatically, that she was forever encountering them in dreams; then launched into an excited, rather anxious account of how for a long time she dreamed every night of a faifai man. She was in fact, at the time of these dreams, sick with severe pain and swelling in her lower back that prevented her from carrying out her normal heavy daily routine. Her dreams not only identified the cause of this debilitating illness, she explained, but also eventually provided the means of regaining her health. At the time she used to fetch water from a small lake near where she and her husband had built a house close to their gardens. This was a swampy area reputed to be a special haunt of faifai.

I went to the lake to get water and faifai spirits got me, so I dreamed. I dreamed that a European man seized me and went inside my back. He took hold of me and then said that he wanted to marry [*akavania,* which also means to take someone as a lover] me, so I was frightened. So I told my husband that they wanted to take my dream-self into the water, so I had seen the dream-image of that European man. Now I was too frightened to go and fetch water. I saw a European

man. That's what I saw in the dream, so I knew that the faifai spirits had struck me. Every night I dreamed of that man. I dreamed of him constantly because my dream-self was there—there in the lake!

This brief narrative, like the dreams of the dead returning, presents a conflict: a struggle between Celestina's dream-self and a European man who wants to seduce her. In this case, however, her dream-self gives in. When Celestina describes the dream lover seizing her and "going inside her back," she is not directly referring to him having sexual congress with her—though it is implied this is what he wants and achieves—but to the sickness her bodily self was suffering at the time. Her physical body was struck or "hit" *(e aunia)* as a result of his assault upon her dream-self.

In waking reality, Celestina was sick and unable to work. Her dream of being seduced by a European identifies the cause of the illness. She is now aware a part of herself has been lured away by a water spirit. She knows the dream lover must be abandoned and her dream-self brought back in order for her bodily self to recover. One can hardly resist translating directly into Freudian terms here, they seem so apposite. If, as Freud (1971) said, psychoanalytic therapy consists in identifying the source of repression that has given rise to the symptoms—a feat often achieved through the analysis of dreams—and then bringing it into consciousness so that the patient may deal with the conflict in conscious awareness, then this seems very close to what Celestina achieves.[3]

The objection must rightly be raised: How explicitly does Celestina herself understand all this, and how much am I, the outside observer, intruding? The dream imagery might be regarded as a disguise in the sense that the locus of sexual desire is shifted from Celestina to the importunate lover; furthermore, the lover is not represented as a man actually known to Celestina, someone she may in fact desire, but as an exotic unknown, a European. Although, as in the dreams of the dead returning, the erotic temptation is presented as a pressure exerted from an outside force, in this case the dream-self gives in to it. Celestina tells us she dreamed every night of being with her European lover, and she tells her husband about it. She explains to him she is too frightened to go and fetch water because of her dreams; furthermore, her back pain is so bad that she can do little physical work at all, something that can only cause concern since a Mekeo family depends so heavily upon the wife's labor. The dream narrative carries an implicit

message that a part of Celestina is beset by erotic temptations endangering her waking self. Can she and her husband be unaware of the unsatisfied wishes represented in not one, but recurring dreams? There is more to follow that will leave little doubt on this score.

Certainly it would be false to argue Celestina has come to recognize she has, in her own mind, set up a repression against her erotic needs and that by facing the source of the repression in consciousness she will able to remove the preconditions for the symptoms and thus dispel them. Nor is it just that she uses different idioms—"dream-self" for "libido," for example, although in this context of healing the two concepts seem to come remarkably close. Her aim, and modus operandi, is not only to bring her inner conflict into consciousness (as in psychoanalytic treatment); rather, she uses the conscious insights gained from her dreams to try to influence the action of her dream-self in subsequent dreams.

Having identified the faifai lover as the source of her problem, either Celestina or her husband might have sought the help of a feuapi. Instead, she paid close attention to subsequent dreams and was finally rewarded by one in which a faifai couple, a man and a woman, showed her a special plant to rub on her back. As already noted, water spirits often feature in dreams as the bearers of ritual knowledge. On waking, Celestina followed the instructions of the faifai couple, using their medicine to reduce the pain in her back. But as this did entirely cure her, she finally resolved to drive off the faifai lover. In the manner followed by feuapi healers, she goes to bed with a knife placed beside her pillow and dreams the following:

> In the dream I saw a dream-image of a snake wound around my back. They had told me [it is not clear who she is referring to here; possibly the faifai couple mentioned previously or merely people knowledgeable in ritual healing], therefore I got a knife ready and when I went to bed, I placed the knife nearby. That snake—the faifai—was here around my back. I took the knife to bed with me. During the night when I dreamed I tried and tried to strike that snake with the knife and at last drove it away. Then the next day my back felt better and I started to recover a little.

In this dream the exotic lover appears no longer in the form of a handsome European man embracing her, but as a huge python crushing her body.[4] At last recognizing it for what it is, her dream-self can reject this destructive force and drive it away. On waking, she feels better and begins to recover. She heals herself by con-

sciously using her dream insights to guide the actions of her dream-self in a less destructive direction, persuading it to perceive the dream lover as her waking self does: a crippling, strangling physical agony. We might say she succeeds in directing her unconscious fantasy processes to suit her conscious ends. Could it be that in doing so she has influenced her id to give up its regressive satisfactions, thus making libido available again to her ego, and dispelling the symptoms?

She is not yet, however, entirely free of temptation. Spending most of their time away from the village at their garden house, Celestina and her family find themselves in a place where there are in fact many large pythons. In general, only water creatures are considered to be faifai; all pythons, however, are faifai, whether they live in the water or on land. People are understandably frightened of these reptiles, which are said to be capable of killing even a grown man. I myself have seen a huge python of awesome appearance cross the track at night at a spot not far from Celestina's garden house. In general, people hesitate to kill such a creature for fear of the anger of the faifai spirit taking its form. Poor Celestina averred she was always coming across pythons while working in her garden; she would only have to go to cut down a bunch of bananas to find one coiled round the base of the tree. These waking encounters, she explained, provoked another dream of a faifai lover, but this time her dream-self acted more circumspectly.

I have seen them [pythons] many, many times. In the garden, wherever we go, we see them. One came here at night to get a fowl. My husband went out to kill it. He called me to come and hold the lamp for him so he could see it. But I told him not to call me, and not to call out my name. He went and killed the python by himself. Then that night I lay down and I dreamed.

When I dreamed, I saw a young man, the dream-self of that python, and he said to me, "I want the two of us to get married, so I have come here." "No," I replied. Now his grandfather and my grandfather were one family I maintained. "Your grandfather and my grandfather are both one family therefore we two cannot get married." Then he said, "Oh, alright, I thought I came to the place of different people, but now you are the same family, so never mind, I will go."

If I had agreed to marry him, I would get sick. But I refused him, so nothing happened. When I got up I bathed in hot water and used medicines *[fu'a]* and I was alright.

The young man in this instance was not a European, but had brown skin like a Papuan. Celestina explained to me that only

pythons living in the water appear in dreams as people with white skins; others take the form of ordinary people with brown skins. The circumstances of this dream might suggest to us that her anxiety arising out of encounters with real snakes threatens to reactivate libidinous desires—anxiety perhaps linked by phallic associations at conscious and unconscious levels.

In this narrative, erotic temptation again faces her. A handsome young man comes to court her, but now her dream-self is, as it were, alerted to the danger and manages to persuade the young man to leave by the clever expedient of claiming they are too closely related to marry. In waking consciousness, Celestina has no doubt that this dream warns of a recurrence of her illness. She treats herself as if she were ill, bathing in hot water and rubbing her body with the medicines the faifai couple showed her. These procedures are intended to strengthen her body and ward off the would-be lover. She manages to avert this new threat by conscious actions intended to reinforce the healthy response of her dream-self.

I have interpreted these narratives of water-spirit lovers as revealing repressed erotic desires, in much the same way I interpreted the dreams of the dead returning as expressing repressed aggression. Yet so far I have produced nothing to show Celestina is, or was, sexually repressed, except the dream evidence. As a married woman with several children, she can hardly be considered entirely unfulfilled sexually. I do not know the circumstances or details of her intimate life, nor did I attempt to elicit such material from her. Nevertheless, on the basis of cultural values alone, values that Celestina has presumably internalized, Mekeo women are neither expected nor encouraged to give open expression to their erotic needs. Women not only must be faithful to their husbands when they marry, but are considered sexually unaggressive, indeed little interested in sex. Men believe they have no hope of finding a bride or lover without love rituals to attract the woman against her will. These differences are underlined, for example, in male and female dressing and self decoration (Stephen, in press). Men sometimes compare the striking differences between Mekeo women and the Waima women of the coast, who enjoy as much sexual freedom as their men, and spend much time in beautifying and presenting themselves with great elegance. But if in Mekeo men's eyes the coastal women are objects of exotic allure, in the women's eyes they are lazy, vain hussies!

Celestina's desires for forbidden lovers are understandable in this cultural context alone. Mekeo women must repress their sexuality to conform with social expectations of both their own and the opposite sex. Whatever Celestina's private longings for sexual adventure might be, she could not openly admit them to others, nor even, I think, to herself. She was certainly regarded in the community generally as a thoroughly respectable and admirable matron. We need only to posit in her case a strong libido to understand the source of her conflicts. She is a forceful personality, and physically strong and healthy, despite the many references in her dream reports to illness. She is a good-looking woman, with fine facial features and good bearing, and would certainly be considered a sexually desirable partner according to Mekeo standards. Her need for erotic satisfaction may be stronger than can be acceptably expressed in her culture. There is, however, another part of herself that can give voice to these unacceptable desires, and does so. Much the same sort of points can be made with regard to the expression of aggression by women in this culture. Mekeo women are thought of, and encouraged to think of themselves, as altruistic, caring, and nurturing. Most women do in fact conduct themselves in a manner suggestive of motherly strength and capability, persuading me these qualities are internalized. For a kind, well-meaning person such as Celestina, the very thought she might desire the deaths of her close relatives would be totally inadmissible. Yet she dreams repeatedly of sinister omens. Her culture determines her aggressive desires are incompatible with her conscious image of self, forcing her to push them out of awareness. But her culture also provides a means of identifying and coming to terms with these inner pressures should they become too insistent.[5]

Although the means adopted are ego-syntonic, serving the needs of consciousness and culture, I do not think what we see here is merely a culturally constituted defense system employed by the individual to protect herself or himself against conscious knowledge of forbidden desire. On the contrary, Celestina's dreams make her more aware of her inner tensions. One final instance will help to show how she uses dream insights to communicate to others her secret needs.

DREAM OF A HUSBAND'S INFIDELITY

This example was not volunteered, but recounted in response to a question I raised toward the end of our interview: Had she ever seen Jesus, God, or other Christian figures in dreams? She replied that God once spoke directly to her, although she did not see him. This followed directly on the water-spirit dreams and is evidently related to them; in fact, this final dream provides a link between the two themes of erotic desire and aggression running through all the others.

I did not see him [God], I only heard his words. I told my husband. A woman's dream-self—now she is dead but she was alive then—that woman's dream-self, I saw her go into the mosquito net [go to bed] and remain there. And I, I sat outside the net. My husband, Paul, he also went into that mosquito net. Yes, Paul, he went in and stayed there. Then God's dream-self—I didn't actually see him, he just called down to me and I heard him. He told Paul—he told me to tell Paul, "God has said that a man shall have one wife—one spouse." And if he should desire *[anina e ani]* another woman, his first wife will not exist. Then I would die. If my husband desired that other woman, I would die, God said. Now the woman took her bead necklace—like that one you are wearing, Michele[6]—the dream-self of that woman who is now dead, she took the necklace and gave it to Paul to put on. Now if Paul had put on that necklace, he too would die. But he refused. He said, "I will not wear that necklace, I don't desire *[anina ae ani]* it."[7] They could see me, so they felt embarrassed, but I was sitting outside the mosquito net. I lifted up the mosquito net and I saw the two of them.

God himself spoke and I heard his voice. He said, "You must go and tell everyone that. You must preach in the village, you must say—God has said that there is one wife for each man. And if the man does not desire that woman, and rejects her, then that woman will die." That's what God said. I did not see his body, Michele, I will not lie to you. I heard his voice telling me to go and preach to the people in the village. But I thought I might become mad *[kaniau apala fe mia]* . . . [she breaks off our discussion to deal with a restless child].

Now when I dreamed that, the next morning I told Paul, "Well that did not come out of my thoughts." I said, "Inside myself *[alouai]* I was not thinking bad things, but it was a dream. You were cheating on me, but it was a dream. God spoke to me. Now you will have to pray hard that I will live. If you reject me, if you don't desire me but want that other woman, you will see, I will die." That's what I dreamed. But if I pray hard, I will live and she will die. My dream indicates she will die. I saw her inside the mosquito net, but she did not take it down, but just stayed there. Paul came out of the net and I stayed outside it, but she remained in it. So she will die. That's what I dreamed.

In this dream report, as in the others, I am struck by the impression that one part of Celestina is constructing a story with a strong implicit message, while another part—her waking, con-

scious self—is attempting to understand it. The part telling the story knows things the other does not. It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that we, as external observers of the situation, might be able see more contained in the message than the conscious part of Celestina.

Consider the text of this narrative. Celestina's dream-self catches the dream-self of her husband in bed with another woman. The woman offers Paul her necklace to wear, which he refuses. Then God's voice thunders down that a man must have only one wife; if he disobeys and takes another woman, the first wife will die. Celestina's dream-self is instructed to preach this message to the whole community. More complex than the other examples, this holds several overlapping possibilities of interpretation. I will not attempt to justify Celestina's understanding of each.

The most overt layer is Celestina's jealousy concerning her husband, which she explains she was not aware of until the occurrence of this dream (i.e., she was not consciously thinking "bad things" about Paul). The dream indicates another part of Celestina is jealous of her husband, believing him to be unfaithful, and fears she is in danger of being rejected by him. It further reveals she will die by God's command if her husband persists in hankering after another woman. So she prays she will live and her rival will die. In other words, she is consumed by repressed jealousy; she unconsciously fears rejection; this generates powerful destructive urges toward the woman who may replace her—or toward herself, should she be cast out. The symbol of the mosquito net, which played an important role in her other dreams as a sign of imminent death, synthesizes here in a single motif her sexual jealousy and destructive wishes: the bed in which one has sexual intercourse, the grave wherein one lies dead, and the rival who occupies both.

Taken in the context of the earlier dreams of water-spirit lovers, which pointed to frustrated erotic wishes, we find here not only is her marital relationship failing to meet her needs, but she fears she will be denied what little satisfaction it does provide. Since her husband is not satisfying her, he must be spending his time with other women. But there is an element of hope. Paul's dream-self refuses the necklace. If he accepted it, Celestina tells us, he would die. The necklace (to encircle him) serves as an obvious symbol of the rival's vagina. Although I doubt Celestina would give this interpretation directly, a necklace, like any other article of apparel,

is regarded as intimately imbued with the body substance or dirt *(faga ofuga)* of the wearer, and thus to take and wear it is to have intimate contact with the body substance of that other person. The sexual connotations of such a gift are quite overt. Since Paul rejects the necklace/vagina/body dirt, he will not die, and there is hope for Celestina. But the dream implies Paul and the other woman have already become lovers. There is ambiguity here; perhaps the necklace suggests a more permanent tie that he refuses.

Paul's rejecting of the necklace, and its consequence—he will not die—suggests Celestina does not want to destroy him, but instead directs her aggression toward her rival, and herself. She continues to desire her husband; indeed she wants more of him sexually than she is getting. This is something that might be very hard for her to admit, even to herself, let alone communicate to him directly. But she does, as we know, relate the dream to him. On a more overt and consciously acceptable level, the narrative expresses quite clearly her fear of losing Paul and a need for some reassurance he still desires her. I can hardly imagine that Paul, a kindly and sensitive man, failed to see this for himself. (As he was present throughout the interview there is no doubt he knew of the dream.) The threat of death carried by the dream is also something she could not admit to in consciousness. It is represented as God's command. Yet the powerful urgency of her death wishes are communicated to Paul in her insistence he must pray with her that she will not die. And what of the necklace Paul's dream-self does not desire: might it be he does not want any necklace/vagina? Does he want another woman? Does he want her? Does he have any sexual desire at all? The dream symbolism allows Celestina to explore the ambiguities of the situation, following in the manner Sperber (1975) suggests the many associative paths leading from the dream motifs.

An explosive mixture of jealousy, sexual passion, hatred, and self-destructiveness is condensed in this one brief dream. I believe it provides the key to understanding Celestina's recurring dreams of the deaths of relatives and of the water spirit lovers. The relatives whose deaths her dreams foreshadow are her clan sisters, with whom she is expected to have particularly close and affectionate ties; but, like herself, they are also eligible marriage partners for Paul. We can see Celestina's self-punishing guilt provoked by her dreams of the dead returning to take her with them are deeply

motivated by her sexual jealousy of her clan sisters, whom she unconsciously perceives as rivals and thus enemies. In this final dream the one crucial figure missing from the others appears. Celestina's relationship with Paul is the pivot of the conflicts depicted in her dreams—dreams that, she constantly emphasized, she always discussed with him immediately on waking.

By paying close attention to her dreams and sharing them with Paul, Celestina gains awareness of emotions otherwise inadmissible in consciousness. She is able to disclose a deep undercurrent of erotic frustration, making Paul aware of her suspicions and her need for reassurance, and at the same time alerting him to dangers posed by his own hidden desires. In working through the dreams, she is able to come to terms with forbidden desires in a way which not only removes the physical symptoms they are causing, but also helps to consolidate a trusting relationship with her husband. Her success in the later was amply attested to in the way in which the couple could together relate these intimate matters to me.[8]

CONCLUSION

Part of my account of Celestina's emotional conflict is admittedly conjecture, but I think what is beyond doubt is the way in which she uses her dream experience to gain greater self-knowledge. Her close attention to her dreams and the actions of her hidden self, enables her to represent these emotions usually denied in consciousness to herself—and to her husband. Furthermore, this allows her to communicate her emotions in a manner that does not directly confront, accuse, or threaten the husband, or directly implicate herself. Her faifai dreams reveal a hidden undercurrent of erotic frustration, and the need to bring back her dream-self from the spirit lover who has stolen it. In the "other woman" dream she clearly reveals to her husband her underlying jealousies, but in a manner acceptable to both; she does not accuse him, but makes him aware of her suspicions, and her need to be reassured—and also alerts him to the desires of his own hidden self. Thus focusing on the actions of the hidden self brings one, and one's intimates, fuller awareness of desires and needs outside consciousness. Celestina can be seen to make good practical use of her dreams, and her claims to self-cures, are not, I think, without justification.[9]

All this is not to claim that Mekeo have a perfect understanding of their unconscious motivations and desires. By no means do all Mekeo care to face in consciousness the import of their dreams as bravely as does Celestina. Some deliberately invoke the cultural conventions of dream interpretation to extract meanings more easily acceptable to them and to others. A brief example will serve to provide a telling contrast with Celestina's honesty. During an interview on dreams in another village, a married couple joined the discussion. The wife had a dream to tell me. In the dream, another woman's dream-self boasted that she was having an affair with the dreamer's husband. The dreamer angrily told her she was lying and chased her away. The husband then interjected, explaining to me that his wife had been wrong to chase away this other woman's dream-self, because what the dream *really* signified was that he, the husband, was going to win at cards (gambling is a favorite male pastime). If his wife had not made the mistake of chasing the other woman away, then he would have in waking reality won a lot of money. This explanation was delivered with an air of decided one-upmanship. The husband seemed to feel he had outwitted his wife and turned what was an accusation against him into one against the wife. Given the many levels of dream interpretation, it is always possible to attempt to counter someone else's insights in this way. Yet no doubt there had been a degree of communication between husband and wife, even though the husband tried to avoid the issue.

For Mekeo, another self is revealed in dreams. People can choose to ignore it, or construe symbolic interpretations to avoid its meaning, but the very notion serves to focus the individual's attention on aspects of self not consciously perceived. By paying attention to the dream-self, certain individuals gain greater awareness of these denied aspects of self and come to terms with them in consciousness. Here, clearly, I depart from the views of those psychoanalytically inclined ethnographers who view indigenous interpretative systems as culturally constituted defenses (e.g., Kilbourne 1881; Tuzin 1975). Psychoanalytic theory assumes that dreams, by their very nature, are not understood by the dreamer. This presupposes a special position of authority in relation to dream interpretation: the ethnographer must assume greater knowledge, and responsibility, than the informant. It becomes extremely difficult from this position to even to acknowledge the possibility that valid self-knowl-

edge can be derived by the dreamer. Positive and creative uses of dreaming, such as those identified here, tend to become obscured in the ethnographer's need to take on the analyst's mantle of authority. Although I have drawn on many psychoanalytic insights in this discussion, I have tried to resist this temptation and thus leave authority with the dreamer herself.

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NOTES

1. The fieldwork on which this article is primarily based was carried out from October 1980 to June 1981, and December 1981 to February 1982. It was funded by the Australian Research Grants Council. Earlier fieldwork among the Mekeo was carried out in 1969, 1970, 1971, and over the summer vacation of 1978–79.

2. The range of faifai-attributed illness is so broad I can offer no neat categorization. They may be external, such as skin diseases, abscesses, swellings (which in particular are attributed to faifai); they include serious birth deformities and difficulties in childbirth, as well as general body pains and aches likened to a snake wrapped around the body, internal sensations of something moving around like a snake in the abdomen, and gripping pains in the body cavity. Minor complaints, including headaches, coughs and colds, and the general fretfulness of small children, are also attributed to inadvertent contacts with faifai.

3. Later, Freud revised this view somewhat as he moved from a topographical to a structural view of the unconscious, and reformulated his theory of anxiety (1971:545–575). Arlow and Brenner (1964:53) point out that the therapeutic process now became more complex. Not only was the aim to make "the unconscious conscious" but, in addition, an analysis of the defense mechanisms themselves was required.

4. Herr's (1981) study of Fijian dreams makes an interesting comparison in many respects with these dreams of water spirit lovers. There is the similarity of the two cultures (both cultures speak an Austronesian language) with respect to hereditary status, the repression of female sexuality, and especially in the careful public management of social tensions. Attitudes to disclosing dreams and the view that they reveal negative and dangerous things are also shared. Furthermore, beliefs concerning erotic dreams, especially those of women, are similar, although not identical. Fulagan Fijian erotic dreams are all attributed to the trickery and malice of *tevoro,* nonhuman spirit beings who take the dream form of seductive human lovers. Such dreams should be confessed for fear of unconfessed sexual sins causing illness. Women, according to Herr, are more bothered by such "nightmares" than men. The problem here is whether such dreams are in fact nightmares in the sense Herr defines. In fact, her account (1981:344) indicates that girls may get pleasure from the manifest content of erotic dreams, and that their danger is hidden. It seems therefore that it is the conscious (culturally determined) interpretation of the dream when recalled on waking that causes anxiety, and not the manifest content, as of course I have argued in the case of Celestina's dream reports.

5. While Herr acknowledges that in other societies where similar beliefs have been recorded, ritual intervention is taken on the basis of dream interpretation, she denies any such therapeutic consequences in the Fijian context. The difference she observes here can, I think, be accounted for largely on the basis of the Christian influence she describes. Christianity has not destroyed Mekeo beliefs in the significance of dreams, nor convinced

people, as the Fulagan Fijians are convinced, that to dream at all is to engage in the work of the Devil. Thus I suggest that dreaming continues in Mekeo culture to have a therapeutic role to play that has become defunct in the communities Herr studied as a result of mission influence. See Freeman (1967) and Obeyesekere (1981:138–142) for discussions of similar erotic dreams and their therapeutic use.

6. The necklace *(kutu)* I wore was a short string of black, rounded beads made from seeds, an ornament commonly worn by Mekeo of both sexes and all ages. On the face of it, her statement holds nothing beyond a clarification of the item she referred to, but I think anyone familiar with dialogue in a therapeutic context would suspect unconscious or preconscious levels of meaning here. Does she identify me with the woman in the dream? Does she suspect me of being involved with her husband? He was, after all, my field assistant and interpreter during my first fieldwork, which meant he spent a lot of time in my company, sometimes alone (although always in a place where we were in full view of other people). This was at a time when Celestina was in the final stages of pregnancy and so might expect her husband to be seeking sexual outlet elsewhere. When I made a brief visit seven years later, Paul had many long discussions with me privately discussing his dreams. Now I had returned and was once again seeking him out for information on dreams. To add to all this, I was identified with Celestina's own clan and lineage, as it was on their land that both my houses were built. People, largely in jest, spoke of me as a woman of her clan, thus placing me in the very category of females whom, as we shall see, became the focus of her unconscious jealousy and aggression. It could be that her suspicions of me were quite conscious and that her statement should be read as a direct accusation, yet I do not think this is the case. If it were, I can hardly believe that she would have agreed to talk with me as she did. In any case, she had not intended to relate this final dream, and did so only in response to my specific questioning about dreams involving Christian figures. Her response to me on this and on many other occasions was never even subtly hostile or evasive. For these reasons I take the implicit accusation as a preconscious one, coming, as it does, in the middle of relating to me inner fantasy.

7. The expression *anina ae ani* 'I don't want/desire' might be used equally appropriately of wanting something such as a necklace or a new shirt, or of desiring to possess a woman sexually. The wording thus emphasizes the link to sexual desire.

8. The nature of my involvement in this dialogue, as already indicated in note 6, is rather more intense and complex than is at first apparent. Overtly, Celestina is simply relating a series of past dreams. There is no expectation of my intervening to guide self-revelation or to resolve her emotional conflicts, nor do I do so. On the surface, our interaction contrasts markedly with, for example, the intense engagement between Kracke (1981) and his Kagwahiv friend and informant, Jovenil. Kracke's interviews with Jovenil take place daily over a period of several months. The dreams that emerge are clearly related to this ongoing dialogue, in which Kracke consciously plays an important role that he later appreciates more fully as a therapeutic one. Yet the contrast between our situations is not as great as it at first appears. The implicit accusation toward me in Celestina's comment about the rival's necklace indicates that I may be far more deeply involved in events, from Celestina's point of view, than I was aware. Her motive, in Kracke's sense, for discussing her dreams *with me* may have been precisely to deal with anxiety related to my interaction with her husband; although, as I have indicated, her dreams are concerned with far more than jealousy of me. For his part, Kracke (1981:272) does not see himself as indispensable to Jovenil's working through his grief, and observes that the unanswerable question remains whether he would have "resolved his conflicts in the same way without these interviews." Along lines similar to those I argue, Kracke also stresses that "asking people to talk about their dreams and childhood memories was a way to communicate an interest in their own personal experience . . . and led people in association to their dreams to open up fantasies and memories of a sensitive kind that were especially helpful in understanding how they felt about themselves"

(1981:260). Do our differences, which on closer inspection are not so great, arise from varying cultural emphases or from the stances we adopted as ethnographers?

9. Herr criticizes earlier arguments of mine (Stephen 1979) concerning the innovative role of dreaming in many Melanesian societies, remarking, "The value and validity of regarding anxiety dreams and nightmares as constructive innovation seem problematical" (1981:346). But, as these dreams of Celestina clearly demonstrate, dreams do not have to be positive in nature to provide important insights. Indeed innovation, both on a personal and a group level, often stems from some conflict and the need to reach new solutions to existing problems.

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