The Meaning of “Culture” among Aboriginal Pentecostal Christians: Doing Anthropology of Discontinuity in Australia

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This article examines the way in which a group of Aboriginal people in rural Australia have accepted Pentecostal Christianity under a diverse Aboriginal lay leadership. The Christians of this group reject Aboriginal “culture.” This, however, does not mean they reject Aboriginality. Drawing upon my fieldwork data and past ethnographies related to the region, I show that their rejection of “culture” is focused upon eradicating their fear of sorcery and promoting attachment to the community and its people. Loss of knowledge related to the sacred places, at which both beneficent magic and destructive magic used to be performed, has enhanced fear as generations have passed. The Aboriginal people have redefined their meaning of “culture” in order to put their primordial past under their control. This article advocates shifting the study of religious change from a dichotomized model that opposes invading Christian moral orders against resisting traditional cultures to one that examines the complex historical development of vernacular Christianity.

Key words: anthropology’s "continuity thinking," rejection of culture, Aboriginal Christianity, Pentecostalism, Australia

Pentecostalism was dispersed quickly over Aboriginal lands in northern New South Wales of Australia during the early twentieth century. A diverse local Aboriginal lay leadership laid ground for Pentecostalization of Aboriginal people in this region, where people identify today as the Bundjalung-Githabal. The permeation of Pentecostalism into the Bundjalung-Githabal community dates back to the early 1920s. Since that time they have had “all-Aboriginal” Pentecostal churches independent of white involvement for more than two generations. The Pentecostalization of the Bundjalung-Githabal, therefore, took place well before the Aboriginal Christian evangelical movement spread from Elcho Island in 1979 (BLACKET 1997; BOS 1988; ROSE 1988; RUDDER 1993; HARRIS 1990: 869-906) and the spiritual

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The Pentecostal church in Australia had been a minority denomination until a drastic expansion began in the 1970s-1980s (HUGHES 1996; CHANT 1984): moreover there has long been prejudice against it in the white mainstream society. Mainline denominations often accused the movement of extremism or fanaticism. "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" indicates the mystic side of the services typically found in this denomination. In this faith, one has direct spiritual contact with God in a variety of ways, but on the whole, one gets in an ecstatic condition on the direct outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the glossolalia (or speaking "in tongues") that accompanies it.³

Bundjalung-Githabul Pentecostals today reject Aboriginal "culture" nearly indiscriminately — whether it is talking about traditional religious life or participating in the contemporary cultural revitalization movement encouraged by the government. Culture and Christianity must not go hand in hand. This was the prominent discourse I encountered in the first week of my fieldwork in 2002. This article examines the meaning of "culture" among Bundjalung-Githabul Pentecostal Christians. Drawing upon my fieldwork data and past ethnographies, I show that their rejection of "culture" is not the rejection of Aboriginality. In Bundjalung-Githabul society, Christianity is needed by those who are deeply embedded in the lived reality of everyday life: such as those individuals who exist within the Aboriginal social domain based on the Aboriginal mode of thought.

The analytic focus of this article is fixed at two points. Firstly, I will look at the issue concerning "culturelessness" and "loss" as a dominant representation of Aboriginal peoples in "settled" Australia. This point has been questioned by a growing number of researchers recently (e.g. CREAMER 1988; KEEN ed.1988; LANGTON 1984; MACDONALD 2001). "Settled Australia" refers here to the closely "settled" regions of Australia modeled by C.D. ROWLEY

1 The Elcho Island revival spread throughout Arnhem Land, into the central and southern areas and to the Western Desert region. In the Yarrabah mission community, a special gift of visions held by Aboriginal residents led to life-changing miracles whereby the alcohol-and-violence-stricken community changed. Both are regarded as new phenomena in Aboriginal Australia in that they were autonomous movements under Aboriginal leadership and that the movement emphasized the spiritual side of the gospel. In Aboriginal anthropology, the pioneering Pentecostal movement of Bundjalung-Githabul people has been somewhat overlooked with regard to this aspect of an autonomous Aboriginal evangelical Christian movement. This is mainly due to the past ethnographers' representations of the local Aboriginal Christianity as a syncretic cult and emphasis on their collection of syncretic myths or elaboration of the stories from biblical and traditional sources — such as the story of Aboriginal Jesus — among very old elders of the time (CALLEY 1955, 1959, 1964: HAUSFELD 1960, 1963).

2 Historians agree that the Pentecostal movement had its beginnings in the United States when a small group of Bible school students in Topeka, Kansas, experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues on New Year's Eve in 1900 (cf. SYNAN 2001). The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles (starting in 1906) sprang from this movement and it became the center of the multicultural Pentecostal church, through which Pentecostalism spread into the other parts of the world. Australia, however, had its own parallel developments at the turn of the twentieth century, although some renowned American preachers were later invited by early Australian Pentecostal churches for short-term joint evangelical tours in Australia. There was an "end-of-the-century" atmosphere of expecting supernatural manifestations of God and this sentiment was erupting universally among white Christians in the early 1900s in Australia (CHANT 1984: 88).

3 Speaking in tongues is the utterance of sounds that are not understandable to the speaker (SYNAN 1997: 108).
(1971), which have been most radically transformed by European settlers (cf. KEEN 1988). Secondly, I would like to confront the prevailing analytical framework that exists in studies about Aboriginal Christianity: studies that often dichotomize Christianity and tradition, or dominance and resistance. In more general terms, this framework is identical with the dichotomy between change and persistence: this is a frame of reference that incarcerates Aboriginal people within the stabilized scholarly discourse of either a loss of cultural inheritance or unchanging tradition. In this article, I attempt to explore indigenous expressions of Christianity on a theoretical basis of deconstructing the dichotomy of the “changing modern” and “unchanging traditional.”

The Bundjalung-Githabul Community

The traditional territory of Bundjalung-Githabul people lies in the far north coastal region of New South Wales. Before European contact (in the 1820s-30s) there were about 20 closely related dialect groups but today the term “Bundjalung” has replaced most sub-groups, except the Githabul group (CROWLEY 1978: SHARPE 1985). Therefore, in the present context, the most appropriate representation of the Aboriginal people in this region is “Bundjalung-Githabul” people. The Bundjalung-Githabul population is today dispersed widely in the far north coastal region and its Christian community cuts across several settlements – in the ex-station and reserve settlements, fringe towns and urban centers. According to the 2001 census, the Aboriginal population of this area is approximately 6,000, comprising about 3% of the total population. The social domains of the local whites and blacks are distinctively separate except for a few domains of social interaction such as schooling and drinking. Despite the obvious Europeanization of lifestyle and loss of traditional material culture, Bundjalung-Githabul people are closely related through loyalty amongst kin that has been reinforced by complex intermarriage over generations. This respect for kinship enables them to live within the social domain of a somewhat exclusive Aboriginal community with its own social order and values. Although it is obvious that they are a people of mixed descent, intermarriage with whites has been rare until only recently. The sharing of money, food, commodities, transportation and child rearing is practiced—and these acts are substantially based on kin relations regardless of generation, residential area, Christian affiliation, and

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4 The “settled” regions lie mainly in the southeastern and southwestern parts of the Australian continent (KEEN 1988: 1). According to KEEN, Darwin, the major European and Asian settlement of the north, should also be included in the category.


6 In southeastern Australia, Aboriginal communities are now essentially mixed-descent communities, not because of active inter-racial marriage, but because of intermarriage through several generations within the Aboriginal community after the initial introduction of white blood that had taken place by the middle of the nineteenth century (ROWLEY 1972). Regarding the Bundjalung-Githabul, according to a record as of 1985, marriage was mainly within the Aboriginal community and the proportion of European ancestry had not changed much in the previous 50 years (SHARPE 1985).
the degree of fairness of skin color. Frequent visits among relatives and casual, temporary cohabitation also help resources to circulate. Narratives of attachment to “our people,” “our community” and the “blackfella” way are poignant even among Pentecostal Christians who are candid in their rejection of Aboriginal culture and tradition.

The Bundjalung-Githabul country has always had abundant Aboriginal churches for proselytes to go to within the Aboriginal social domain. As far as their social orientations are concerned, in their community, becoming Christian means that one shifts from the “sinner’s way” to the “Lord’s way” within the same domain of the everyday “blackfella’s life.” In essence, it is only a shift from one lifestyle to another while maintaining the same mundane life in the same Aboriginal community. This group of Aboriginal people has formed an Aboriginal church network while they have kept their Christian practice self-dependent or, rather, withdrawn from the white Christian community. The local Aboriginal congregations have never merged into white Pentecostal churches in the vicinity, despite the fact that most of the Aboriginal congregations lack a stable financial footing and active manpower. There are twelve congregations of the Aboriginal church in the Bundjalung-Githabul country, which are based on a seemingly endless cycle of the merging and splitting of small factions. Some of the factional groups were merely “house meeting” groups. Notwithstanding their rejection of Aboriginal “culture” or their traditional religious knowledge, they are exclusively Aboriginal – that is, dependent on the social relations within the local Aboriginal community. The pastors of the congregations are local-born Aboriginal persons and the congregations are virtually not controlled by the umbrella bodies. The pastors pay for the membership to the umbrella body (it costs approximately 60 dollars per year), but for them the only benefit of, and necessity for, the membership is to maintain the certificate required for practicing marriage and burial rites.

It is extremely difficult for outsiders to find out when, where, and by whom church services and other meetings are held in the local Aboriginal community. Except for a couple of churches that have been known to have regular weekly activities for the past couple of years or so, information about the time and venue of church activities is generally only available through the grapevine of the local Aboriginal community. It is not unusual, after all the hustle and expectations of a church service, to find only a pastor and their own family as the whole congregation, and moreover, it is not uncommon that the venue is a lounge room of a private home, where kids rolled in blankets are scattered on the floor, sleeping. The lack of interest in making church activities mandatory and securing a permanent property is one of the characteristics of the Bundjalung-Githabul congregations. As noted above, most of the congregations lack a stable organization including a firm financial footing. It is partly because they, as Pentecostals, put more emphasis on personal communication with the Holy

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7 On the whole, people can provide for their family unless they are absorbed in alcohol and drug abuse. Housing needs are well looked after by the local Aboriginal Housing Corporations and, more importantly, there are kin to whom individuals can turn for help at any time.

8 The word “sinner” simply means a non-Christian in Christian discourse. Christians regard those who do not believe in God as committing the greatest sin.
Spirit than the formalities of religious ceremonies respected by the orthodox churches, and partly because the Bundjalung-Githabal Pentecostal community retains a strong loyalty to local kin groups. All the church factions are embedded in a complex web of closely related kin groups. Rather than thriving for the growth of a church, the members of these congregations tend to regard the Christian fellowship as a kind of contested arena where loyalties to kin, family and church leaders are tested.

Thus the Bundjalung-Githabal community is a very small, exclusive community, though geographically dispersed. Among the members of the community, it is considered common sense to everyone that people watch one another. Tension among the community members produces feelings of anxiety and insecurity, and ultimately can become fear of their own people. A Christian youth once stressfully and sadly testified, "We watch one another. Aboriginal people are like this." He had a lot of anxiety as there are always unresolved issues in the community, even brothers and sisters are "having issues" with one another. "Grudging, unforgiveness...," he continued, "In the church there are jealousies, criticisms, backstabbing, and gossiping. We know offences are being talked about and we hold the grudge. It is left in the lurk." He professed a complete improbability for them to bring up "the issues" and confront one another. They are suffocatingly related to one another in a complex way, and so he continued, "We just can't do it." Rather, they choose to live with emotional stress and surveillance by their own people, rather than engage in confrontation or discussion.

The major concerns among the contemporary Bundjalung-Githabal are greatly relevant to their relationships with others, especially kin. Various inter-intra-factional conflicts are intricately entwined with different kinds of tensions: such as those between the families, between the older generation and the younger generation, between loyalty to kin groups and to Christian groups, between sense of relatedness and the desire for personal autonomy. Decisions about actions are made at each critical point according to the context, and so, the standard of judgement fluctuates constantly. These conditions cause intense emotional stress. People chronically suffer from anxieties and suspicions because of complex and substantial kin obligations that must be tirelessly fulfilled at the expense of everything else. Especially, attitudes towards upward social mobility, such as accumulation of money and work responsibilities, are irreconcilable with such binding kin obligations. In such a closed community of kin, and one under intense surveillance like that of the Bundjalung-Githabal, looking for the causes of problems, that is, talking directly about the problems, offences and resentments, risks breaking down the emotional equilibrium of the community.

Understanding a "Settled" and Christianized Situation

The anthropological focus on change in Aboriginal society has been bound by an antithetical opposition, that is, on the one hand the reproduction of traditional lives and on the other a one-way process to change. The latter idea, in the main, is concerned with the
Aboriginal people in "settled" Australia. In these settled areas severe dispossession took place. As a result, it has been maintained that Aboriginal people living in such a deprived environment have no alternative but to change toward assimilation. The former idea, by contrast, holds that Aboriginal people "adapt new things to traditional ways." Particularly, studies of Aboriginal people in remote regions have demonstrated that Aboriginal culture retains the strength to reproduce traditional lives or traditional aspects of them — despite the increasing interactions between Aboriginal and European lifeworlds. Persistence of distinct aspects of Aboriginal cultural production has been powerfully demonstrated in the growing body of work that explores the milieu in which Aboriginal people's lives have come to be articulated with exogenous socio-cultural orders (e.g. MYERS 1988; PETERSON 1977, 1991, 2000). Conceptually, these works imply that people fit new circumstances into old categories. As with M. SAHLINS's analysis of the Hawaiian understanding of Captain Cook as the god Lono (SAHLINS 1985), cultural categories stretch to encompass new referents but do not change their relations to other categories. The relations between categories are left untouched and traditional cultural understandings can be reproduced in the face of new realities, or else a transformation of the relations between those categories may occur, but people are able to maintain a sense that their familiar categories are still in play.

The latter position, a one-way process to change, argues people live in a world with so many new things that they abandon their traditional ways. Nevertheless such people are also able to draw resources from a previous culture and to respond creatively to changes. This view is evident in the studies of Aboriginal people in "settled" Australia. These regions have been radically transformed by settlers of European origin and Aboriginal people in these regions have been given a stereotypical image: that of cultureless "part-Aborigines" or "half-castes" — the term now allocated is "mixed-descent" Aboriginal people. Bundjalung-Githabul people are included in this category. Representations of "culturelessness" prevailed until the 1980s in scholarly writings of Aboriginal studies (for example, BELL 1959, 1964; REAY 1945, 1949). Recent studies criticize the representation of "culturelessness and loss" or "invention of culturelessness" (cf. MACDONALD 2001) and more positively emphasize the persistence of a distinctive culture or a way of life (cf. KEEN ed. 1988). The conceptual direction of this position, however, is continuous with that of the work in remote Aboriginal society. It is because, despite the antithetical momentums that the two positions focus on, both expect that in confronting change people fit new circumstances into old cultural categories. In short, the main concern of these contrasting positions is to emphasize either what has been retained or what has been lost.

Within this framework, it is evident that Bundjalung-Githabul Christianity retains no sign of persistence of the Aboriginal way or socio-cultural order in its rituals and activities. The south-east, where Bundjalung-Githabul people come from, is an intensely "settled" part of

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9 During the 1970s and the 1980s, the remote regions saw a major socio-cultural transformation and Aboriginal people's lives began to be articulated with many aspects of mainstream society (modernization of transport and communications) and, most remarkably, with the state and welfare system (e.g. emergence of the social order mediated by cash and commodities).
Australia, where severe depopulation and dislocation took place. Less tradition-oriented lifestyles and mixed descent origins (evident in their physical features) are obvious and the local dialects have long since fallen out of use in their everyday lives. Today their Christian practice is palpably “de-traditionalized.” There is no sign of exotic syncretism. No narratives of Aboriginal mythology, ancestral heroes, or anything related to their traditional culture are expressed in the church context. The testimonies, behaviors and narratives that take place at church are furnished with biblical terminology only.

Therefore, my focus on Aboriginal church in “settled” Australia is unusual among ethnographies of Aboriginal Australians. Not only does the church affiliation of Aboriginal people in urban and rural locations suggest a high probability of the cultivation of an Aboriginal self that has greater congruence with European values and virtues – and is therefore a departure from a “distinctive” Aboriginal way of life – but also my research target is, as above mentioned, a group of mixed-descent Aboriginal Pentecostals who have come to reject Aboriginal culture and tradition. Thus, in the conceptual framework of culture loss, it would be easy to interpret the situation in which this Aboriginal group has become a group of anti-culture advocates. This interpretation would lead to the conclusion that the assimilation of Bundjalung-Githabul Christians has been successfully completed. This would be the least attractive research target if I were interested in the zero-sum game of cultural persistence or loss. However, I purposely chose to work in the Aboriginal communities in “settled” Australia because of all the emerging spaces of contemporary Aboriginal cultural practices. Indeed the representations of culture loss can be recognized everywhere, but detachment from cultural heritage may not necessarily mean a desire for assimilation into the white society. There is a lot to explore in the loss or rupture itself, that is, discontinuity with old practices.

Obviously, in urban and rural locations as in the Bundjalung-Githabul community, Aboriginal society has shown the aspect of “well adaptedness” (cf. HINSON & SMITH 2005:157) to the white community. This differs from what are popularly considered “remote” locations such as the communities in Northern Territory. Yet, researchers have continuously reported aspects of cultural persistence in urban and rural locations. M. CALLEY, for example, depicted the Bundjalung-Githabul society as showing “adaptedness” but “leaning heavily on the logic and outlook on life of the indigenous traditions” (CALLEY 1956: 213). Ethnographers tend to emphasize these (continuously reinforced) aspects of distinction still found today in the field sites in the southeastern Aboriginal community.10 On the other hand, “remote Australia” continues to be conceived of as culturally different, yet the Aboriginal lifeworld in remote areas has increasingly come to be articulated with exogenous socio-cultural orders. The blurring boundaries between distinct domains, cultures and societies, along with the emergence of a new consciousness, have become the foci of recent anthropological studies of

10 Curiously, this trend has coincided with the pervasive representation of culture loss in the studies of Aboriginal communities in “settled” Australia. In the main, however, these studies argued that the Aboriginal people in the “settled” area “consciously retain no vestige of their tribal culture, yet they remain in some respects culturally distinct” (BECKETT 1964: 33). Conceptually, these studies regarded the aspects of distinction as part of the one-way process to cultural loss. (See also, BECKETT 1965; BARWICK 1962, 1964).
Australian Aboriginal society (cf. HINKSON & SMITH 2005). Conceptualizing these situations of "difference-yet relatedness" (HINKSON & SMITH 2005: 157) and what can be called "adaptedness-yet difference" (for example, regarding "settled" Australia as mentioned above) is in need of further theoretical elaboration.

**Christianity, Anthropology, and Cultural Change**

The study of Australian Aboriginal Christianity has been bound predominantly by the conceptual framework of persistence and change. Until the 1970s or 1980s, Aboriginal Christianity was regarded as peripheral to mainstream anthropological study (cf. ROSE & SWAIN 1988). The prevailing idea of the time was that Aboriginal peoples had only two options, those of either complete traditionalism or total assimilation into White Australian society. As the focus of Aboriginal anthropology shifted from the salvage approach to observing change, the analytical focus on Aboriginal Christianity changed accordingly and was fixed on the tension between Aboriginal and exogenous socio-cultural orders – either in the context of incommensurable divisions between Christian practice and Aboriginal cosmology (e.g. KOLIG 1981; ROSE 1988; TONKINSON 1974; TRIGGER 1988) or in the context of synthesizing processes of the two religions (e.g. MAGOWAN 1999, 2001; MCDONALD 2001; SLOTTÉ 1997).

The researchers who are interested in these divisions have focused primarily on whichever side of the binary opposition appears to be in fashion. Christianity and Aboriginal culture (or moral order) have always been counterposed; the former as an apparatus of an invading colonial ideology and the latter as the autonomy of an unchanging traditional Aboriginal mode of thought. More recent studies, which look at synthesizing processes, outline the positive aspects of the synthesizing processes of the two religions. This analytical direction contrasts with that of prevalent anthropological writings that highlight the division between Christian practice and Aboriginal cosmologies. Not only has more attention recently been paid to syncretic forms of indigenous expressions of Christianity, but also the paradigm of studies of syncretism itself has shifted from viewing it as "cultural inauthenticity, pollution and even debasement" to an "indication of indigenous creativity, agency and autonomy" (MAGOWAN and GORDON 2001: 253; cf. STEWART and SHAW 1994). Conceptually, however, the dichotomized framework of persistence and change is posited in both of these positions in the form of a binary opposition: one of resisting Aboriginal culture (that is represented as somewhat a totality of meanings despite minor changes) and invading European knowledge (i.e. exogenous moral orders). The new direction towards exploring Aboriginal creativity also sits within the same framework, for it unconditionally postulates a priori domains of European and Aboriginal socio-cultural order (or meanings).

I propose that, as T. RANGER nicely put it recently, the "real stuff of dynamic interaction" should be sought rather than the "shadowy play of unmodified tradition" (RANGER 2003:
257-258). According to RANGER, in contrast to the Africanist interest in interactive dynamics, the Australianist approach to Aboriginal Christianity has been preoccupied with unchanging continuity and/or "the contrast with the excitement of Oceanic Christianity" (RANGER 2003: 258). As is well-known, "the excitement of Oceanic Christianity" represent a quest after millenarian movements and cargo cults. My views are in accord with RANGER's, and in this article, I demonstrate the processual change that occurred during Christianization of Bundjalung-Githabul people. I explore the way a group of Aboriginal people redefined their social and cultural orders, namely, as noted above, the "real stuff of dynamic interaction" between a vernacular Pentecostal Christianity and an Aboriginal people in rural Australia. In doing so, I would like to provide ethnographic material with which to contest a conventional mode of thought among anthropologists – what J. ROBBINS (2003, 2007) calls "continuity thinking." It is worth noting that in much of the recent research on Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity among local cultures worldwide, there is a growing body of work that shows what are apparent "paradoxical" features of cultural change incurred by Christianization. According to J. ROBBINS (2003), who had done intensive ethnographic research with a small group of converts to charismatic Christianity in a remote village of Papua New Guinea (ROBBINS 2004), globalizing Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity has gained two faces – a face of continuity and that of rupture.

In the Urapmin society in Papua New Guinea, ROBBINS (2004) observed that since the late 1970s people have rapidly taken on a new culture of Christianity. This small group of roughly 390 people no longer practice their traditional religion. Today's healing rituals, for example, are performed by spirit mediums under the Holy Spirit and aim at severing the relations between the villagers and the traditional spirits. Now, all of the villagers practice a kind of charismatic Christianity focused on human sinfulness and the need for constant self-discipline. However, simultaneously they still live deeply embedded in their relationalist traditional value system in everyday reality: reproducing their traditional grounds such as their families, their gardens, their hunting territories, and so on. Thus the Urapmin are caught between contradictory cultures promoting two values: the relational value (that is, traditional Urapmin culture) and the individualistic value (in short, Christian culture). In B. MEYER's study on Ewe Pentecostals in Ghana (MEYER 1999), it is their task to "make a complete break with the past," and, in their case, this means breaking ties with one's kin. Ewe Christians pursue individualism and independence from the family. Yet, in order to go through the deliverance ritual to get rid of the demons that their past have lodged in them, people must go through personal history questionnaires or interviews, by which the deliverance rituals become something more than forgetting and proceeding to modernity and individualism. People end up "re-enacting in a ritual context all the links connecting them with that 'past' (i.e. their actual connections with, for instance, their extended family)"

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11 The charismatic movement is essentially a Pentecostal revivals within the orthodox churches. Thus charismatic churches emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit while maintaining their ties to non-Pentecostal denominations. There is no clearly defined membership because of its very nature and there is no easy means of finding out which church belongs to it (CHANT 1984: 229; cf. HUGHES 1996: 108).
(Meyer 1999: 216). Thus, even people who are "consciously most devoted to rupture," Robbins argues, may still in some cases be "unwittingly reproducing their traditional culture in significant ways" (Robbins 2003: 227, emphasis added).

Robbins proposes that, in order to fully understand such paradoxical manifestations of cultural change, anthropologists should reconsider conventional judgments of continuity that are dependent on underlying judgments of similarity (Robbins 2003). Apparently, it is quite easy to retreat into the anthropology's "continuity thinking" — unless anthropologists become aware of the meanings in which the converts' personal and collective projects of discontinuity are framed in Christian terms. The meanings in which these practices are embedded should be explored rather than focusing only on the similarities between cultural substances. Most often Pentecostals are trying to change, in that they vigorously learn new things and allow their culture to change drastically.

Similarly, Bundjalung-Githabul Pentecostalism has obviously shown rupture in its manifestations as it cultivated an anti-culture fundamentalism of the present day, yet my data from the field also shows rich manifestations of "adaptedness-yet difference" — namely, continuity with, and similarity to, the past practices. However, my central concern is not to determine what kinds of continuity and/or discontinuity people show between their contemporary Christian practice and the traditional social and cultural practice. Rather, I attempt to draw a conceptual trajectory in order to understand the dynamics of processual change of the meanings of what Bundjalung-Githabul people regard as "culture" as they have come to be framed in Christian terms.

The Meaning of "Culture"

In the Bundjalung-Githabul community, the English word "culture" is two-fold in its usage. On the one hand, in the social domain shared with the mainstream society, both the Christians and non-Christians perceive nothing ominous and abominable when somebody mentions "culture" — such as a cultural festival, introduction of Aboriginal culture and language to school, Australia as a multi-cultural country, and so on. Today many aspects of Bundjalung-Githabul "culture" have been "detoxified" into such harmless fragments as "dreamtime" stories, language education, and Aboriginal arts and crafts. People do not find any problem with the revitalization of these cultural elements because they are "nothing" as far as the probability of the manifestation of a "fearful" outcome is concerned.

On the other hand, in the context of Christian practice or everyday life within the Aboriginal domain, the word "culture" makes everyone lower his or her voice to a guarded whisper. This implies that in their discourse of "culture" there is another area of "cultural" practice, namely the direct engagement of the spirit world of ancestral powers. In other words, in this context, "culture" explicitly means practice and knowledge of sorcery based on the "Old Way," that is to say, traditional Aboriginal knowledge. This concern stirs up the
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community members' fear, and the loss of "proper" traditional knowledge has in fact functioned to increase the fear of "culture."

The rejection of "culture" is linked with the rejection of worldly pleasures. Among the local Aboriginal proselytes, the unallowable worldly pleasures are adultery, fornication, alcohol and drug abuse, cigarette smoking, divorce, remarrying, gambling, watching football and doing sports, dancing, listening to "worldly" or profane music, watching immoral TV programs and cinema, gossiping, coveting, involvement in political issues in the community, and involvement in the issues related to cultural heritage, traditional beliefs, and Aboriginal arts and crafts. This article focuses on the issues relevant to "involvement in culture" as detailed below. Unlike the other "worldly" pleasures mentioned above, which are more or less based on the standardized rules of universal Pentecostal teachings, the local specificities show a remarkable vehemence in their rebuke for the following issues connected to "involvement in culture." The most distinct "evil" is involvement in the "spirit world." There are a few things that are called "culture" broadly. For example, the Christians must stay away from the cultural knowledge and practices that have potential to summon up evil spirits or to stimulate one's "lusts" for money, social status, and so on. The rough breakdown of the issues related to "involvement in culture" is as follows:

a. to believe in the traditional spirit world;
b. to be involved in politics for community management, jobs related to cultural heritage, cultural events and land claims;
c. to do Aboriginal arts and crafts, cultural performances, and so on.

As for the issues under the rubric of a., to be involved in the traditional spirit world is viewed as evidence of involvement in demonic power. Therefore, practitioners of traditional religions are feared and avoided by Christians, but such practitioners usually do not communicate with the church. On the other hand, to retain belief in the traditional spirit world is regarded as less evil than practicing sorcery because it is the evidence of vulnerability to demonic power. If having belief in the traditional spirit world is known openly, however, the interested people are rebuked and corrected. Regarding the issues under the rubric of b., first, it is not recommended to be involved in cultural heritage projects, cultural events, and land claims. The rationale behind this thinking is that demonic power may be released accidentally because, for such work, it is often necessary to deal with traditional ceremonial knowledge and visit sites, which Christians must not do. Also one may be caught up with desire for money by dealing in Aboriginal cultural heritage promotion that invites abundant government funding. Second, in a similar vein, involvement in politics for community management or getting leading positions in the local administrative institutions are not recommended, as the Christians think that the desire for power and money will attract one to the Devil's way. Finally the issues under the rubric of c. lie in a "gray zone." In short, doing Aboriginal arts and crafts, cultural performances such as singing and dancing is regarded as "tolerable." But if the practice is related to the spirit world, such as creator spirits other than God, it is judged to be demonic. Insofar as the Christian principle of the
One and Only Creator (God) is not impinged upon, traditional stories and arts are regarded as harmless. By this standard, ancestral creator spirits such as the well-known Rainbow Serpent are not permissible for production.

Interestingly, some Christian elders today are often suspected by fellow Aboriginal Christians of cheating in their faithfulness to God by enjoying lucrative jobs related to cultural heritage. Unfortunately, according to the local Christian standard, the elders have found a questionable, monopolistic channel to worldly pleasures supplied by mainstream society. Examples include engaging in traditional dances, giving lectures about Aboriginal culture, doing life story sessions at public meetings, sitting for researchers' recording local languages, and selling arts and craft. These activities can produce a good income to make a living with, but they are nevertheless all frowned upon by other Aboriginal Christians. The Far North Coastal region of New South Wales now holds an increasing number of white people interested in nature-based lifestyles and new age trends, which are evident in the multi-ethnic towns such as Byron Bay and Lismore. Aboriginal elders are admired by mainstream society insofar as they represent the persistence of traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality that fits with the white peoples' romanticism of Aboriginal peoples. In the domain of rural industry, in a more practical sense, white farmers would listen to Aboriginal elders for their own benefits. The farmers are willing to pay for a "cleansing ceremony" for the massacre sites if they are told to do so by Aboriginal elders. However, most of the local Aboriginal Christians do not have that kind of romanticism. They insist that only God can cleanse the place, not the elders – regardless of being Christian or traditional.

Redefining the Primordial Past

Pentecostal Christianity has appealed to Bundjalung-Githabul people because of its message of "warfare" against Satan. Pentecostal faith is based on the belief that what is written in the Bible from cover to cover is true, and, therefore, it assures adherents that anyone can have the way of Jesus in oneself through faith. The teaching of the Bible guarantees that anyone who has faith – and nothing else – can obtain the divine power to discern and repel demonic spirits. The Bible assures Pentecostal proselytes that those who believe in God can gain the divine power to exorcise devils, that they will survive from snakebites and poisons, and that they can heal sick people as Jesus did by laying their hands upon them. This means that by becoming Christian, one can expect an enormous reward. The Bundjalung-Githabul Pentecostals are convinced that they are divinely sensitive in discerning the Devil. They call this particular spiritual power "sensitivity" and it is a substantial weapon of warfare against the Devil. It is not a mere sense or feeling, however. Today sensitivity is regarded as equivalent to what they imagine the traditional Aboriginal knowledge was – knowledge once only "old fellas" (initiated people) were allowed to possess.

The communal mode of thought, which is widely held by contemporary Bundjalung-Githabul people, is thus: “proper” cultural knowledge has already been lost as initiated elders died out, and therefore, all the evil spirits are now left intact as the traditional way of driving away evil spirits is forgotten.

Djurebil is the Bundjalung-Githabul word for the sacred places (sites) or “clever”13 places. The following is the list of the different classes of the djurebil which were current during M. Calley's research in the 1950s (Calley 1955: 8-10):

1. The djurebil that were associated with the creation myths.
2. The djurebil of the totems that were owned by a clan or lineage responsible for performing initiation rites.
3. The djurebil that were owned by particular families but with no connection to increase rites. These places had a reputation for being used for sorcery.
4. The djurebil that were used by the clever men for initiation rites.

By the time the precursors of the lay Aboriginal Christian leaders had encountered the story of Jesus in the early 1920s, reconstruction of the primordial past had already begun in their country in response to drastic socio-economic changes. Throughout the process of the collapse of their traditional social institutions, most notably rites related to localized spiritual beings, Christianity functioned as protection against the “spirits of the bush.” Loss of knowledge related to the djurebil in which both beneficent magic and destructive magic used to be performed has enhanced people’s fear as generations have passed. People began to identify djurebil with remaining channels to sorcery. Calley researched the Bundjalung-Githabul society between 1952 and 1956, and he observed that the community was in the midst of a ceaseless process of restructuring the pre-contact social institutions. There was still a group of people who performed increase rituals and they knew “the correct form of address” (Calley 1955: Notes, 74), but as there were so few initiated men still living – only five on the North Coast – the uninitiated elders and even women were justified in their talking to djurebil. The notable evidence here is that those who were uninitiated disregarded sites for increase rites and benign spirits of the bush and showed interest in placating malign spirits only (Calley 1955: Notes, 75). This phenomenon is interpreted by Calley in the following quote:

The reasons for this are mainly economic: modern Bandjalang14 gain an infinitesimal proportion of their food from the bush and so no longer depend on the cooperation of the increase butheram.15 It matters little to them if o’possums [sic] do not increase or if there

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13 Being “clever” meant in Aboriginal Australia “not only clever in the sense of shrewd, but also intellectually clever, and having the ability, through the help of spirits and psychic agencies, to perform wondrous feats, in a way incomprehensible to ordinary people” (Berndt and Berndt 1999: 307-308).

14 Calley represented the studied group as “Bandjalang,” which actually covered several linguistic groups in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. In this article I use the term “Bundjalung-Githabul” people to represent the Aboriginal people that my research covers, which exactly nominates the group of Aboriginal people Calley’s research covered.

15 Butheram is the Bundjalung-Githabul word for the localized spirits of the bush (Calley 1955: 8-10).
are no edible grubs in the wattle trees. Evil spirits had less economic importance and have held their position; they still function as a projection of feelings of insecurity which are perhaps more acute now than before the Europeans came. (CALLEY 1955: Notes, 75)

This view is directly relevant to the argument of this article. It is important to note that it was the uninitiated, including justified women as above mentioned, who ignored benign spirits and were preoccupied with placating evil spirits.16 There was the potential that the uninitiated, lacking knowledge, were more drawn to dealing with the concerns of the current community ethos: communities which were perceived as being under threat through an increased fear of malign spirits.

In classical Aboriginal traditions, people carry out certain rites based upon their belief in magic. R. BERNDT and C. BERNDT (1999: 304-335) categorize the forms of magic in Aboriginal Australia into beneficent magic (non-harmful magic) and sorcery (harmful magic).17 However, demarcation between the non-harmful magic and harmful magic is not so clear-cut. Aboriginal doctors or medicine men (who perform beneficial magic) sometimes acted as sorcerers (the performer or organizer of destructive magic), and vice versa.18

Above I noted the four classes of djurebil in contemporary discourse about djurebil. The first and the second classes have been totally eclipsed. The third and fourth classes of djurebil are associated with sorcery and demonic spirits of the bush respectively. Especially worth noting for the case at hand is the djurebil of the third class. CALLEY speculated in 1955 that this type of sorcery was the product of the collapse of the traditional culture and social institutions by the colonial encounter and that its original association had been forgotten. The change in the social environment had begun much earlier in the Bundjalung-Githabu country than when CALLEY collected the above mentioned data. In his field research in 1929, RADCLIFFE-BROWN (1929) collected a number of the remnant Bundjalung-Githabu legends, which obviously functioned as practical knowledge for the respective groups of families to perform increase rites at the respective djurebil. Even during this period, however, he depicted the local situation as follows: "...none except a few of the very old people know...anything about the increase rites" (RADCLIFFE-BROWN 1929: 408).

16 One might ask, what was the difference between the initiated and the uninitiated? The initiated had complete knowledge, according to which they knew how to preserve the religious protocols correctly according to the "Old Way".
17 The former relates to "hunting, food-collecting and fishing; rainmaking, and weather control; love magic; magic of jealousy; curing or healing magic; divination after a death; magic to stop quarrels, counteract destructive magic, avert misfortune, evade enemies, keep away snakes and so on" (BERNDT and BERNDT 1999: 312). The forms of the latter, for example, are: the pointing bone (which draws up the victim's blood or soul into the skewer-like bone); poison powder; use of magical items as weapons such as the magical cord; image sorcery by using an effigy; magical (ritual) operations in revenge expeditions, which have three general types by region: the removal of kidney fat, the insertion of spikes or pointed sticks, and the removal of blood and soul stuff (BERNDT and BERNDT 1999: 319-329).
18 "Clever men" is the term for Aboriginal doctors, and also for Aboriginal sorcerers. Such men possessed the knowledge that ordinary members of their society had no access to and this knowledge had to be acquired through effort - through special initiation rites that were broadly similar for the whole Australian Continent (see, for example, ELKIN 1994).
In considering how the Bundjalung-Githabul Christians regard the djurebil 50 years later, CALLEY’s speculation regarding the third class is highly significant:

This form of sorcery might, however, have arisen over recent years, due to a misunderstanding of the nature of the djurebil, in the following manner: The attitude of the younger people towards the djurebil is one of mistrust and fear, and as there are no Clever men about now to whom they can take the hair clippings of their enemies, it is natural that they should attempt to gain their ends by making use of something that everyone knows is dangerous. It is possible then, that this class of djurebil is a product of the contact situation. (CALLEY 1955: 8)

As he argued on the basis of his fieldwork some 20 years after RADCLIFFE-BROWN’s field research, “[a]ttitudes change radically and elements like the djurebil which once evoked a feeling of awe, respect and sanctity, as well as fear, now are more frequently regarded with fear alone” (CALLEY 1955:10).19

The Emergence of “Pure Evil”

I have so far shown that two strands of “things to fear” are today regarded as “culture” in the vernacular vocabulary of Bundjalung-Githabul people:

1. A (imagined) traditional technique of sorcery that would allow their kinsfolk to curse one another.
2. The revitalization activities of Aboriginal tradition that would allow the Devil to approach everyday life through the worldly desires (for material benefits) that they evoke.

Regarding the first strand of “things to fear,” only the class of the djurebil for sorcery (i.e. the third class as mentioned above) is imagined by Bundjalung-Githabul people today in terms of the function of the “sacred sites” (or “clever” places). In the contemporary discourse, all the beneficent functions of the djurebil have been blotted out. For example, a middle-aged church leader in a predominantly Christian community told me they would be more than happy to “dissemble” their knowledge about the djurebil even in response to the land rights hearing. He continued, “We must do away with those sites. Sacred sites are where some people raise evil spirits. People are killing each other by witchcraft!”20

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19 BERNDT (1947a, 1947b) reported a similar situation in another Aboriginal group in New South Wales (Wuradjjeri people) regarding young people’s fear of initiation ceremonies when they were experiencing rapid collapse of social institutions in the 1940s.

20 The word “witchcraft” is today a common local English term the Bundjalung-Githabul use for an intentional act of cursing by a living person through the use of traditional magical powers. The contemporary common purposes are to kill, bring illness, or sexually seduce females and males. As far as texts of narratives from the field are concerned, I use the term “witchcraft” to represent this Aboriginal group’s practice of harmful magic or sorcery.
In contemporary narratives of sorcery, confusion is clearly seen in regard to the rules about how the *djurebil* spirits would attack people and how a sorcerer would follow the procedures conducted in the “Old Way.” The above mentioned informant was “caught” (by a sorcerer’s curse) when he was swimming in the river outside his people’s territory as a young man:

I was a young fella from here and went for turtle hunting. We love bush food sometimes, you know. There were certain areas in Tabulam [a neighboring Aboriginal village] there. I placed my thongs, my shirt, and everything was folded neat in one place. So that was OK, and I went up to the river and started turtle hunting. Then I came back to my place where I left my clothes and stuff. One of my thongs went missing. That was Saturday. I was fit as anything. I was well. Saturday night I was looking back...I didn’t know how that thong was missing. Come home Sunday morning and I was sick as anything. And my wife’s uncle said to me, “Where did you go down there? Did you go anywhere? Was anything that belongs to you missing?” And I said, “One of my thongs was missing.” So, someone wanted to wipe me out – or destroy my life. When I went to Dr. Dawson in Kyogle [a local urban center] he said, “I can’t understand this. I don’t know, this should not have happened.”... After six weeks, the doctors told me, “We are gonna measure you up for the coffin at night.” Someone in Tabulam wanted me out of the road. I nearly died, but the Lord restored me again. ...

Then his wife cut in:

We are aware of certain areas. We don’t go there ignorantly just to try and test. You don’t go there. Because we don’t believe in the practice of it, we don’t go to those places. Because they are – whether they are Christians or not we don’t know – still practicing these things, or think it is OK to hang on what they got, what they were given. Because those things are passed on...in some of the families.

The husband’s testimony seems to basically follow the traditional structure of sorcery. He was caught by someone in Tabulam, a neighboring Aboriginal village, which means the sorcerer is a stranger.\(^\text{21}\) Although there is a possibility that the *djurebil* spirit was summoned by a sorcerer, swimming in a river suggests the potential of having been caught by the localized spirit, and not by a sorcerer. As his wife’s emphasis on “certain areas” shows, there is already confusion as to the relationship between the *djurebil* spirits and sorcerer’s cursing – not to

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\(^\text{21}\) In accordance with the traditional way of sorcery in Aboriginal Australia, usually sorcery was projected outside one’s own social group, though not always (BERNDT and BERNDT 1999: 334). Sorcery served as a means of retaliation or as a punishment in the service of social order. The procedures were the basis of the traditional legal system. Regarding the Bundjalung-Githabul, too, CALLEY (1959) observed that “one does not fear the sorcery of one’s neighbors but the sorcery of people on other stations” (CALLEY 1959: 102). According to his research done in the 1950s, allegations of sorcery could generally be viewed as emerging along *station* lines. However, under the Old Rule, such allegations were along *claw* lines. CALLEY observed the station (the superintendent Aboriginal reserve) was replacing the clan as the local group towards which people felt loyalty.
mention the complete disappearance of the beneficial meanings of the *djurebil*. Instead, the informants have obviously embraced the concept of "pure evil" which is identical with the Christian concept of the Devil.

The second strand of "things to fear" as noted above, is also connected to the concept of "pure evil" regarding the revitalization activities of Aboriginal tradition. During the post-Welfare Board Aboriginal administration of the late 1970s, the politics of Aboriginality and cultural revitalization movements that focused on Aboriginal culture began to supply handsome financial incentives to the Aboriginal communities. Among Bundjalung-Githabal people, desires, jealousy and suspicion began to cause divisions of kin and the community at large. The revolutionary self-determination policies of Aboriginal administration promoted by the Australian government accelerated social problems. People, due to these policies, have secured welfare-dependent livelihoods and, as a consequence, they now have enough "leisure" time to become involved in violence, petty crimes, unhealthy habits such as drinking, overeating, drug addiction, and so on, in order to manage their boredom and apathy. Furthermore, there is plenty of time also to sit down and gossip, which can cause many people to become obsessed with rumors, ungrounded speculations, and, as a result, resentment towards others. The Bundjalung-Githabal Christians regard all the tragedies of human life as the work of demonic powers through which the Devil can get into the course of their practical lives.

The anti-sorcery function of Christianity developed by indigenous people is widely reported by anthropologists (e.g. MAGOWAN 2001, 2003; VAN GENT 2003; BARKER 2003). According to BARKER (2003), among Maisin people in Papua New Guinea, a recent charismatic revival has drastically changed the conceptualization of sorcery as a social system into a notion of "pure evil," or, as acts of the Devil. BARKER's study (BARKER 1990, 1993) of Maisin Christianity has made the biculturalism of Christianity among the Maisin clear. Maisin people do not suffer from the moral torment between contradictory new and old traditions. In this region, Anglicanism belongs to the mission station, whereas traditional life is carried out in the village. And so, the stability of the spatial and moral divide is maintained in the Maisin case. In his recent study (BARKER 2003), however, he argues that such a dualistic model of the study of religious change is now challenged by the recent changes to their religious practices that are influenced by the explosion of a worldwide charismatic revival movement. Among the Bundjalung-Githabal, arguably a similar shift in people's conceptualization of sorcery, that is, from social apparatus to "pure evil," took place much earlier. I suggest that this was due to the pervasive collapse of traditional social institutions and the loss of material culture and cultural knowledge among this rural Aboriginal people.
Conclusion

Let us look at the process behind the emergence of the Bundjalung-Githabul people's anti-culture advocacy. First, the English term "culture" was given particular meanings. This was because people had begun to fear things related to their traditional past and the "revitalized" aspects of tradition. Bundjalung-Githabul people named these fearful things "culture." They are fearful of: (1) sorcery because they live in the midst of enormous emotional stress caused by the complex net of kin relations; and (2) social problems sweeping over the Aboriginal community because they see demonic powers infiltrating their kinsfolk's minds through the medium of these problems. Their own interest in worldly pleasures (e.g. desires for drinking, liberated sexuality, money, fame, and higher social status) is regarded as the source whence these evils spring.

After all, the anti-culture Pentecostal slogan today functions to condemn those who have shown interest in individualism; in essence the whites' lifestyle which encompasses worldly desires for pleasure and success. By defining everyone's irresistible desires for worldly pleasures and success in modern times as the Devil's way, this anti-culture slogan can condemn those who are being drawn to upward social mobility, which is equivalent in social orientation to independence from the family and kin. As long as they stay with the church in this vernacular context, they will not be able to become "assimilated Aborigines" despite, paradoxically, their extreme obedience to the Christian moral order that is exogenous and anti-tradition/culture.

For Christians in such a drastically changed Aboriginal society where social problems and increasing complexities of kin relations are overwhelming, the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit enables them to confront increasing unease and stress. Conversion to Christianity makes them vessels filled with the euphoria of oneness with the Holy Spirit, which gives them power to resist: not the power to directly resist the colonial intervention, but the power to resist the dark side of what they have absorbed into their society through history. This dark side includes, for example, fearful images of traditional knowledge that used to be productive, the division of church and community caused by self-determination policies, and the somewhat stabilized problem-laden condition of the Aboriginal community such as chronic diseases, alcohol and drug abuse, psychosis, violence, apathy and withdrawal from the mainstream society. However bleak the secular side of life is, faith in God keeps them tuned into the spiritual side and keeps them anchored securely to the status quo. Put another way, being Christian does prevent people from scattering off from communal life. Strong belief that Christians will be protected against the Devil (i.e. the surrounding problems of their lived reality) allows them to stay content with the present situation.

Those who do not show interest in the power of the Holy Spirit follow two courses of life. Most "sinniners" are subsumed in "sinful" life and are thus awaited by the aforementioned lethal problems. Because of these conditions, "sinniners" "live in fear," but a minority of motivated and hard-working Bundjalung-Githabul people are able to achieve upward
mobility. Such individuals do not have to fear because of their disciplined lifestyle and more educated or "rational" thinking. Bundjalung-Githabul Pentecostals regard both of them as "sinners" and label them as having "gone to the Devil's way," but they still maintain relationships with the first group of "sinners" (i.e. those who are subsumed in "sinful" life). In contrast, Bundjalung-Githabul Pentecostals keep their distance from the second group of "sinners" (i.e. those hard-working, non-Christians who are motivated to achieve social distinction) because their social success has frequently led them to neglect their kinship obligations both socially and emotionally. Among Bundjalung-Githabul people, to neglect kinship obligations means stop being Aboriginal.

In conclusion, the ruptures (i.e. non-production of certain socio-cultural patterns), which this article highlighted through the redefined meanings of the Bundjalung-Githabul people's culture, are exactly products of continuity. The Bundjalung-Githabul Pentecostal discourse has gained anti-culture advocacy as generations have passed, so that it unites these Pentecostals in their community. People need the power of the Holy Spirit with which they can fight against sorcerers or the Devil and heal the physical and psychological bruises they receive by living their lives as contemporary Aboriginal persons in such a problem-ridden community. Among Bundjalung-Githabul people the Pentecostal moral order has been functioning to reinforce relatedness and distinctive Aboriginality among themselves by means of its strong advocacy of rejecting "culture."

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