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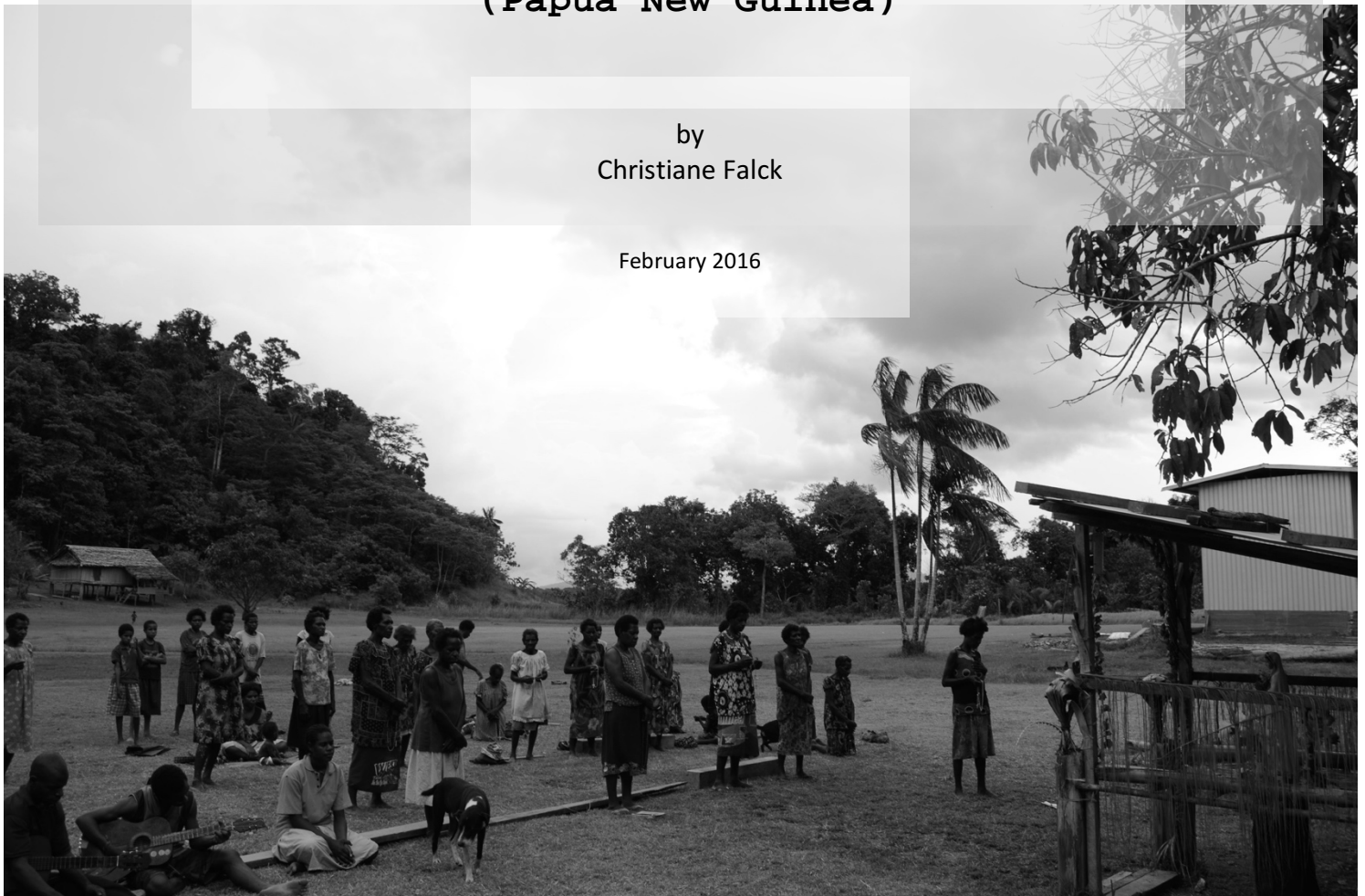
James Cook University, College of Arts, Society and Education & Aarhus University, School of Culture and Society
in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Anthropology)

PhD Thesis

Calling the Dead
Spirits, Mobile Phones, and the Talk of
God in a Sepik Community
(Papua New Guinea)

by
Christiane Falck

February 2016



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by
Christiane Falck, M.A.

Thesis submitted to
College of Arts, Society and Education, James Cook University
School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University

in fulfilment of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Anthropology)

February 2016

Dedicated to my family,
to Waakbange and to Kaligubmali

Statement of Authorship and Access

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other tertiary education other than the James Cook University and Aarhus University. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and the list of references is given. I also declare that as the copyright owner of this thesis, I grant James Cook University and Aarhus University a permanent non-exclusive licence to store, display or copy any part, or all of the thesis, in all forms of media, for use within the University, and to make the thesis freely available online to other persons or organisations. I do not wish to place any restriction on access to this work.

Christiane Falck

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract in English	iii
Abstract in Danish	v
List of Illustrations	vii
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	1
1.1 On the Being and Self of the Anthropologist	3
1.2 Theoretical and Methodological Approach	14
1.3 Chapter Outline	19
1.4 The Lifeworld of Timbunmeli – identifying processes of change	21
1.4.1 Socio-political Organisation	24
1.4.2 Ecological and Socio-economic Change	28
Chapter 2: Being and Person in Timbunmeli	44
2.1 On Person, Self, and the Body	48
2.2 Naming and Names	58
2.3 Sickness and Healing	63
2.4 Beno is Sick	65
2.5 Concluding Remarks	72
CHAPTER 3: Perceptions of Death, Rituals of Death, Relations with the Dead	76
3.1 Perceptions of Death	78
3.2 Rituals of Death	85
3.3 Relations with the Dead	97
Case Study 1 – Nelcy’s death	97
Case Study 2 – Josephine’s death	101
3.4 Concluding Remarks	105
CHAPTER 4: Nyaura Ontology and Cosmology in a Context of Religious Change	107
4.1 The Road of the Dead – spirit beings and different realms of existence	109
4.2 Nyaura Genesis and the Agency of Spirits and Things	116
4.3 The (Re-)Appropriation of Spirit Beings	122
4.4 Concluding Remarks	134
CHAPTER 5: God is (in) Each One of Us - spirit possessions and the work of God	136
5.1 God is (in) Each One of Us	139
5.2 The Month of Mother Mary	150
5.3 A Struggle with Spirits and Leadership	156
5.4 Male Being and Schismogenesis	163
5.5 Concluding Remarks	169

CHAPTER 6: Calling the Dead – millenarism, cargoism and the talk of God.....	171
6.1 The Time of all Times.....	173
6.2 The Blessing Starts to Come Now	180
6.3 Thomas – a God from the Chambri Lake	188
6.4 You Have to Talk with God – the nature God	195
6.5 Concluding Remarks	200
CHAPTER 7: Technologies of the Other and the Changing Lives of Things	201
7.1 The Mobile Phone – a new technology in Timbunmeli	204
7.2 Trickery, Secrecy, and Mobile Phones	209
7.3 Heaven and Ground Phones, a Rosary, and a Book.....	217
7.4 Concluding Remarks	225
Chapter 8: Concluding Remarks and Final Reflections	227
Appendix	236
Chapter 1	236
A <i>sorak</i> celebration.....	236
Fish study	237
Chapter 2	250
Parts of body and person	250
Chapter 3	251
Mavak’s version of the Kibbinbange myth	251
Moses version of the Kibbinbange myth	251
Chapter 4	252
The agency of spirits demonstrated by a moving grass island	252
A visit to the spirit stone Ukata	253
Two brothers and the Noah story told by Jerry Gawi.....	253
Chapter 5	256
Removal of sorcery items from the school ground	256
Iven’s talk	257
Nikki’s talk	258
Nyaura creation myth.....	258
The men’s theft of the <i>Wagen nambu</i> that women discovered:	259
Chapter 6	260
Thomas Soul’s prayer meeting on February the 23 rd in 2013:	260
Thomas healing Maria	261
Healing session as described by Bateson	262
Chapter 7	262
Sambang, December 10 th 2013.....	262
Bibliography	264

Acknowledgements

At the time of first meeting someone you like, you are somewhat guarded; you try to get to know the other person through conversation, an exchange of views and experiences. But then, to live with the other person, even for a while, gives rise to a different kind of understanding, one which suspends the sense of separateness between self and other and evokes the primordial meaning of knowledge as a mode of being-together-with (Jackson 2012: 8).

I would like to thank the people of Timbunmeli for inviting me to conduct fieldwork in their community and for their ongoing support. The openness with which they have welcomed me into their lives and the candour with which they shared their thoughts, feelings, and desires with me remains unprecedented in my experience.

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Abstract in English

as required by James Cook University and Aarhus University

The thesis explores lines of cultural continuity and change in the Nyaura (West-Iatmul) village Timbunmeli, situated at Lake Chambri at the middle Sepik (East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea). The thesis examines how people appropriated Christianity, and especially charismatic Catholicism, as well as mobile phones. It argues that persisting ontological premises have influenced the way people made these new things their own, thus stressing continuity within change. Via prayers, spirit possessions, and phones villagers currently call on spiritual others who are an intimate part of their lifeworld.

While Christianity has been influencing Sepik lives since the first half of the last century, mobile phone technology has only recently been introduced. In 2010 Timbunmeli village received access to the mobile phone network. Most villagers use mobile phones to talk with relatives and friends in other places, but some villagers also started to use them to talk with dead relatives. This development can be understood in relation to the influence of a charismatic movement that during the 1990s shaped people's religious practices. Charismatic prayer groups started in which people, guided by spirits possessing them, receive the talk of God.

The thesis' theoretical approach is inspired by existential phenomenology and practice theory, stressing a dialectic relationship between culture and human agency. Assumptions about human existence and relations between different kinds of entities develop over time in intersubjective experiences and interactions between self and other. They influence the way humans act and perceive themselves, things, and the world. However, although people are influenced by mutual understandings of their experienced world, they also influence their lifeworld through their actions. They shape it and may change it through their practices in dialectic interaction between what is given and what they actualise by engaging with others and things in the space constituting their lifeworld.

The data for this thesis was collected during a 14 months long fieldwork in Timbunmeli. The main method of data collection was participant observation, supplemented by interviews and group discussions, a household survey, a study about female fishing activities, and a mobile phone network analysis. While focussing on the analysis of people's perceptions of and engagements with each other, Christianity, and things, the thesis also strives to provide insight into socio-political, and socio-economic change in Timbunmeli. Furthermore, the thesis includes personal and methodological reflections about experiences the anthropologist had with her interlocutors that have strongly been influenced by her being perceived as a dead person from the village who had returned in a white body.

The Timbunmeli's understanding of their lifeworld and themselves is characterised by a close connection between the visible and invisible. The spiritual other is crucial for people's well-being and strength. Spirits live in an invisible realm that is part of the same existential space as humans' visible realm; from there they influence people's lives. Furthermore, the local understanding of personhood assumes that a spiritual substance, called *kaik*, is crucial for life. Persons in Timbunmeli are composite beings, embodying different entities and identities. They are composed of maternal and paternal matter, names, as well as *kaik* that intimately connect them with past and present beings, their cosmos, and its creator, who today is called God. If the connection with the invisible gets disturbed or lost, sickness, death, and destruction of people's environment may be the consequence. For example, present environmental change is perceived as being a punishment from God and a lost connection to one's *kaik* will lead to sickness and death.

A discussion of people's perceptions of death, rituals of death, and relations with the dead, shows that death does not end Being in Timbunmeli. The *kaik* comes from the invisible

spiritual realm and is embodied in a person's body during life. After death it returns to the invisible part of the world as a spirit of the dead. From there it might return to the living to communicate with them via mediums or to visit them in a new, usually white, body and deliver messages, money, and goods. The dead remain an active part of people's social relations. In fact, people have established a lived relation to the realm of death that seeks to access the dead as a source for change. This is reflected in practices of prayer groups that aim at strengthening their relations with the dead via prayers and offerings. People have always had different techniques to communicate with spirit beings, but today also prayers and mobile phones are means to bridge over into the invisible realm and communicate with dead relatives, who nowadays are understood as being spirits of God.

After converting to Catholicism people had temporarily distanced themselves from former practices and beliefs and came to perceive their own traditional spirits as evil. However, currently a re-interpretation process is taking place that re-legitimizes their own spirit beings as spirits of God, and in fact understands God as being an ancestral being as well. Furthermore, a persons' life-spirit (*kaik*) has been reinterpreted as coming from God. With that the spiritual other is not only part of people's lifeworld, but also perceived as being part of each person – the expressions 'God is in each one of us' or 'God is each one of us' stresses people's claim to be active participants in what they call God's work, an ongoing creation process shaping their world.

The way people engage with God and His spirits shows continuities to their interactions with local spirits in séances and healing rituals of the past. However, while in the past only initiated men were entitled to handle powerful spirits, nowadays mainly women are possessed by spirits of the dead, reinterpreted as God's souls and saints. Women deliver the talk of God, who works through His spirits in their bodies to heal, preach, and talk prophecy. Currently an egalitarian process is taking place, concerning the access to and representation of the spiritual sphere, that offers women and uninitiated men the possibility to extend themselves into a domain that was formerly only inhabited by initiated men; a process that has engendered intensified struggles for male leaders.

By studying practices such as healing ceremonies, rituals of death, prayer meetings, spirit possessions, and the appropriation of the mobile phone and other things, by analysing myths and stories, by listening to, observing, and participating in people's experiences with the visible and invisible other, the researcher has encountered implicit and explicit assumptions that characterise Timbunmeli people's lifeworld and their sense of Being. These premises have influenced the way people in Timbunmeli have made Christianity and mobile phones their own and have to be considered as being rather stable factors in processes of change.

Abstract in Danish

as required by Aarhus University

PhD-afhandling: "Om at ringe til de døde – ånder, mobiltelefoner og Guds tale i et Sepik-samfund (Papua Ny Guinea)" af Christiane Falck, James Cook University & Aarhus Universitet

Resumé

Afhandlingen udforsker nogle linjer inden for kulturel kontinuitet og forandring i Nyaura (Vest-latmul)-landsbyen Timbunmeli, der ligger ved Chambrisøen i det centrale Sepik (provinsen Øst-Sepik, Papua Ny Guinea). Afhandlingen undersøger, hvordan beboerne tilegnede sig kristendommen, specielt den karismatiske katolicisme, og moderne mobiltelefoner. Den påviser, at overleverede ontologiske præmisser har haft indflydelse på den måde, hvorpå indbyggerne tog disse ting til sig, og understreger på den måde kontinuiteten i forandringen. Gennem bøn, åndebesættelser og mobiltelefoner tilkalder landbyens beboere nu om dage de åndelige Andre, som er en integreret del af deres livsverden.

Kristendommen har øvet indflydelse på Sepik-folkenes liv siden første halvdel af sidste århundrede, mens mobiltelefoner først er blevet introduceret for nylig. Landsbyen Timbunmeli fik adgang til mobilnetværket i 2010. De fleste af landsbyens indbyggere bruger mobiltelefoner til at tale med slægtninge og venner andre steder, men nogle af dem er også begyndt at bruge dem til at tale med afdøde slægtninge. Denne udvikling kan ses i relation til indflydelsen fra en karismatisk bevægelse, som formede befolkningens religiøse praksis i 1990'erne. Der blev oprettet karismatiske bedegrupper, hvor folk modtager Guds tale under vejledning af ånder, der besætter dem.

Afhandlingens teoretiske tilgang er inspireret af eksistentiel fænomenologi og praksisteori og lægger vægt på det dialektiske forhold mellem kulturen og menneskers handlinger. Antagelser omkring menneskets eksistens og forholdet mellem forskellige typer af væsner udvikler sig med tiden gennem intersubjektive erfaringer og interaktioner mellem selvet og den Anden. De har indflydelse på den måde, hvorpå mennesker handler og opfatter sig selv, tingene og verden. Men samtidig med at mennesker er under indflydelse af en fælles forståelse af deres oplevede verden, øver de også selv indflydelse på deres livsverden gennem deres handlinger. De former den og kan ændre den gennem deres praksis i dialektisk interaktion mellem det givne og det, de skaber ved at engagere sig med andre og med tingene i det rum, der udgør deres livsverden.

Dataene til denne afhandling blev indsamlet under et 14 måneder langt feltarbejde i Timbunmeli. Den primære metode til dataindsamling var deltagende observation suppleret med interviews og gruppediskussioner, en survey undersøgelse af alle husstandene, en undersøgelse af kvinders fiskeri og en netværkanalyse af brugen af mobiltelefoner. Afhandlingen fokuserer på en analyse af indbyggernes opfattelse af og interaktion med hinanden, kristendommen og tingene, men forsøger også at give indsigt i sociopolitiske og socioøkonomiske forandringer i Timbunmeli. Desuden indeholder afhandlingen personlige og metodologiske overvejelser omkring nogle af forskerens oplevelser med sine samtalepartnere, oplevelser, som var stærkt påvirket af, at hun blev opfattet som en afdød person fra landsbyen, der var kommet tilbage i en hvid krop.

Timbunmeli-folkenes forståelse af deres livsverden og sig selv er karakteriseret af en tæt forbindelse mellem det synlige og det usynlige. Den åndelige Anden har afgørende betydning for menneskers velbefindende og styrke. Ånderne lever i en usynlig sfære, som er en del af det samme eksistentielle rum som menneskenes synlige sfære, og derfra øver de indflydelse på menneskers liv. Derudover antages det i den lokale forståelse af det at være menneske, at en åndelig substans kaldet *kaik* er afgørende for menneskers liv. Mennesker i Timbunmeli er sammensatte skabninger, der indeholder forskellige substanser og identiteter. De er sammensat

af materiale fra deres far og mor, navne og *kaik*, som knytter dem tæt til fortidige og nutidige skabninger, deres kosmos og dets skaber, som i vore dage kaldes Gud. Hvis forbindelsen til det usynlige bliver forstyrret eller mistes, kan konsekvensen være sygdom, død og ødelæggelse af menneskenes omgivelser. For eksempel bliver den aktuelle ændring af miljøet opfattet som en straf fra Gud og et tab af forbindelsen til folks *kaik*, som vil føre til sygdom og død.

En undersøgelse af landsbyfolkenes opfattelse af døden, ritualerne omkring døden og forholdet til de døde viser, at døden ikke er afslutningen på tilværelsen i Timbunmeli. En persons *kaik* kommer fra den usynlige åndelige sfære og bliver inkarneret i hans krop, mens han lever. Efter døden vender den tilbage til den usynlige del af verden som den afdødes ånd. Derfra kan den komme tilbage til de levende og kommunikere med dem via medier eller besøge dem i en ny, oftest hvid, krop og give dem beskeder, penge og ting. De døde vedbliver med at være en aktiv del af folks sociale relationer. Landsbyens indbyggere har faktisk etableret en oplevet relation til dødsriget, hvorigennem de forsøger at opnå kontakt til de døde som en kilde til forandring. Dette afspejles i en praksis med bedegrupper, som stræber efter at styrke deres relationer til de døde gennem bønner og ofringer. Folk har altid haft forskellige teknikker til at kommunikere med ånder, men i vore dage er også bønner og mobiltelefoner redskaber til at slå bro til det usynlige rige og kommunikere med afdøde slægtninge, som nu til dags opfattes som Guds ånder.

Efter at de var konverteret til katolicismen, havde Timbunmeli-folkene midlertidigt taget afstand fra tidligere tiders praksis og tro og var kommet til at opfatte deres egne traditionelle ånder som onde. Men nu foregår der en omfortolkningsproces, som genlegitimerer deres åndevæsner som Guds ånder og faktisk også forstår Gud som et forfadervæsen. Desuden er et menneskes livsånd (*kaik*) blevet omfortolket til noget, der kommer fra Gud. Således er den åndelige anden ikke blot en del af folks livsverden, men forstås også som en del af hver enkelt person – udtryk som "Gud er i enhver af os" og "Gud er enhver af os" understreger, at folk opfatter sig selv som aktive deltagere i det, de kalder Guds arbejde, en stadig skabelsesproces, som former deres verden.

Timbunmeli-folkens måde at komme i kontakt med Gud og hans ånder på viser en kontinuitet i forhold til de interaktioner, de tidligere havde med lokale ånder gennem seancer og helbredelsesritualer. Men mens det tidligere kun var indviede mænd, der havde lov til at have med stærke ånder at gøre, er det nu om dage hovedsagelig kvinder, der bliver besat af de dødes ånder, omfortolket som Guds ånder og helgener. Kvinder videregiver Guds tale, som virker gennem hans ånder i deres kroppe for at helbrede, prædike og profetere. Der foregår nu om dage en ligestillingsproces med hensyn til adgangen til og repræsentationen af den åndelige sfære, som giver kvinder og ikke indviede mænd adgang til at trænge ind på et domæne, som tidligere var forbeholdt indviede mænd, og denne proces har medført en forstærket kamp for de mandlige ledere.

Ved at studere praksisser som helbredelsesceremonier, dødsritualer, bønnemøder, åndebesættelser og tilegnelsen af mobiltelefoner og andre ting, ved at analysere myter og historier og ved at lytte, til, observere og deltage i indbyggernes oplevelser med den synlige og den usynlige Anden har forskeren stiftet bekendtskab med implicitte og eksplicitte antagelser, som karakteriserer Timbunmeli-folkens livsverden og deres forståelse af tilværelsen. Disse præmisser har haft indflydelse på den måde, hvorpå indbyggerne i Timbunmeli har taget både kristendommen og mobiltelefonen til sig, og må betragtes som temmelig stabile faktorer i forandringsprocesser.

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List of Illustrations

- No 1: Photo, first encounter between Lina and me in Chambri 2011. In the front from left to right: Igenius, Monika, Imelda. In the middle from left to right: Grace and Helen. In the back from left to right: Lina and myself, taken by P. Wasko 2011.
- No 2: Map, Timbunmeli's (Timbunmeri) location (red circle). Section taken from map 'West and East Sepik Provinces, Papua New Guinea', published by Wirui Press n. A., Wewak.
- No 3: Photo, Lina and I on my last day in Wewak, January 2014, taken by C. Falck 2014 with mobile phone camera.
- No 4: Photo, view on Timbunmeli island (centre) from a canoe leaving Chambri island, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 5: Photo, Nyaura clan compound, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 6: Photo, Yak clan compound during high-water, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 7: Photo, Yak clan compound after high-water, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 8: Photo, Possuko clan compound, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 9: Photo, women paddling out to the lake in the early morning, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 10: Photo, Erika Kaiban disentangling her fishing nets, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 11: Photo, my Nyaura siblings gutting fish during high-water in the Yak clan compound, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 12: Photo, assisted by her children Utika guts her catch of the day: *rabbamaus*, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 13: Photo, canoe filled with fish bags, leaving Timbunmeli for Maprik market, taken by: C. Falck 2013.
- No 14: Photo, a woman checking Erika Kaiban's smoked dried fish products on the Maprik market, taken by S. Rath 2013.
- No 15: Photo, crocodile caught by Timbunmeli men, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 16: Photo, crocodiles raised by Markus Ivut are loaded for transport to buyer, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 17: Photo, Sila re-smoking her mother's catch of the previous day, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 18: Photo, Agatha smoking her mother-in-law's fish, taken by C. Falck 2014.
- No 19: Photo, Mali women exchanging sago for fish with Timbunmeli women at the Mali barter market, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 20: Photo, mother and newborn with *kaikmanje*, a rope to keep the spirit of the child close, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 21: Photo, Children playing with humanlike figures, called *mallu*, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 22: Photo, Beno Kaiban, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 23: Photo, Beno sitting with *awang* on a stool while Mossong is whispering a spell onto a bundle of leaves later used to chase the spirit away who made Beno sick, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 24: Photo, Mossong guiding Beno's *kaik* back to his body, taken by C. Falck 2013.

- No 25: Photo, Mossong removing spikes from Beno's body, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 26: Photo, spikes that were removed from Beno's body, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 27: Photo, Papmangawi's death, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 28: Photo, Katharina, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 29: Photo, Mavak, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 30: Photo, the last ritual washing in the context of Nelcy's death, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 31: Photo, bone of a Possuko clan member, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 32: Photo, Gramowi in black clothes and with kaikmanje, mourning the death of her husband Papmangwi, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 33: Photo, monu for Papmangwi's death ritual, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 34: Photo, kaikwagunda for Papmangwi's last cry, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 35: Photo, women colouring their faces with white clay for Nelcy's last cry, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 36: Photo, Erika Kaiban with long hair expressing her grief, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 37: Photo, shelter with bamboo for a divination ritual in the context of Josephine's death, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 38: Photo, Jerry Gawi beating one of the remaining slit drums of Timbunmeli village, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 39: Photo, a miagwi floating in front of the Possuko clan compound threatening to destroy Papmangwi's house, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 40: Photo, the kirugu of the Possuko clan, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 41: Table, (re-)appropriation of Spirits, by C. Falck.
- No 42: Photo, Jane, collapsed in exhaustion after a spirit possession in October 2013, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 43: Photo, women praying the rosary during the month of Mother Mary, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 44: Photo, Timbunmeli's statue of Mother Mary, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 45: Photo, Sandra collapsed after removing the sorcery bundle from the headmaster's house, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 46: Photo, the jambia found contained a rope with knots marking the time left until the intended addressee, the headmaster John Wavi, would die, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 47: Photo, Josephine and Sandra collapsed in exhaustion after being possessed by spirits, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 48: Photo, Thomas counselling Leslie, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 49: Chart, communication ways for the talk of God, by C. Falck.
- No 50: Photo, Thomas blessing and strengthening a group of children, assisted by Rita, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 51: Photo, Thomas about to strengthen the body of Lilien, possessed by the spirit of Adrian's dead daughter, taken by C. Falck 2013.

- No 52: Photo, Thomas holding money that suddenly appeared in his hands during a prayer meeting, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 53: Photo, Thomas checking his mobile phone, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 54: Photo, Timothy Thomas and Peter Kaiban charging their mobile phone batteries with their son's solar panel during high-water, taken by C. Falck 2013 with mobile phone camera.
- No 55: Photo, self made phone battery charger, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 56: Photo, solar panel used to charge phone battery, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 57: Photo, Benny demonstrating a love-spell sung over a prepaid card, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 58: Photo, Benny folding the bespelled prepaid card to preserve the spell for later usage, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 59: Photo, heaven and ground phone of a Thomas Souls Ministry member, taken by C. Falck 2013.
- No 60: Photo, the book that came to be known among TSM members as 'Trust by truth', taken by C. Falck 2013.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction



No 1: First encounter between Lina and me in Chambri 2011. In the front from left to right: Igenius, Monika, Imelda. In the middle from left to right: Grace and Helen. In the back from left to right: Lina and myself (P.Wasko 2011).



No 2: Timbunmeli's (Timbunmeri) location (red circle). Section taken from map 'West and East Sepik Provinces, Papua New Guinea', published by Wirui Press n.A., Wewak. Red circle added by author of this thesis.

1.1 On the Being and Self of the Anthropologist

Ethnography throws one into a world where one cannot be entirely oneself, where one is estranged from the ways of acting and thinking that sustain one's accustomed sense of identity. This emotional, intellectual, social, and sensory displacement can be so destabilizing that one has to fight the impulse to run for cover, to retrieve the sense of groundedness one has lost. But it can also be a window of opportunity, a way of understanding oneself from the standpoint of another, or from elsewhere (Jackson 2013: 10).

'You have to come back!', Lina said repeatedly when in 2011 I stepped into the boat, ready to leave. Her eyes were filled with tears. During the last three days I had become somewhat close with her. I felt sorry to leave, but I also felt relief as our encounter had filled me with an uncomfortable feeling of being perceived as someone I was not. The sound of the motor kicked in and the boat started to move away from the island. I saw Lina standing at the lake's shoreline, waving her arm until she was out of sight.

I remember well how I met Lina for the first time. It was in August 2011 on Chambri island at Lake Chambri. I had just finished teaching a class at the Divine Word University in Madang and had come to the Sepik River to visit a friend of mine, Piotrek, a Catholic priest from Poland. Piotrek had invited me to accompany him on his journey to different villages of the Karawari River and Chambri Lake at the middle Sepik. For a few days we went to Chambri, one of his parishes, where people had organised a Catholic Church feast. On the second day of our stay, I attended the Sunday mass. Although I am not a religious person myself, I sometimes joined the communities in their church services out of curiosity; Christianity had long become an important part of people's lives.

The mass finished and I went outside the church building to chat with some people who met me with welcoming curiosity. After a while I started to walk uphill towards the parish house. That was the moment when I first saw Lina. She was standing half way up the path, holding a basket in front of her body, smiling widely with her eyes fixed upon me. As I came closer, I saw that her eyes were watery and that she trembled a bit; she seemed very excited to see me. When I reached out my hand to greet her, she quickly grabbed it and pulled me close to hug me and kiss my face. I was completely taken by surprise and puzzled about this heartfelt welcome – I had been in Chambri before in 2008, but I could not remember her. As I learned later, she came from a different island in the lake, Timbunmeli. She had come to Chambri to witness the celebrations. I learned that her name was Lina. I asked why she was so happy to see me, but Lina just exhaled sounds of joy and hugged me again, clapping my cheeks with her hands and kissing my face. I was puzzled as I had never been welcomed that way by a complete stranger before. Lina gave me the basket she was holding; it was filled with peanuts and sweets – things

she had bought for me. Lina did not say much on this first encounter, she just smiled widely every time our eyes met. Being a bit unsure about what to make of this situation, I started to talk about my journey and thanked her again for the gift she had given me. Then we went uphill and sat down together with others on stones next to the parish house where we made conversation (photo no 1,p.1).

Later on that day, when I walked to the field where a stage had been erected, Lina invited me to sit down with her and other women on a plastic canvas in the shade of a tree to watch the celebrations together. This time Lina was more talkative; she was in high spirits, talking and laughing loudly. Again, she hugged and kissed me turbulently from time to time. I tried to make sense of why Lina was so overly excited, but did not get another answer than ‘You came to Chambri and that is why I am happy.’

While we were sitting in the shade of the tree Lina called out to people who she introduced as my sisters and brothers, or aunts. She said she was my mother and that I should say ‘*mama*’¹ to her. I was confused about what was going on and started to doubt whether I had understood her right because of all the noise coming from megaphones, music, and talking people surrounding us. But the women around us also referred to her as my mother.

Lina indeed treated me like a child – without being asked Lina applied body lotion onto my skin, told me where to sit, when to move into the shade so that my skin would not get burned, and she hugged and kissed me whenever she felt like it. Also she provided me with food during my stay – she would bring bananas, peanuts, and sweets to the celebrations for me and cook rice with chicken or fish for dinner.

On Tuesday, the morning of my departure, Lina and another woman called Monika came to the mission house, bringing food for Piotrek and me. We ate together and afterwards sat around a small table to share a tea and talk for the last time before I had to leave. When it was time to go to the boat, Lina approached me, holding out some money saying, ‘This is for you. It is for buying some things you like such as food on your journey.’ I thanked her but said that I would not like to take the money. Her face darkened and before I could say anything more she interrupted me and said, ‘No, I am your mother, I have to give you something for the road!’ I replied that she had already given me so much – food, the basket, the sweets, and that I had really enjoyed spending time with her, but that I would not like to take money from her. Her face lightened up again and she smiled after she had heard what I had to say. She came closer and said ‘Kabiwangabiamange – that is your name’ into my ear. I must have looked confused

¹ In the following Tok Pisin terms will be marked by italics whereas the local vernacular Nyaura will be presented in italics and underlined. English terms that people used in their Tok Pisin sentences will be marked by italics, too.

and Lina said 'Kabiwangabiamange'.² That is the name I give you. Don't forget it.' Shortly afterwards, we left the parish house and walked to the lake to say goodbye and I stepped into the boat.

I had told Piotrek about my encounter with Lina; I was confused about what to make out of it. He explained that some villagers in his parishes would identify white people as returning dead relatives and that this perception of white people was also common in Lina's village. Lina was part of a group that believed that the dead could return in a white body. I had seen that Lina and Monika had brought letters for their priest on the day of our departure. Later I learned that they were addressed to dead relatives and asked for money and goods. In case the dead kin wanted to contact them, villagers provided their address and mobile phone numbers. Lina had also asked me for my address and mobile phone number and also in a different village, in Kanjimei on the Konmei River, a tributary of the Karawari River, I had met women who asked me about dead relatives and their phone numbers.

My experiences at the Sepik still occupied my mind after I had returned to Germany. How could it be that white people, mobile phones, and the dead were intermingled in people's understandings of the world? Why did Lina perceive me as her daughter? I decided to design a research project and applied for a scholarship to be able to carry out research in Lina's village, Timbunmeli. In 2012 after I was accepted as a PhD Student at the James Cook University, Australia, I contacted the community and was invited to come and do my fieldwork in Timbunmeli.

When I finally arrived in Timbunmeli in December 2012 I was looking forward to immerse myself in and learn about a different lifeworld, to do participant observation. At that time, I already knew from my literature study and prior experience in PNG that ethnographic fieldwork could be a challenging experience and that it could change one's personal sense of self – the subjective experience of one's being-in-the-world. For the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1993[1927], 2001[1962]) our Being is thrownness ('Geworfenheit') into a world that is already there. He calls the existential state of human beings a being-in-the-world ('in-der-Welt-sein') – Being and the world are related, they constitute each other. While one does not choose the world one is born into, as an anthropologist one chooses deliberately to throw oneself into a different world. I knew that living in a different society for a year or so could bring an 'existential struggle in the field to maintain a balance between preserving and losing our sense of personal identity' (Jackson 2012: 167). However, I did not anticipate quite accurately

² Later I learned that Kabi is the name of a local fish species, a small fish. Kabiwangabiamange is a totemic name, referring back to an ancestral being of the Yagun clan, Lina's father's clan. Lina gave me a *bambu si* – a name belonging to the side of the mother's father's clan (Chapter 2.2).

how difficult the matter I moved out to study would sometimes be for me personally. I did not realize then yet that this could mean to experience such stark clash between my own experience of my self, my sense of who I was, and other people's experiences and sense of me as a returning dead person.

My being-in-the-world changed from the first day in the village. I was thrown, or rather I threw myself, into a world, in which my place was already determined before I arrived. Before I started my fieldwork I had thought about my identity and what it could possibly mean for my research. I was an anthropology student, a 30-year-old woman from Germany. As I expected, as a woman I became especially close with other women of the community. I learned about their daily lives, their responsibilities, and the hardships they were facing, their private thoughts, hopes and dreams. As a white woman I was also automatically part of unequal power relations – between western and developing countries, between black and white people, between women and men. I had the privilege to study and travel – privileges that only very few men and even less women from the village had. And I had money – not much in western standards, but still more than most of the people in the village. Further, I differed from other women in the village by lacking most of the attributes that women in my age usually shared – I did not go to the lake to catch fish and smoke-dry it; I had no children and the work shares of me and my partner Sven were different from those of married couples in the village. During his stays,³ Sven was fetching the water from the creek, doing the laundry, and taking care of the household, while I was walking around, doing participant observation. Unlike most women in the village, I did not feel ashamed to approach men to converse with them alone or to socialize with them in a *haus win*.⁴ I did not only behave differently than women in the village, I was also treated differently. No one expected me to find my own fish or wash sago and men treated me differently, too – they allowed me insights into their secret knowledge and told me stories they would not have shared with local women. Although I was perceived as being different from village women, I was of course not treated like a man either. My wish to accompany men during a crocodile hunt was never realized and men told me that if an initiation would have taken place, I could not have gone into the men's house myself to study it because they would get into trouble with the *kastom*.⁵

My gender and skin colour enabled but also restricted me in my data collection. It further created the possibility to be perceived as a spirit of the dead and be integrated as a

³ Sven accompanied me for two months in 2013, and one month in 2014.

⁴ A roofed sitting place similar to a gazebo

⁵ *Kastom* is a Tok Pisin term referring to ancestral custom or law that contains spiritual agency.

family member of the Yak clan. From the first day in the village, I had become a Yak clan member, a Kaiban family member, Lina's daughter, and a child in the structure of the kinship system.

When I arrived in the village the Yak clan had already decided that I should stay with them; until a house had been built for me I should move in with Leslie Kaiban and his family. Lina, her husband Beno, and her two children Marleen and Davis moved in with them, too. Leslie and Beno were brothers and since Lina and Beno's house was in a bad shape, Leslie and his wife Anna took it upon them to accommodate me in their house. I lived in Leslie's house for two months and I remember this intense time very well – I learned a lot and became very close to the Kaiban family who welcomed me into their home as a family member. Suddenly I had many sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, fathers and mothers. I became very close with my new relatives who openly shared their thoughts, feelings, hopes, practices and beliefs with me.

Although not everyone welcomed my incorporation in the Yak clan, many people approached me saying that it was a good decision for me to stay with the Yak clan; that I belonged to them. Only later did I fully grasp the meaning of these statements. After a while I started to understand the complex totemic clan system that classified me as a being belonging to the Yak clan. I learned that the totem (*gwaak da*) of the Yak clan was linked with everything that referred to white people and death. I was told that whites were associated with spirits of the dead when they suddenly appeared at the Sepik River in the 19th century from a place that people had never seen (see also Stanek 1982).⁶ Spirits of the dead, too, live in a place that is out of reach for humans – it is called *undumbunge*.⁷ Therefore, white people became associated with that place and are not only called *saunbange nimba*, white skin people, but also *undumbu*, spirits of the dead. They became part of the Yak clan's totemic repertoire and with that so became I.

Undumbunge was created by one of the Yak clan's original ancestors, Kibbinbange.⁸ Kibbinbange lived with his brother and other family members in a village. However, the noise and habits of the other villagers annoyed him so much that he decided to leave the place. He took his belongings and went so far away until he had found a place to which no human had gone before. To screen that place from human intruders he used magic and thus made it invisible and inaccessible for the living.

⁶ After a stay on 29.05.1913 in Yensemangua Adolf Roesicke, who was part of a Sepik expedition 1912/1913, wrote in his diary: 'Then they asked me if I had seen their dead. They brought a few skulls and explained that only this would remain, but where would the people go to? Into the ground or to the above? Had I seen them in Madang or in my places? The Malu people had said, I was a child of the sun. Was the sun there, where I was from?' (Schindlbeck 2015: 287; my translation).

⁷ *Undumbunge*: *undumbu* meaning spirit of the dead, *nge/qai* being the local term for place/village.

⁸ *Kibbe* is the cold that crawls up the body of a dying person and *bange* means skin and/or body.

The story of Kibbinbange, who left his brother and family, was related by one of my informants, Mavak, to a story that I had read before, in similar versions, in the literature – the two brothers myth.⁹ It goes as follows: Two brothers appeared from a hole in the ground. The brother who left the hole first took all that now belongs to white people. With that he left for a place far away and became the forefather of whites. The second brother came too late to receive some of the good things his brother had already taken. He could only take from what was left behind – things and knowledge to govern the ground in Papua New Guinea.

Probably more recently the two brother myth has become intermingled with the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden and with the story of Cain's fratricide that I heard from different people during my fieldwork. The quintessence of both stories is that the ancestors of the people in Papua New Guinea had sinned and that as a consequence the descendants of Adam and Eve, or respectively of Cain, had to live a life full of hardship, work, pain, and sinful behaviour. It is striking that the myth of Kibbinbange also contains the element of punishment (being left behind) for bad behaviour that can be compared to the sinful acts of Adam and Eve, or Cain. Kibbinbange left his village because the behaviour of his fellow men repelled him. The place that he created is today not only called undumbunge, but also Paradise or Heaven. It is a place of happiness and peace.¹⁰

Many people used the reference to the Yak clan's totems in a playful way when they called me 'undumbu' (spirit of the dead). Others were quite outspoken about their conviction or suspicion that I really was a spirit by telling me quite bluntly to stop hiding the truth and lying about my real identity.

Also my official clan name, Savikakanambumange,¹¹ that Leslie Kaiban had given me a few weeks after my arrival, relates to the reign of death (see Chapter 3). Savi is the name of a little bird, a roller bird that is seen at the Sepik only for a few months during the dry season. After that it disappears and will not be seen. People do not know where it breeds and where it goes to. It is said that the bird travels between the place of the living and the place of the dead. With that, I was told, it seemed only fitting to give its name to me since I also came to stay with the community for a while before I would leave again to hopefully return sometime. This nicely chosen association intermingled with the belief of many that I was a spirit of the dead who, like

⁹ See Bashkow 2006: 222; Burridge 1960; Gewertz 1983: 117-122; Kulick 1992: 57-58; Schuster 1990:13; see also Lipset 1997: 73-74; Meeker et al. 1986: 47-48; Moutu 2013: 178; Stanek 1982: 50-51, 1983: 203-204, Telban 2009: 139; Tuzin 1997: 70-71 on the brother who became ancestor of whites.

¹⁰ See also Wassmann (1991: 109): 'The ghost of the dead [...] should travel to the beautiful land of the dead on the far side of the sea, where everything gleams in the most splendid colours, where it is always day and where the sea roars and the wind blows. This is the land of the spirits of the dead and of the east wind.'

¹¹ During my fieldwork I was called 'Savi' (and sometimes 'Kakanambumange'), also by Lina. Children are called by the gwaak si they receive from their fathers (see Chapter 2).

the ancestress Savikakanambumange, had returned from the land of the dead. Mavak, was one of those who openly told me what I was to him. When I asked him about the meaning of my name he said: 'Savi? It went to the place of the dead and came back. That's it, what is there more to say? You already came. You are from this place. You went away and came back. You are one of us. You belong to the Yak clan.'

I did not struggle with the identity that was transferred to me with the name of the roller bird. I did not mind to be called 'Savi' and took it as a sign of people accepting and integrating me, of me becoming a community member. However, what I struggled with was being perceived as a spirit that had taken on a white body to return to its family and supposedly carrying secrets to be revealed. I experienced the 'physical upheaval, psychological turmoil, and moral confusion' (Jackson 2013: 11) that Jackson describes as being part of ethnographic understanding. Around my integration with the Kaiban family hovered the conviction of many and the suspicion of others that I was a spirit of the dead. This of course offered an excellent vantage point for the issue I wanted to study – I could use the perception of me being a spirit as a research tool that offered me insights of people's understandings of the world (see also Bashkow 2006: 15 on using one's whiteness as a research tool). However, I had anticipated that people's perception of me would change after a while through the experiences that we would share. Now it astounds me that I was so ill prepared for the possibility that people might not change their perception of me as being a spirit of the dead. Although I did not have a problem with being integrated into the social structure as a child of the Kaiban family, I was disturbed by being identified as Lina's dead daughter. The situation deeply frustrated me more than once.

I recall very well an instance when I got especially frustrated. One of my Nyaura uncles, Mangas, had come to spend time with me as he had done many times before. Mangas would come every now and then and tell me about things that he wanted me to know about his *kastom*, or when I could help him with a project proposal for a fish transport and storage business that he intended to start. He was always in the mood for joking and I enjoyed his company for it was uncomplicated and fun to spend time with him. It took the stress of me that I often felt when tensions due to jealousy, suspicion, and rumours concerning my person took the toll on me. This time we also sat on the floor of my house and chatted when Mangas said that he wanted to ask me about a dream he had had. He had dreamt that he was in Wewak (a coastal town and capital of the East Sepik Province) and that I had come to find him there. In his dream I had said to him, 'Why did you go to Wewak? Your sister and your child are in Timbun to see you. They brought things for you and you are here. Hurry up, we have to go back!' But when we had arrived in the village his sister and daughter had already left and taken his things with them. His sister and daughter were dead. He had come to ask me for the mobile phone number

of his dead sister. Mangas, too, believed that I was a spirit of the dead. I had not seen that coming. I always had anticipated that he believed me when I talked about myself and that he did not perceive me as a spirit being. Afterwards I never felt the same ease in his presence as I had done before. I was always on alert for him asking me about his dream and what it meant, which he did several times. I had offered him my interpretation of his dream as probably being part of his grieving process. I stated that I also sometimes dreamt of my dead grandmother and that those dreams would also contain painful moments of not being able to talk with her although I saw her in front of me. But Mangas would not be satisfied with this answer and I felt so disillusioned and frustrated by being confronted with his suspicion that I was hiding something from him that I had a hard time getting over my disappointment.

Looking back, it is clear to me that the disillusionment I felt had to do with my initial inability to accept that one person can be many. Although I had read about dividual personhood before I left for the field and in fact had made the study of personhood part of my research outline, I had difficulties to reflect on my situation in this way. I had read literature on Melanesian personhood stressing the dividual, relational or composite aspect of persons in Papua New Guinea rather than the individual, autonomous, or disconnected aspects dominant in Western concepts of personhood (e.g. Strathern 1988; Robbins 2004a; Mosko 2010). In Timbunmeli persons are composites of multiple entities and relationships – composed of relations with others, persons, things, and an invisible substance that form an important aspect of personhood. Therefore, people in Timbunmeli live a life that is oriented at and ingrained with the Being of others (humans and non-humans). I, however, grew up in a socio-cultural context which stresses autonomous selfhood – a self that aims to be true to one's own sense of self ('eigentliches Selbst') despite external pressures of one's social embedding ('Man-selbst' (Heidegger 1993[1927]: 129). Furthermore, an ontological premise that informs the life in Timbunmeli differs fundamentally from my secular western ontology: Being in Timbunmeli does not end with death but carries on in an invisible realm of the world that is connected to the visible world and that can be bridged by different practices.

Before I started my fieldwork, I had the understanding that every person is not only an individual but also a dividual (LiPuma 2000; Stewart and Strathern 2000) but I struggled with accommodating myself in a context in which the person is 'multiply-authored' (Fowler 2004: 26), the self is fragmented (Silverman 2001: 29), and a person can be perceived as the reincarnation of a dead person (Bateson 1958[1936]: 42-43, 244). However, I only became to realize in a conversation with my friend and anthropologist Sabine Hess after my fieldwork that it was exactly the composite aspect of my personhood that had repeatedly stressed me out – because I had no control about the part of me being perceived as a spirit of the dead. Not only

was it a very uncomfortable feeling to be seen as a spirit that hid its secrets from the people I became close with, it was also hard because with this perception of me came a denial of the self that I identified with – a self that I had become during the 30 years of my life. That self was declared as being not real. Whereas a feeling of alienation or estrangement – as quoted from Jackson at the beginning of this chapter – is part of the fieldwork experience, what I experienced was a radical alienation as my situation allowed no way out of this existential dilemma. I, for psychological, moral and ethical reasons, could not give in to people's perception of me and people did not desist from it. I had started my fieldwork with the anticipation that this perception of me would change when people got to know me, the me that I identified with. Instead my living in their village, reaffirmed people's perception and even more convinced others, who before had doubted that I was a spirit, to believe that I indeed was Lina's returning daughter. Towards the end of my fieldwork the church leader came to tell me that after he had carefully studied me, my movements, my interactions, my approach towards people, he had come to the conclusion that I certainly was a spirit of the dead.

Although I had explained repeatedly the reason for my coming to the village, the circumstance of my arrival, and my interest to study people's way of life with my intention to write my PhD thesis from the data I intended to collect, people were nevertheless suspicious that it was just a cover-up story. Even people from other Sepik communities would travel to Timbunmeli only to see and ask me to help them to get in contact with a dead relative. I always told them that I could not help them and that I was not a spirit of the dead. Most of these conversations left an uncomfortable feeling in me – people did not believe me and as a consequence thought that I did not want to help them or that I was hiding the truth.

Here is an excerpt from a conversation I had with one of my aunts, Rita. I was asking her about how the dead could return to the living in a white body. While I was struggling to grasp people's existential dilemmas and also trying again to find a way to convince my interview partner that I would not be a spirit, Rita (R) took my being-in-her-world as a proof for her perception of the world:

I:¹² And you are saying the dead can return?

R: They can come back! Like you did! Why are you hiding the truth? You should not hide the truth! Listen! You should not hide the truth! I am the one who started the work of the Spirit [here Thomas, Chapter 6]. You cannot hide the truth. It is not the time for hiding the truth. It is not the time for arguing. *Laikim yu* [I like you].

I: So, could you explain, when a person dies, you say the body will fall apart after burying it.

R: Yes, this body [clapping her right arm].

I: And the spirit goes away.

R: It goes to God.

I: But how can it come back as a human?

¹² 'I:' in front of interview excerpts refers to the author's statements and questions. Insertions or omissions by the author of this thesis are marked by square brackets.

R: It can come back human, like you did!
 I: But how? It is a spirit, how can it come back with a body?
 R: It can come back! It can come back!
 I: But how?
 R: It will change the body. This body [clapping on her right leg], is rubbish. Do you know – Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden? [I nod my head]. That's it! The fall of mankind hit us! And this is a body of this ground. When my spirit goes, it will change its colour, like yours. This one rots. When the spirit goes, it will change its colour like you before you came. It is only one death. It will happen like that.
 I: So you are saying your body is a body of this ground.
 R: It is a body of this ground.
 I: And what about my body? Is it also of this ground?
 R: No! It is a *soul*! *Spirit*! You cannot hide the truth, *bobo*. It is not the time for hiding the truth. *Laikim yu*. Thank you. God bless you.
 I: But I am not hiding the truth, *bambu* [aunt]. I am not hiding it. Why should I hide it? [Rita starts to lift up her arms and moves her arms and upper body in excitement, smiling widely]. Many times I have told you how I came here. But you are saying that I am lying.
 R: *Laikim yu, younduwa*.¹³ *Laikim yu*.
 I: I always say that I am a student of the James Cook University and that I came here to study. [Rita has stopped smiling and moving]. But then you are saying that it is not true, that it is a lie. – What do you think?
 R: I am not thinking anything. I have those thoughts that I told you. *Laikim yu*. God bless you.

Of course I had many dialogues on this matter with Lina. She was convinced that I was her dead daughter. For her it was a plain sailing – either I was hiding the truth or I really did not remember that I was her child. Her daughter died during the pregnancy and Lina said, she did not hold the baby and walked around with her – therefore I might not remember the place and her; I grew up as the child of white people and forgot where I was from. All the arguments that I could think of to convince her that I was not that dead baby were void for her. She repeatedly said that I could say whatever I wanted; she would strongly believe that I was her daughter. And I think somehow in a way, I became this daughter. Jackson (2013: 10-11) says ethnographic understanding means that

one may glimpse oneself as one might be or might have been under other circumstances, and come to the realization that knowledge and identity are emergent properties of the unstable relationship between self and other, here and there, now and then, and not fixed and final truth that one has been privileged to possess by virtue of living in one particular society at one particular moment in history (italics removed).

Lina's and my interactions and shared experiences supported her belief and made me accustomed to her lifeworld: Lina treated me as one of her children – she nurtured me like a mother does with her child. She looked after me and made sure that I always had enough food or firewood. She encouraged me to learn new things, had patience with me when I was not quick to understand or remember something she had told me before. When I achieved something for the first time, like knotting a basket or baking sago, Lina performed a *sorak* for me – she danced

¹³ *Younduwa* is the local vernacular term for a wild duck that is part of the totemic repertoire of the Yagun clan, Lina's father's clan. By calling me the name of the duck Rita stresses her conviction that I was Lina's daughter. Children are called by the totemic names of the *bambu da* (totemic things of the maternal relatives) as terms of endearment.



No 3: Lina and I on my last day in Wewak, January 2014 (C.Falck 2014).

for me and boasted about my achievements. She would also give me orders in the gruff, harsh voice that Nyaura women often use to discipline their children. When she went to the market in Maprik and had earned enough money to buy treats for her children Jordan, Marleen and Davis, she also always thought of me and assigned me the same share. When I wanted to go somewhere, it was usually Lina who came with me. When I became sick she worried about me like a mother does and even blamed my illness on herself when she was not around as much as she should have been once. When members of the Possuko clan, who

adopted my partner Sven, announced that

Lina should call a bride price for me so that

they could buy me and I could live within their clan compound (the woman moves to her husband's clan area after marriage), Lina said that she would not want to hear of such a thing as she wanted to have her child close to her.

In regard to myself, I did behave like a small child upon my arrival – a fact that was often mentioned by Lina. Like a small child, I did not know my way around, asked many and often the same questions and made many mistakes, such as cutting my hand with a knife while trying to open a coconut. I depended on others to show me around and explain how to do things, how to behave. I also worried about Lina when she fell sick or got into a dispute with someone. Being integrated in the Kaiban family and Yak clan structure, I started to call people with kin terms, as I was told I should do. For others my closeness to the group and to the Kaiban family members was supporting their suspicion or belief that I really was Lina's daughter. The shared experiences that we had while I was in the field, supported their beliefs. For some I was Lina's daughter, for others I became Lina's daughter – and I experienced myself as Lina's daughter and a Kaiban family member. Eventually, I partially reconciled myself to this existential dilemma between Lina and me by telling her that I understood that she believed that I was her dead daughter, but that she also had to understand that I did not believe it, that I did not believe that I was a spirit. But

from what I could say about her was that she had become like a mother to me, although I still believed that my actual mother was back home in Germany.

As the end of my fieldwork came closer, Lina and I had a conversation in which we reflected on our first encounter and Lina told me about her feelings for me:

The kind of thoughts I had when you left Chambri [in 2011], I did not have all sorts of thoughts. I thought, 'Why did she only come for such a short time?' I thought about her, the baby that I buried and that went away, and now she only came for such a short time in this year. This *love* of mine was like that and I did not forget it, when I went on, I still remembered it. I thought about your face. [...] It did not matter what I did, I never stopped thinking about it. When I talked about it, tears fell down. I wiped them off and went on. I will not forget you. There is no way for me to forget you. Now you came here to stay as my child and it will be hard to forget. [...] I see you and I think, that is it. I do not think that you are a different woman. I do not think like that. I think 'She is that child'. I have that kind of thought. Savi, you cannot see my heart – how it is working [she starts to cry]. I will remember you. [...] Now this morning the others were talking about you and I started to cry, 'I won't forget.' I said, 'I do not know when she goes she will go to do her work and I won't see her face for a long time.' [...] I said to them, 'You do not know how I am feeling. I cannot describe how I feel in my heart. It is too hard that I will lose her again and that she will leave me again and go away.' I have these thoughts.

Although I struggled sometimes immensely with coming to terms with the clash between people's perception of me and my own understanding of who I was and all the emotional baggage that came with it, I embraced this situation as a part of my fieldwork experience. The new identities that I acquired in the field offered me quite a personal understanding of people's lifeworld and their understanding of Being.

1.2 Theoretical and Methodological Approach

My thesis is an exploration of Being and beings in a Sepik community in the context of religious change. It is an investigation into the lifeworld of the Nyaura (West-Iatmul) in Timbunmeli and how it is shaped by intersubjective experiences and interactions. Thereby I focus especially on religious change as people's appropriation of Catholicism provides us with insights into their existential struggle between self and other – including other people, spirits, things, and the world at large. I will argue that ontological¹⁴ premises characteristic for the Nyaura lifeworld and reflected in the local concept of person have been crucial for the way people in Timbunmeli appropriated Christianity. With that my thesis can be read as stressing continuity within change.

My approach is inspired by the existential phenomenological anthropology of Michael Jackson (Jackson 1989, 1996, 2002, 2012, 2013), with its focus on intersubjectivity, the

¹⁴ Ontology is a branch of philosophy concerned with existence – with what kind of beings exist and how they relate to each other. By extension I use the term ontology to denote a shared understanding about Being and beings that develops differently in different societies over time in intersubjective experiences between self and other. These assumptions might be implicitly present rather than explicitly articulated (Heidegger 2001[1962]).

philosophy of Martin Heidegger¹⁵ and his study of Being (1993[1927], 2001[1962]), and practice theory stressing the dialectics between structure and agency (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Sahlins 1981, 1985).

For Heidegger the human Being¹⁶ is intimately tangled up with the world. Therefore, Heidegger has coined the expression ‘being-in-the-world’ to characterize the relational nature of human existence. As human beings we are not separated from our worldly ingraining and our experiences of and understanding of the world (own world, ‘Eigenwelt’) cannot be separated from this existential condition of our Being as being-in-the-world. As part of being-in-the-world Heidegger sees being-with (‘Mitsein’), meaning that we are not alone in the world but always in relation with ‘others’ (‘Andere’). Being-in-the-world describes the character of human existence that is defined by its emplacement in the world, in the sense of physical environment (‘Umwelt’) and in the sense of being with others (‘Mitwelt’, ‘with-world’) (Heidegger 1993[1927]: esp. 52-66, 113-130; 2001[1962]: esp.: 78-95, 149-168). A person is thrown (‘geworfen’) into a certain lifeworld – s/he is born into existing conditions and relationships that follow certain rules and reasoning. Before a person is able to perceive her/himself alone and in relations with others, sh/e becomes socialized into the specific lifeworld of her/his environment (Heidegger 1993[1927], 2001[1962]; also Bourdieu 1977, 1990). Thus people’s perceptions of themselves, others, things, and the world are shaped by shared assumptions about human existence and relations between different kinds of entities that characterise their lifeworld. However, they also influence their lifeworld through their actions. They shape it and may change it through their practices (Bourdieu 1977, Ortner 1984, 2006, Otto 1997, 2005, Sahlins 1981, 1985).

With that my understanding of lifeworld is best captured by Alfred Schutz’s and Thomas Luckmann’s (1989[1983]: 1) definition:

¹⁵ Recently some anthropologists working in PNG have used Heidegger’s philosophy for their argumentation. James Weiner mainly focusses on Heidegger’s later work concerned with the origin and function of the work of art (Weiner 1991, 1995, 2001). Deborah van Heekeren on the other hand explores Heidegger’s approach towards a study of Being in relation to Vula’a identity (Van Heekeren 2012). But while Weiner and van Heekeren focus mainly on metaphorical speech and myths to reveal the Foi and respectively Vula’a Being, I focus primarily on practices aiming to reveal the invisible that is part of Nyaura Being (also Lattas 1998, 2000, 2006). By studying contemporary practices of the Nyaura in Timbunmeli I aim not only to reveal their mode of Being, but also to show how intersubjective experiences play into processes of change.

¹⁶ Heidegger (1993[1927]: 7; 2001[1962]: 27) terms human Being (‘Sein’) ‘Dasein’ (‘Being-there’). Central for Heidegger’s understanding of human Being is the idea that it embodies an understanding of Being: ‘Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it’ (Heidegger 2001[1962]: 32, italics removed). He sets the task to concern himself with the meaning of Being (ontological investigation), which is to be differentiated from an investigation about the facts of beings (ontic investigation). However, an investigation of Being cannot be clearly differentiated from a study of entities, since, as Heidegger himself says, ‘Being is always the Being of an entity’ (Heidegger 2001[1962]: 29) and since Being is always being-with and being-in-the-world. My focus is on the characteristics of the Nyaura Being in Timbunmeli and its relationship with its lifeworld, others, and things. I follow Macquarrie and Robinson’s (2001[1962]) translation of Heidegger’s ‘Sein und Zeit’ into English and also follow their capitalisation of Being to express the noun ‘Sein’ that is always capitalized in German.

The Life-world is the quintessence of a reality that is lived, experienced, and endured. It is, however, also a reality that is mastered by action and the reality in which – and on which – our action fails. Especially for the everyday life-world, it holds good that we engage in it by acting and change it by our actions. Everyday life is that province of reality in which we encounter directly, as the condition of our life, natural and social givens as pre-given realities with which we just try to cope.

As humans we experience the world and engage with it in different ways that are best understood as processual and always in the course of becoming and making. In reference to Heidegger's understanding of the interrelationship between Being and world as described in 'Being and Time', his later discussion of world-formation (Heidegger 1995: 274ff.), and his statement 'the world worlds' (1993[1977]: 170), I call this process worlding (see also Descola 2010, 2014; de Pina-Cabral 2014a, b; Tsing 2010). With worlding I describe a process that oscillates between that what is given (and what we are thrown into) and that what humans actualise, or bring-forth by engaging with others and things in that space that constitutes their lifeworld.

Heidegger made it clear that humans form their world in a specific environment of everyday life with others and things. I call this world of people's everyday engagement lifeworld. In this sense, there is one world (the totality of everything that exists), but many different lifeworlds. Humans never inhabit the whole world at once, but only experience a certain part of it – their lifeworld. It is this part of the world, the lifeworld, on which people act, and in which they interact with each other, things, and their environment and thus create their lifeworld anew in their daily interactions. Thereby, global transformation processes are increasingly felt in the lifeworld of local communities and exert influence on it. The Timbunmeli lifeworld is situated at the middle Sepik, but is also influenced by experiences people have with urban centres, people from other places, digital technologies, and media that connect their lifeworld increasingly with the globalised world.

Our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world is shaped over time in intersubjective experiences and interactions between self and other (Jackson 1996, 2013). Our Being is relational – only through the engagement with things and other people do we reveal ourselves to others and do things and people reveal themselves to us (Dallmayr 1980: 240; Heidegger 1993[1927]: 66-88, 117-125, 2001[1962]: 95-122, 153-163, Jackson 2012: 171-172). Thereby, intersubjective relationships are characterized by struggle and ambiguity towards the other (Jackson 2002: 334-336). Jackson (ibid.: 333) takes it as axiomatic that 'all human beings need to have a hand in choosing their lives, and to be recognized as having an active part to play in the shaping of their social worlds.' How we experience relationships between ourselves and the other will depend on the 'degree to which we feel in control of these relationships, as well as the degree to which these relationships are felt to augment rather than diminish our own sense of well-being' (ibid.: 336). I want to pick up on Jackson's approach and extend it to the

West latmul approach towards things that have only recently become part of their lifeworld and explore the intersubjective dynamics of this encounter (ibid.: 334). As we will see in the course of my thesis, conflicts and frictions occur in Timbunmeli – not only for individual persons, but also within clans and the community at large. Different groups and individuals struggle for influence on the way their community is changing.

My entry ticket into the experienced reality of Timbunmeli is my own Being that has undergone a transformation from the first day of my encounter with people's lifeworld in 2011. Intersubjective experiences I had with people and other beings in Timbunmeli flow into this work. Thus, as a methodological point worth mentioning here, I treated spirits as people in Timbunmeli treat them – as persons who can be engaged with and as active participants in the worlding process. I took notes of and/or recorded interactions, conversations and interviews that I had with spirit beings during spirit possessions that I witnessed. Following an experiential phenomenological approach (e.g. Knibbe and Versteeg 2008), I am interested in (inter)subjective experiences that people have with visible and invisible others, including myself, and how these experiences have an influence on the shaping of people's lifeworld.

Otherwise I followed conventional anthropological fieldwork methods. In addition to collecting data via participant observation, I conducted a household survey, made a mobile phone network analysis by asking people about their incoming and outgoing calls, studied the amount of fish women could catch, and used interviews and group discussions. A large amount of my data stems from informal discussions and conversations with my interlocutors. Everyday conversations and stories as well as myths and life-histories provided detailed information about local concepts, beliefs, values, norms and concerns that inform life in Timbunmeli. However, by studying practices such as healing ceremonies, rituals of death, prayer meetings, spirit possessions, or the appropriation of the mobile phone and other things, by studying myths and stories that people told me, by listening to, observing, and participating in people's experiences with the visible and invisible other, I have also encountered ontological premises that inform life in Timbunmeli people's sense of Being.

My thesis will mainly focus on transformation processes connected to the religious sphere. However, I also intend to give an overview of other processes of change that can be identified in Timbunmeli. In addition to describing what I have experienced and what people have told me, I have the advantageous position of being able to rely on the work of other anthropologists who have worked with latmul and their neighbouring societies. Their works were a valuable source for me in identifying processes and lines of change.

The latmul have been on anthropology's agenda since the 1920s when Gregory Bateson (1932a, b, 1958[1936]) started to study their lifeworld. Since then, different anthropologists set

forth to study the culture of the river societies commonly known as latmul, a term that Bateson assigned to the groups living between Sapandei and Tambunum¹⁷. Today the groups called East, Central, and West latmul know from contacts with tourists, traders, mission, and anthropologists that the term latmul refers to them as a group. However, they usually do not use this term to refer to themselves, but – in case of the Central and West latmul groups – call themselves Palimbei and Nyaura and with that refer back to their mother villages – Palimbei and Nyaurangei – from which their current villages originated. The East latmul are known as Woliagwi. However, latmul groups see themselves as being related in language, culture, and descent and trace their origin back to a mythical place called Mävimbit from where their ancestors originated.

The latmul have been described as being the aristocrats of the Sepik (Metraux 1978a). They are well known for their impressive material culture, their complex totemic and naming systems and their rituals. Especially renown is their male initiation with its body scarification, and the *naven* rite first described by Bateson. Whereas Bateson¹⁸ (1932a,b, [1936]1958) studied the East and Central latmul, Metraux (1975, 1978a,b, 1990), Hauser-Schäublin (1977, 1990) and later Silverman (e.g. 1993, 2001, 2013) conducted their fieldwork among the East latmul. Stanek (1982, 1983, 1990, Stanek and Weiss 2015), Schmid (1990, Schmid and Kocher-Schmid 1992), Weiss (1981, 1990, Weiss and Stanek 2006), and Moutu (Herle and Moutu 2004, Moutu 2009, 2013) worked among the Central latmul. Wassmann (1982, 1988, 1990, 1991, 2001) has worked with the West latmul in Kandingei, the mother village of Timbunmeli where I conducted fieldwork from December 2012 to January 2014 and November 2014 to December 2014.

Reading through the existing anthropological literature, common themes studied among the latmul can be identified: They are the social structure and kinship system (Moutu 2013; Stanek 1983), the complex mythology and totemic system (Moutu 2013; Wassmann 1982, 1988; Silverman 1996; Schmid and Kocher-Schmid 1992), and the ritual world (Moutu 2013; Wassmann 1982, 1988; Bateson 1958[1936]; Silverman 2001). Two female anthropologists have further concerned themselves with the lifeworld of children (Weiss 1981, 1990) and women (Hauser-Schäublin 1977).

Recently the reports and diary entries of Adolf Roesicke, an ethnographer who was part of a Sepik expedition in 1912/13, have been published (Schindlbeck 2015). Descriptions of what

¹⁷ Bateson took the name of a clan called 'latmul' in Mindimbit and used it as a collective term for the river societies.

¹⁸ During his first fieldtrip Bateson spent six months among the latmul. Most of the time he was in Mindimbit (East latmul), but he also visited also the Central latmul village of Palimbei (3 weeks) and the East latmul village of Tambunum (3 days) (Bateson 1932a: 245). On his second fieldtrip he spent further 15 months among the Central and East latmul villages of Mindimbit (East latmul), Kanganamun (Central latmul), Palimbei (Central latmul), and Malingei (Central latmul) (Bateson 1958[1936]: 11).

he saw and encountered in latmul villages offer the possibility for a historical perspective – Roesicke spent a prolonged time in West latmul territory and also briefly visited the Chambri Lake.

Also, the publications of anthropologists, who conducted research in neighbouring societies, were valuable for the development of my thesis. The work of Deborah Gewertz and Frederik Errington (Gewertz 1977a,b, 1978, 1983, Gewertz and Errington 1991, Errington and Gewertz 1987, also Nicholas Garnier 2015) enriched my understanding of Timbunmeli's lifeworld. They are working with Timbunmeli's direct neighbours, the Chambri, a group that has very much been influenced by the latmul as have the Aibom (Schuster 1967, 1990, Schuster G. 1990), another society living at the Chambri Lake.

In regard to my understandings of the Nyaura concept of person, I cannot overestimate the importance of Simon Harrison's work about the Manambu (1985a, 1990), and the work of Borut Telban (e.g. 1998) and Daniela Vávrová (e.g. 2014) working with the Ambonwari, as there are striking similarities between the Nyaura concept of personhood and that of the Manambu and Ambonwari, on which already Silverman (2001: 183n4) and Moutu (2013: 116) have commented. What all of these societies have in common is an understanding of the person as being composed of spirit, embodied mind, and body. In my thesis I will argue that the Nyaura person embodies visible and invisible entities that reflect ontological premises characterising Timbunmeli's lifeworld. Those premises have influenced the way people appropriated Christianity, and especially charismatic Catholicism, into their lives, and furthermore, have received a reaffirmation by the new religious doctrine. Moreover, they are reflected in current religious practices and beliefs that also feed into people's engagement with things that only recently have become part of their lives. I will analyse how the Nyaura conceptualisation of person and world has been influenced by and has affected the appropriation of Christianity.

1.3 Chapter Outline

Before I will start to discuss the Nyaura concept of person in Chapter Two, I will provide the reader with a brief summary of the ethnographic background of Timbunmeli village. In section 1.4. I outline the history of Timbunmeli, the socio-political structure and ecological as well as socio-economic change.

Chapter Two discusses the Nyaura person as being composed of maternal and paternal matter, as well as an invisible substance called *kaik*, that intimately connect a person with past and present beings, its cosmos, and its creator that today is called God. I will also turn to names

and naming as well as understanding of sickness and healing that reveal the Nyaura Being as a being-with the invisible realm of their lifeworld.

In Chapter Three I will turn to describing people's perceptions of death, rituals of death, and relations with the dead. In the Nyaura ontology, death does not end Being. The dead stays enmeshed in a social network of relations with the living.

Chapter Four discusses the Nyaura ontology and cosmology under the influence of Christianity. I argue that a re-interpretation process of beings that have always been part of their lifeworld is currently taking place. I also suggest that this process, accompanied by practices that will be the topic of following chapters, may be regarded as an attempt to regain one's self-worth and re-legitimate an aspect of the Nyaura Being that people have become distanced from in their recent past.

Chapter Five discusses the phenomenon of spirit possessions in Timbunmeli and argues that the spiritual other is not only part of people's lifeworld, but also part of the individual person. I further identify an egalitarianisation process concerning the access and representation of the spiritual sphere that offers women and uninitiated men the possibility to extend their Being into a domain that was formerly only inhabited by initiated men. As will be shown in this chapter this process creates struggles for male leaders.

Chapter Six will take a closer look at people's understanding of death as a possibility for change. Millenarian and cargoistic influences can be found in the Catholic community and are reflected in villager's practices that aim at strengthening their relations with the dead and furthermore accessing them as a source for change. I further show that currently a trend towards a spiritual re-empowerment can be identified.

Chapter Seven aims to discuss how assumptions about Being and beings in Timbunmeli also take influence on people's appropriations of things. Three examples will be discussed – the mobile phone, the rosary, and a book. All of these things have acquired a different meaning in people's intersubjective experiences and interactions.

My conclusion aims to summarize the most important findings of my research and provide some final reflections on processes of change in Timbunmeli.

1.4 The Lifeworld of Timbunmeli – identifying processes of change



No 4: View on Timbunmeli island (centre) from a canoe leaving Chambri island (C.Falck 2013).

Timbunmeli¹⁹, or Timbun as locals call it, is a village situated on a jungle-covered hill at the southern end of Malimbi, the Nyaura term for Lake Chambri. The big lake (ca. 216 – 235 km² see Chambers 1987, Mitchell et al. 1980) is nourished by the Sepik river and is surrounded by swampy grass- and bushlands.

Timbunmeli island is for its most parts enclosed by water – only at its backside, where a branch from the lake called Mewang ends, a small corridor connects the island with the swampy hinterlands. During the wet season, the water masses of the Sepik River swell and push into the Chambri Lake swallowing the shorelines of Timbunmeli. Here, people settle in houses that are built on posts lifting the floors up to two metres off the ground. But sometimes the heavy rainfall causes the water level to rise to such extend that the elevated houses offer no protection from the water mass. Then, families have to leave their homes and move in with kin whose houses were built on higher ground.

Although the island is large, most of Timbun's 656 inhabitants (292 adults) settle only on a 6km stretch situated at its south-eastern shoreline, leaving the hill sites mainly uninhabited. People prefer to settle close to the water like latmul societies in the Sepik River's lowland have to. Only a few families choose the arduous steep ascent in the humid heat over the inconvenience of being surrounded in their houses by the yearly floods – but their houses, too, are built on posts because it is the way that Nyaura build their homes.

Timbunmeli's villagers have moved to the island from Kandingei.²⁰ From Kandingei six other Nyaura villages were founded along the Sepik River – Takengei, Korogo, Sapandei, Sapanaut, Yensemangua and Yamanambu (see map, no. 2, p.2). Today people say the Nyaura

¹⁹ Also found as Timbunmali or Timbunmeri, but my informants identified these as misspellings. Timbunmeli is a name that is part of the Nyaura clan's totemic repertoire.

²⁰ According to Wassmann a former village called Nyaurangei, the first village of all Nyaura, was abandoned and its inhabitants split into the villages Kandingei and Takengei. Kandingei became 'old' Nyaurangei (Wassmann 1982, 1988). Claas (2007: 165n 213), who sighted reports from the 19th and early 20th century confirms this. Also my interlocutors confirmed this. Nyaura is people's self-designated name, whereas *gai/gei* in their local language is the term for house or place. Nyaurangei therefore refers also to all Nyaura villages. Today the inhabitants of Takengei call their village Nyaurangei, a village official is said to have renamed the village during his office – but Timbun's and Kandingei's inhabitants do not approve of this.

have seven villages (*'Nyaura i sevenpela ples'*), counting younger settlements still as offshoots from older Nyaura villages. Timbunmeli's inhabitants moved out from Kandingei, Arinjon (made up of two small islands called Wondunumbuk and Abrak) was founded by Nyaura from Takengei, and Lukluk's population came from Sapanaut. The islands, however, people say, belong to Kandingei's territory (see also Wassmann 1982: 18, 1991: 10).

The story of how West latmul from Kandingei came to settle on Timbunmeli island is a sensitive one because there has been a fierce ground dispute with the Chambri, another community living on an island in the lake. In former times Timbunmeli had been fought over by different groups (see Gewertz 1983: 138), but was eventually conquered by men from Kandingei.

Via different ground appropriation activities, the Nyaura made Timbunmeli island their own. We can identify four different phases of the land appropriation process. The first phase goes back to ancestral times, when people's forefathers wandered the landscape and formed villages and descendants in different places (see Wassmann 1982, 1988, 1990, 1991). The West latmul clans situate their ancestral journeys also in the Chambri Lake area and today some of their spirit beings still live there.

The second phase of the land appropriation process is characterised by war. In former times latmul groups fought with lake societies and Sepik Hills people for ground, bush- and watersides. It was the time of endemic headhunting campaigns. People's oral history tells how the island's traditional landowners, the Manawi, were wiped out.²¹ After most of the Manawi had been killed, the Nyaura went back to Kandingei. However, they, as well as people from Changriman and Chambri,²² had camps on Timbunmeli island and upheld trade relations with people from the interior.²³

²¹ At that time Timbunmeli island had evolved as a trading ground. The Manawi were said to have had a good location on a mountain from where they could easily fight enemies at the shorelines of the island. However, at some time approximately during end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century, the Manawi were diminished in an attack. Most of them resettled to a hill at the backside of Timbunmeli from where they were eventually fought off by a raid from Kandingei after they had attacked Nyaura trading parties and Kandingei came to take revenge. A Yak clan man climbed up a coconut tree with a torch from burning leaves and inflamed a house where the Manawi had entrenched themselves. Their fight was lost. The Nyaura chased off the Manawi from the island, only a few people survived the raid. One of them was Worru. He was injured when the string bag in which his mother was carrying him as a baby while fleeing from the village caught fire. As an old man, Worru witnessed for Kandingei in front of a land title commission and stated that it was Kandingei who had conquered the ground.

²² The Chambri had fled their village during wars with latmul from Palimbei and were living in the backside of the lake, also having camps on Timbunmeli island (see Gewertz 1983: 108). Note that my informants stated that their forefathers fought on Chambri's side and considered the Chambri to be their war canoe's steersmen (*stirman*) when they went to fight with other communities. They also claim that the Nyaura have supported the Chambri in their fight against the Palimbei latmul and have helped them to return to their island (see also Claas 2007: 169).

²³ Adolf Roesicke, who travelled the Sepik in 1912/13, stated that during a stay in Jentschemangua (Yensemangua) people listed Timbunmeli (Timbunmeli) as one of the villages found further south (next to Paliagwi, Tsambuli (Chambri) and Aibom). During a travel to the Chambri Lake, he saw three big houses on Timbunmeli (Schindlbeck 2015: 281-282). However, there is no information found in his writings on who was settling there.

The third phase of the land taking process took place between the 1930s and 1940s. Men from Kandingei resettled to Timbunmeli island for good.²⁴ Around that time a fight had arisen between men from the West latmul villages of Kandingei and Yensemangua that resulted in Yensemangua blocking Kandingei's access to its sago market in Torembi. Kandingei started to look for a new source of its staple food and remembered its *spia graun* (conquered ground), Timbunmeli which was rich in sago trees and had a strategically advantageous location to trade with hill people for sago. The new settlers then made a deal with the communities around Timbunmeli island. The *luluai* (first village official, appointed by colonial government) Waviyeri from Chambri supported the men from Kandingei because Kandingei and Chambri not only had kin relations, but also because Kandingei had helped Chambri during wars with Hill groups and a Palimbei raid that almost led to Chambri's extinction (also Claas 2007: 169, 337; Gewertz 1983: 100-102, 138-140). Gewertz (1983: 138) also states that the Chambri never had had an interest to inhabit the island before the latmul had come to settle on it. However, they were reluctant to see that the settlers from Kandingei intended to stay on the island for good, fearing that they could have disadvantages in the trade with other communities. The people from the interior, on the other hand, saw an advantage in supporting Kandingei's intention to settle on the island since its superior military and magical strength offered protection in times of wars. Also Kandingei had access to desired trade items that they had not.

The Nyaura settlers tamed the spirits on the island, put spells into the ground, named their surroundings, cut the bush, drained the swampy ground, built houses, and planted trees and plants. It was spirits and names of the Nyaura clan²⁵ that were used in magical spells to appropriate the new ground. The name Timbunmeli goes back to the ancestral names of the Nyaura clan – Timbunyondi is the name of the water lily that was plentiful in the waters of the lake before. The name Timbunmeli is part of a name bundle that belongs to the Nyaura clan relating them to the water lily. Today the island is widely known under the name Timbunmeli, but in fact it has a different, hidden and secret name that was used in a magic spell to secure the ground to the Nyaura and transform it into a safe inhabitable place.

Part of the ground appropriation activities was also the construction of a *geggo* – a men's house. Since West latmul came to settle on the island they have undertaken six male initiations. The last initiation took place in the 1980s.

²⁴ See also Wassmann (1991: 208) who states that the father's and grandfather's generation of Kandingei people (1972/73) started a migration to Timbunmeli.

²⁵ The Nyaura clan is said to have been the first clan to arrive in the West latmul territory. There, its members founded the first Nyaura village called Nyaurangei. Nyaura is also the West-latmul's self-designated name. If the clan Nyaura is meant in my writings, it will be marked by the addition 'clan'.

A while after the Nyaura started to settle permanently on Timbunmeli, Chambri started to complain and a land dispute over the island arose.²⁶ In the fourth phase of the land appropriation process, people from other lake communities witnessed for the Nyaura in front of landtitle commissions and the Australian administration, then in charge of PNG, decided that Kandingei was Timbunmeli's rightful owner (see also Gewertz 1983: 140-143).

Today, the Nyaura on Timbunmeli have also strengthened their rights to the land with intermarriage and trade relations. Every Saturday, women from the neighbouring communities of Mali and Changriman come to sell their sago in Timbunmeli, and Erika Kaiban regularly travels to Changriman to offer store goods to the community. At the backside of Timbunmeli the Mali village Korewui is situated where Timbunmeli women obtain Sago, too. Furthermore, the son of one of the Changriman settlers lives in Timbunmeli, married to a Nyaura woman, and intermarriage between other neighbouring communities and Timbunmeli took place. Women from Garamambu, Mali, and Paliagwi are married to men in Timbun and a man from Mali is married to a Nyaura woman. Also, children from the neighbouring communities visit Timbunmeli's primary school.

1.4.1 Socio-political Organisation



No 5: Nyaura clan compound (C.Falck 2013).

The socio-political organisation of West Iatmul societies traditionally consist of an exogamous patrilineal clan system as it has been described by Wassmann (1982, 1991) who conducted

²⁶ Gewertz (1983: 220) places the 'Iatmul intrusion' to 1943. She dates the conflict between Kandingei and Yensemangua to 1942, based on the evidence of documents and ethnohistorical accounts that she sighted. My informants, however, estimated that Nyaura started to settle on Timbunmeli during the 1930s. In his PhD thesis Lawrence Kuna Kalinoe states after sighting documents of a landtitle commission 'Timbunmeri was founded in 1939 when two Garamambu village men, Akata and Ganika, gave the migrants their customary land to found the village' (Kalinoe 1998: 186).

research in Timbunmeli's mother village Kandingei. Two moieties (*nyame*, *nyoui*) split into different clans that are made up of lineages. People in Timbunmeli call all those socio-political divisions '*yarringe*' ('clan') in their local vernacular.

In Timbunmeli not all the clans that are present in Kandingei are prevalent – only a few men, often brothers or fathers with their sons, migrated to Timbun and are the clan founders there. The *nyame* moiety consists of the clans Nyaura, Gama, and Yagun. The Possuko, Yak, and Nambuk clan belong to the *nyoui* moiety.

Timbunmeli has a patrilineal kinship system (see esp. Stanek 1983), but the mother and maternal relatives are highly valued and respected among the West latmul (see also Silverman 2001 for East latmul). I was told: 'The mother is very important. She had to endure big pain and hard work to raise a child.' The positive evaluation of maternal ties is for example expressed in a ritual called *sorak*. It has already been described and analysed by Bateson (1958[1936]), Moutu (2013), Silverman (2001) and others (e.g. Houseman and Severi 1998; Lipset 1997; Stanek 1983, Weiss and Stanek 2006) under the term *naven* (also *navin*), the East (and Central) latmul's term for *sorak* (see also Wassmann 1982: 44). A *naven* celebration takes place between the *laua* (ZC) and the *wau* (MB). Today, the celebration of first time achievements of the *laua* among the West Nyaura is celebrated by the maternal relatives as a collective (*lain kandere*), not by an individual mother's brother (*wau*). In Timbunmeli participating men do not dress in women's clothes, like others described it (e.g. Bateson 1958[1936]: 12-22, Silverman 2001: 133), but decorate themselves with plant leaves that belong to the totemic repertoire of the *laua*'s mother's clan, if they decorate themselves at all. Participating women, however, do dress in men's attire (traditional and modern) to celebrate the achievement of the *laua* (see appendix p.236), which are at the same time considered to be achievements of his mother, whom they represent as her clan members.

The family house is the space of women. A household contains a stove for each wife. In a house of a man with two wives, two stoves and wires for smoking fish are found. Whereas Wassmann (1982) states that during the time of his fieldwork in the 1970s polygamy was decreasing in Kandingei, it is common in Timbunmeli today with men having up to three wives. In the father's generation of the current leaders, men had up to seven wives.

The space of men is the men's house (*geggo*), currently non-existing in Timbunmeli. Instead there are many *haus win* (*barre*), in which men mingle, talk, and relax over the day.

Bateson (1958[1936]: 124), who studied the latmul culture during the beginning of the last century, stated that: 'A man achieves standing in the community by his achievements in war, by sorcery and esoteric knowledge, by shamanism, by wealth, by intrigue, and to some extent, by age.' Today men in Timbunmeli do not take part in warlike raids and head-hunting



No 6: Yak clan compound during high-water (C.Falck 2013).



No 7: Yak clan compound after high-water (C.Falck 2013).

campaigns anymore and men have lost much of their secret knowledge surrounding magic, sorcery and esoteric knowledge.

Resulting from the abandonment of practices related to the male domain, today an 'increasing disintegration of the social order of the village' (Wassmann 1991: 42) takes place, which was already noticed by Wassmann in the 1970s. However, although the central meeting place for male politics, religious and social activities and associated activities have vanished, new areas of male influence have opened up (also Silverman 2001: 24-26). Today the latmul male ethos of continual and aggressive assertion (Bateson 1958[1936]: 124, Silverman 2001: 25, 88) has shifted to the competition of male leaders in village and church offices and is also expressed in the accumulation of new technologies, such as outboard motors, generators, CD players and speakers, TVs, DVD-players, laptops, mobile phones and smartphones. But, whereas the political domain is still mainly ascribed to the male domain, today men have to compete for influence and status in the religious sphere not only with each other but also with women (Chapter 5).

Next to patrilineal clans that structure the community, the community is organised in the WDC (Ward Development Committee). The village councillor, currently Benedict Wavi (Nyaura clan) governs the community, elected by villagers for a five-year candidature. Although Benedict has only been elected in 2013, the community meetings he summons lack attendance and he finds it difficult to pursue his work.



No 8: Possuko clan compound (C.Falck 2013).

The same holds true for the local Catholic Church leader, a young Yak man called Nikki Tonagon (Yak clan). Although Nikki was elected to replace an older leader, Rondey Kinjak (Possuko clan) as the KST (*Kommuniti Stia Tim* = Community Steering Team) chairman, he struggles a lot to get community support. The community is split into different private prayer groups not accepting his office and male leaders call Nikki's ability for leadership into question.

On the educational level, Timbunmeli has an Elementary and a Primary School.²⁷ The schools have a chairman, a treasurer and secretary. Due to a conflict between the teachers that runs along clan lines (Yak–Nyaura), the Elementary School moved away from the school ground and resettled in the Yak compound on a mountain. The schools in Timbun struggle – often teachers are absent and pupils are missing out on lectures. On the other hand, teachers complain about the lack of motivation among pupils and the attitude problem among parents. Some children do not come to class regularly; others are missing on the market days when they are either travelling to Maprik to sell fish or checking fish nets for their mothers who went to the market.

On the health sector, the community has a male and female health worker (Stella and Benedikt Wavi, Nyaura Clan), but they are often without a supply of medication.

Generally, it can be said that Timbunmeli's community organisation is malfunctioning. There have been fierce conflicts mainly between the Yak (especially Kaiban family) and Nyaura (especially Wavi family) clan in the past (the two biggest clans in the village) resulting in the quasi blockade of any community cooperation. Interestingly the conflicts run along the membership lines of moieties (*nyoui–nyame*) that already Bateson (1958[1936]) has described as being rivals (Chapter 5). The *bruk pasin* (disunity) and the lack of *wok bung* (common work and support) on the community level are lamented by all, but so far people found it impossible to overcome their issues.

1.4.2 Ecological and Socio-economic Change

During the rainy season huge amount of of driftwood and water hyacinths float around in Lake Chambri. Also areas of grass that were anchored before start to drift and trip around before they eventually sink to the ground when the water level drops again. These grass-islands

²⁷ The Primary School was once situated in Changriman, but was moved out to Timbunmeli in 2005 as a result of the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Wavi. Mali and Changriman children visit the primary school and sometimes stay with families from Timbunmeli. Before the communities at the backside of the Chambri Lake received their own schools, their children had to travel to Chambri island to receive education. The leaders of today were part of that generation and tell stories of how their mothers baked bundles of sago pancakes for them on the weekend that they then had to feed on during the week when sleeping in Chambri in a boarding home built for them.



No 9: Women paddling out to the lake in the early morning (C.Falck 2013).

(*miagwi*) are said to have come into existence when creation took place and are connected to spirit beings. From February to April 2013 an unusual high water hit the area²⁸ – a lot of rain fell down, a lot of strong wind blew and the water level of the lake rose so high that some villagers had to leave their houses.

People observed that many *miagwi* were loose, drifting around and destroying the nets of the fisher women. They said they could not remember that so many grass-islands had ever moved before. Huge grass-islands came out of small rivulets and people were wondering how that was possible – had *nature*, the bush and water spirits, been stirred up by something?

People in Timbunmeli say their environment has been changing for some time. Whereas in former times people could predict the time of the rainy and dry season, today, people say, the water level can rise at any time. In former times the lake was well known for its stunning beauty when waterlilies and grass coloured its waterlines and gave home to diverse birdlife. In the 1930s Margaret Mead (1977[1935]: 237) wrote about the Chambri Lake:

Its outlines are irregular and its contours are continually changing as the large floating islands of grass are pushed here and there by the shifting winds. [...]. The water of the lake is so coloured with dark peat-brown vegetable matter that it looks black on the surface, and when no wind stirs it, resembles black enamel. On this polished surface, in still times the leaves of thousands of pink and

²⁸ 1973, 1998 and 2010 are years for which people remember a high water level similar to that of the high water in 2013. 1973 is remembered as a severe high water during which people from Kandingei found shelter in the houses of kin in Timbun (see also Stanek 1983: 41, Wassmann 1991: 8). Also in 2013 some relatives from Kandingei came to stay with their family in Timbun. The water level of the lake in 2013 rose higher than in 2010.

white lotuses and smaller deep-blue water-lily are spread, and among the flowers, in the early morning, the white osprey and the blue heron stand in great numbers, completing the decorative effect, which displays almost too studied a pattern to seem completely real.²⁹

Today the lake is a vast plane of brownish water. While in former times water-grass and grass-islands gave shelter when wind was hitting the lake, today only a few areas with grass remain within the lake and wind finds open water that can easily be stirred up to a white foaming sea. Nowadays the lake's water may quickly change and appear like the sea that hits the shorelines in Wewak – a coastal town and the capital of the East Sepik Province visited by many inhabitants of Timbun quite regularly. In the past, tourists came to the lake only to catch a glimpse of its beauty and people could sell their carvings to them. They no longer come and today's generations only hear stories of the former beauty and water-life of their home place.

Being asked why the appearance of the lake changed so drastically, people attribute the changes to different factors – many explain it with man influenced destruction of their natural environment. New fish species were introduced that feed on the roots of water plants and people burn down grass during the dry season to catch crocodiles or to come up gardens more easily. For others the changes in their living surrounding may be signs of a bigger change – uncontrolled by mankind, but sent by God. Some said the unusual movement of the *tumbuna graun* (ancestor's ground) would be a sign for big change to come. Believers could read the signs; others would be ignorant of what was to come – the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

For many though, it is the introduction of new fish species into their waters that ended the diversity of water-life. Villagers say that *titpis* or *bolkatta pis*, as locals call the Pacu, a relative of the piranha, and *javacap* feed on the roots of the vegetation and prohibit the growth of waterlilies and water-grass. Before, local fish species, e.g. *nilpis* (*kami*) and *bigmaus* (*kaura*), was abundantly present. Today, the native fish species are overtaken by introduced species such as *paku*, *javacap* and *rabbamaus* that by the majority hang up in the nets of the fishing women.

Nowadays many complain about the dominance of the bun filled *rabbamaus*. However, *rabbamaus* – cut in its middle and smoked dry over fire – is today the basis of Timbun's households' income.³⁰

²⁹ See also Roesicke's description of the Chambri Lake and photo of the lake from Aibom in 1913 (in Schindlbeck 2015: 43-44, 280-282).

³⁰ *Pacu* = *Piaractus brachipomus* or *Colossoma bidens*. *Javacap* = *Puntius gonionotus* (Gehrke et al. 2011; Kolkolo 2005). *Rabbamaus* = probably *Prochilodus margravii* (see Kolkolo 2005). The fish species of *rabbamaus* has not been clearly identified yet. Gehrke, Sheaves et al. 2011 refer to the 'rubber-mouth' as an unidentified fish species (p.587). The fresh water fish expert Heiko Bleher, asked by Gerry Allen and Robin Hide, who kindly shared this information with members of the ASAONET, identified the *rabbamaus* as a *Prochilodus* species after sighting photos of the fish that Deborah Gewertz and I had provided. Also in Kolkolo (2005) the '*Prochilodus margravii*' appears, also called 'Emily's fish'. Also in Gehrke et al. the Emily's fish is identified to be a *Prochilodus* species, but called '*Prochilodus argenteus*' here. Before the *rabbamaus* was introduced, another introduced fish species, the 'tilapia' (*makau*) was already outnumbering local fish species (see also Coates 1985; Gewertz 1983: 53; Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 23).

When fishing nets were introduced to the Chambri Lake area via the Catholic mission shop in Chambri (approx. during the 1960s-70s as estimated by my interlocutors³¹) it offered the lake societies a technology with which they could catch more fish in less time. Whereas women formerly would produce fish baskets (*namj*, *kwiala*) and loop roundnets (*njura*), or use hooks (*sungut*) and spears (*minja*) to catch fish (see also Hauser-Schäublin 1977; Gewertz 1983; Wassmann 1982: 51), they could now span nets and catch their fish more easily.

A woman usually joints her nets in a long row, spun between bamboo sticks that are thrust into to the lake's muddy ground. The nets are left in the water permanently and are checked every morning, unless they need to be entangled (see photo no 10, p. 31) or cleaned. Here we can identify a difference to fishing practices to Central latmul women of Kanganamun as described by Moutu (2013: 56). Not only do women there only own one net each, but also do they anchor their nets in their fishing lagoon anew on each morning (ibid.: 57).

Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin (1977) conducted a fish study during the 1970s in an East-latmul village called Kararau. There she found that a woman could catch up to 267 fish within a month (around 9 fish per day), using locally produced fish traps and fishing rods (with a nylon string and hook bought from a mission store). During January 2013 I asked Timbunmeli women about the amount of fish they caught on a daily basis and found that one woman could catch up to 338 fish with fishing nets on a single day (appendix p.237-249) – a striking increase.



No 10: Erika Kaiban disentangling her fishing nets (C.Falck 2013).

³¹ But note that Nylon fishing nets do not appear in Gewertz's list containing things the Chambri bought from the Mission Store in 1974. Her list only contains fishhooks (Gewertz 1983: 168, 173-174).

Simultaneously to the introduction of fishing nets, new fish species were introduced to the Sepik region³² that rapidly proliferated and ousted local fish species. Whereas until the 1990s an introduced fish species called '*makau*' in Tok Pisin was predominantly caught, people say that since the late 1990s to early 2000s they noticed that mainly the newer species *rabbamaus*, *paku*, and *javakap* filled their nets.

We have to take into consideration that the introduction of new fish species is likely to be a factor that contributed to changes in Timbunmeli's economy if the fish stock increased with the dispersal of the new species. Women and men in Timbun told me that the appropriation of fishing nets ascended during the 1990s – before women would usually own only one or two fishing nets. The acquisition of more nets seems to have coincided with the proliferation of the *rabbamaus*. Today most women own more than ten nets (and up to 24) and it is common that their children and other female relatives assist them with their work of checking the nets, as well as gutting and smoke drying the fish. Hereby it is common that women give a share of their cash receipts to those women who helped them. One woman, who also owns a local store, paid her helpers for their labour with a salary.

Not only offered the introduction of fishing nets (and probably also the introduction of new fish species) an improvement of the subsistence economy in Timbun as it is possible to catch more fish in less time, it also intertwined it more and more with the market economy. Today women, no longer focus on catching fish for local consumption and exchanges at local barter markets alone, but catch fish also for the distribution at supra-regional markets to earn money. Women now catch such a surplus amount of fish that they can afford the costs (around 90 Kina) for the travel to markets in towns and back to offer and sell their dry smoked product there and generate an income. Women and sometimes their husbands, sons or daughters travel mainly to Maprik, a town situated on the Sepik highway between Pagwi and Wewak, to sell their fish on the market there. But also Pagwi's and Wewak's (see map, p.2) markets are used as sell points.

Most women I asked stated that they would travel to the market twice per month. But depending on the amount of fish they accumulated they might go more or less often. One woman, who owns a motor canoe business and pays others to check her nets when she is away or busy with other things, sometimes travelled to markets twice within one week.

When travelling to a market, a woman usually tries to take as much bags of fish as possible with her (up to ten or more, approximately 10kg each) to save transport costs. Thereby

³² 1950s-1970s: *makau* (tilapia); 1990s: *paku*, *rabbamaus*, *javakap* (see e.g. Dudgeon and Smith 2006; Kolkolo 2005; Smith and Mufuape 2007).



No 11: My Nyaura siblings gutting fish during high-water(C.Falck 2013).



No 12: Assisted by her children Utika guts her catch of the day: *rabbamaus* (C.Falck 2013).



No 13: Canoe filled with fish bags, heading for Maprik market (C.Falck 2013).

it is common to take one or two fish bags of other women who did not catch enough fish themselves to travel to the market or feel reluctant to go and charge them a contribution to the transport costs (2012-2014: 60K canoe, 25K public transport) and market fee (2012-2014: 5 Kina).

The fish production further is the basis of small transport businesses in the village maintained by one woman and six men who each own outboard engines to motorize big canoes and transport passengers from Timbunmeli to Pagwi, a transportation hub, and back once or twice a week.

Hauser-Schläublin (1977: 37, 256)

states that in 1972/73 selling smoke-dried fish at the markets in Wewak was an only

recently established practice in Kararau. Only every few month men would travel to town, sometimes accompanied by their daughters or wives. Deborah Gewertz, who conducted fieldwork in Chambri at the Chambri Lake in 1973/74 and 1979, too, states that Chambri women then had only recently started to travel to markets in Pagwi, Maprik and Wewak approximately once a year. According to Gewertz they were the first from the Chambri Lake societies to travel to towns and sell their fish products there (Gewertz 1983: 159-160). My interlocutors remember that only in the 1980s women from Timbunmeli started to travel to town markets every now and then. In former times, the surplus amount of fish caught was primarily used for exchange with sago on local barter markets.³³ Starting in the 1990s however, the regular marketing of fish in towns became people's prime objective – a new time had started, the time of money (*taim bilong mani*).³⁴ Today money is needed to buy desirable items (e.g. store food, mobile phones and units, radios, marihuana, alcohol) and necessities (e.g. sago, soap, transport to the market,

³³ For barter market system see esp. Gewertz 1977a, 1983; but also Hauser-Schäublin 1977; Schindlbeck 1980; Stanek 1983; Weiss 1981; Wassmann 1982.

³⁴ Also Andrew Moutu (2013: 12) reports a change from the barter market between Central Iatmul women of Kanganamun and Sawos women towards a market system in which money is the main exchange medium. However, while the Kanganamun women primarily seem to sell their fish product on local markets (ibid. 12, 77), Timbunmeli's women's main sales markets have become Maprik and Pagwi.

medicine, school fees, clothes), or to build community projects, and to be able to meet one's responsibilities in rituals.

Depending on how many people cluster on the market in Maprik to sell their fish or if the demand is high, Timbun's women can sell a big bag of fish for around 150 to 200 Kina. Otherwise 80 to 100 Kina is common. If the market is slow and customers are reluctant to buy the fish, women break their bags into smaller ones and sell them for around 20 to 50 Kina or carry their full bags back home. Depending on how many bags people carry to the market and how good the market is, they can earn between 250 to 1000 Kina. On a bad day, a woman may return without profit to the village.

Whereas formerly also men used to hunt for fish with spears (also Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 23), this is no longer the case in Timbun. The *wok bilong fish* (fish work) became exclusively women's work. Nowadays almost solely women earn money. This fact is proudly stated by women, but can lead to conflicts on the micro level between husband and wife(s) and on the macro level within the community between men and women. During the planning of an opening ceremony for the new church building I noticed a conflict between women and men when male leaders asked the women of the community to donate money or fish (that could be sold on the



No 14: A woman checking Erika Kaiban's smoked dried fish products on the Maprik market (S.Rath 2013).

market) to support the work of the male leaders to raise money for the inauguration event planned. Although men had decided that their wives should donate, women were reluctant to donate money or fish and complained about men's lavishness of money that they did not earn. Lilien, the second wife of Markus Ivut, said: 'The men always deplete [our] money and we [women] work hard for nothing.' Furthermore, fights between couples can occur when women refuse to give money to their husbands, or when husbands sold their wives' fish on the market and keep the money for themselves (or spend it before returning to the village).

During my household survey and in conversations many women stated that they would share their earned money with their husbands and give them a pocket money (*poket mani*). There were also a few women who said they had to give their earned money to their husbands. More men however said their wives were in charge of the household's money and would handle it better than men.

Formerly, men could produce carvings and sell them to tourists that sometimes would visit the lake on a tourist ship, but today this is no longer the case.³⁵ If tourists visit the village today, which is very rare, they are either customers of local tour operators from other villages or visitors of the Catholic priest. In both cases there is no opportunity for people in Timbun to earn money from those visits and since the occasion is rare enough, no effort to do so is undertaken either.

In an attempt to get a foot into the cacao market, many families planted cacao, but were then disillusioned by the dropping prices and expensive costs for transport and drying the beans.³⁶

Another way to earn some money for men is to produce canoes and paddles to sell (also Moutu 2013: 65) but usually a husband produces the canoe(s) for his wife(/ves). Also, men go out to hunt crocodiles and sell their skin, but big crocodiles are hard to find in the lake area today; people say they have been hunted down (see also Gewertz 1983: 167). Some men catch small crocodiles or collect crocodile eggs to raise the reptiles in cages close to their houses until they have reached a size that is desired by skin buyers. Pigs, ducks and chicken are also raised and sold to other villagers, but this does not provide a regular income.

³⁵ Gewertz (1983: 164) states that during her fieldwork among the Chambri money acquired by selling artefacts produced by men surpassed money derived from women's fishing activities.

³⁶ In 2013 though, the community received three fermentaries (one for the Nyaura clan in Wongiambu, one for the Nyaura clan in Timbunmeli main village, one for the Yak clan) to dry wet cacao beans from a politician. In 2014 the Kaiban family received a further fermentary with the help of kin from the Wasara area. However, by December 2014 only the Kaiban fermentary was officially registered and had started to operate.



No 15: Crocodile caught by Timbunmeli men (C.Falck 2013).



No 16: Crocodiles raised by Markus Ivut are loaded for transport to buyer (C.Falck 2013).

Timbun's women further earn an income by selling store goods from town on the Saturday village market (mainly rice, tinned fish, sugar, milk powder, milo, lollies, salty biscuits, chewing gum, flour, oil, batteries, soap, washing powder, and prepaid cards). Furthermore, there are two bigger stores operated in the village, but whoever can afford to buy a stock of goods sells them every now and then for profit in the village. Women also sell betelnuts (*bangra*) and -pepper (*piaga*), lime (*kwayabu*), peanuts, and fried flower balls during community events, card games, and market days.

However, smoke dried fish is the main source of income in Timbunmeli and from February to April 2013 women complained about the lack of monetary income for – due to a combination of high-water that pushed fish out to the main river and drifting grass-islands that (threatened to) destroy(ed) the fishnets – women did not catch much fish. Some stopped their fishing activities for several days in fear of losing their nets. Also the relatively little amount of fish caught during this time was found to be not worth the long exhausting canoe trips out to the lake. Some women did not travel to the market at all and others who went reported that the market was full with women from the main river selling big amounts of fish – the price was down.

Women's workload is heavy and time consuming. Whereas Hauser-Schäublin (1977: 22-43) found that in 1972/73 women in Kararau travelled to their fishing grounds every second or



No 17: Sila re-smoking her mother's catch of the previous day (C.Falck 2013).

third day, in Timbunmeli women nowadays fish more or less every day. Early in the morning before daybreak they take their canoes and paddle out to the lake to check their nets. However, if nets have to be maintained, or if a woman feels tired after an exhausting market trip, a woman may take one or two days off to relax. Strong wind, rain, waves, and the burning sun often make the paddling an exhausting task. Sometimes women start to gut the fish while being on the lake if they can find a shady spot on the lake, but often they disembowel their catch at the shoreline of the village after they return from the lake around midday with the help of other women or children. After that the fish has to be smoke dried for several hours. If a woman has no one to help her, she, depending on the size of her catch, might be occupied with the fish work until late afternoon. Also, the fish has to be smoked repeatedly on every day to prevent mould and fly maggots ruining the fish. While women formerly only fished for a few hours in the morning (Gewertz 1983: 53) or stopped in-between to cut firewood in the forest (Bateson 1958[1936]: 143; Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 22) in Timbunmeli women spend most of their daytime on the *wok bilong pis* today.

The considerable increase of the women's fish work was described by my interlocutors as a result of the wish and need to earn money in the context of the increasing importance of money in people's lifeworld. 'The *rabbamaus* has already twisted (*faulim*) our heads' is an expression often heard in the community when people complain about their prime objective to catch as much fish as possible to sell it at the market as often as possible to earn money. Once I



No 18: Agatha smoking her mother-in-law's fish (C.Falck 2014).

heard the village councillor complain that Timbun had become a place where people only eat, sleep, and catch fish to travel to markets – nothing else, he complained, seems to be on their minds. Yet, although the Nyaura women now concentrate on catching as much fish as possible, the men do not. Only if their wives are sick, some men paddle out to check their nets, but more likely a female relative of the sick women will turn to this task. Within the latmul culture daily fishing activities – especially with nets, baskets and hooks – and the nurture of the family have always been women's responsibilities (Bateson 1932a: 272-276, 1958[1936]: 142-143, 147, Plate XVI, Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 22-23, Silverman 1993: 471-472, 2001: 190n.31, Wassmann 1982: 51) and have remained to be so.

Villager's main food is fish and sago. Sago (*nau*, *saksak*), is a starch product³⁷ gained from the palm tree of the sago palm. Sago, although Timbun has sago trees, is either bought Saturdays on Timbun's market from Changriman, Mali and Korewui women or was, until mid-2013, exchanged for fish on Thursdays in Mali on a barter market that already people's forefathers used to trade on. The West latmul say that it is not their custom to wash the starch

³⁷ Sago is mainly eaten fried (*samat nau* (dry fried sago pancakes) or *gubiat nau* (sago is fried into a pancake, then soaked in water, folded and fried again)), but it can also be served as a gluey jelly (*nangu* or *nongjik*, *tainim saksak*) that seems to be more popular in the Maprik area and among the Sepik Hill people than among Nyaura. If a woman wants to prepare a special treat for her family, she mixes the sago flour with sweet bananas and coconut (*labunau*), or the grease of the *nilpis* and grated coconut meat (*tipmanau*) – delicacies that are cooked over the fire, wrapped in leaves.

product, and that they are fishers and crocodile hunters – they prefer to buy or exchange it from others, if possible (see also Silverman 1993: 72).

The Mali barter market was re-established in 2012 after women from both places decided that one should go back to the old practice to exchange fish for sago – one fish for a



No 19: Mali women (left) exchanging sago for fish with Timbunmeli women (right) at the Mali barter market (C.Falck 2013).

piece of sago (see photo no 19, p.41). During the 1990s the barter market with Mali had been replaced by a market on which the latmul women had to buy sago for money. Whereas Timbunmeli women were happy about the resumption of the barter, Mali women soon found that they now lacked monetary income since the Nyaura women preferred to exchange the sago they needed for fish and did not buy much sago for money anymore. In mid-2013 the barter market was stopped again.³⁸

Marihuana is also planted in Timbunmeli as it offers a source of easy income. However, being illegal and socially not approved, the marihuana business is not openly discussed and was never listed as an exchange or trade product when people were asked to list what they sell or trade for.

Marihuana and alcohol consumption is a problem in Timbunmeli that puts pressure on the social structure. Especially during the Christmas Holidays when young men return home from town or on celebrations alcohol is extensively consumed. Whereas older men prefer to get drunk with beer, which is expensive to come by, young men drink *buket* a homebrewed alcohol mixture gained from yeast mixed with the juice of coconuts, pineapples, or citrus fruits. On other islands in the Chambri Lake men know how to distil alcohol and sell what is called *stim* in plastic bottles. Often young men were not only drunk for a day but kept drinking and smoking marihuana over days. During these times serious fights between drunken men or husbands and wives may occur. Alcohol is widely considered to be a substance one consumes when one is happy (*'amamas'*) and celebrating (*'amamasim'*). Although mainly men consume alcohol, also a few women sometimes buy beer or *stim* when they return from an especially successful market or if they want to celebrate something.

Marihuana consumption is a troubling novelty in the village. People noticed that since the 1990s the drug taking has steeply increased. People relate harassment as well as domestic and sexual violence to the influence of the drug, but also to the influence of pornography which has spread with the proliferation of mobile phones in the village. For example, in 2014 one man raped his underaged stepdaughter. He was said to have consumed Marihuana before the violent act and to have been inspired by pornography that he had watched on the mobile phone.

Marihuana is mainly consumed by young men between 20 and 35, however a few older men and some young women and teenagers, too, smoke Marihuana. Unfortunately, many young men smoke the substance pure on a daily basis. Although already the mental health of about five men of the community³⁹ is negatively affected by Marihuana consumption, and the

³⁸ A sago hump is usually sold for five to six Kina. However, towards the end of 2013 the price increased to seven Kina.

³⁹ People's opinion about what has affected the mental health of these men differed. Not everyone was convinced that it was the drug that 'confused' their heads but sorcery and spiritual agency.

older male generation and wives preach to abandon the drug, it nevertheless seems to be a valid payment for work favours. Women trade their fish on the Maprik market not only for garden products, but sometimes also for marihuana. Furthermore, the mental state evoked by the drug seems to be perceived as providing access to the spiritual sphere. Young men argue that they become enlightened when smoking the drug, using it also in preparations for prayer meetings. Traditionally, plants like stinging leaves (*serei*) and betelnut (*bangra*) (Chapter 2.4) have been used in preparations for séances in which initiated men were possessed and guided by powerful clan spirits, called *wagen*, to make the body receptive for the spirit's agency.

The spiritual other is an important part of people's lifeworld. In fact, it, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, is an immanent part of the local concept of person.

Chapter 2: Being and Person in Timbunmeli



No 20: Mother and newborn with kaikmanje, a rope to keep the spirit of the child close (C.Falck 2013).

In this chapter I aim to analyse aspects of Being and person in Timbunmeli that are crucial for my later discussion of the appropriation of Christianity and mobile phones. I see the way the Nyaura in Timbunmeli made the foreign religion and technology their own strongly informed by premises that are reflected in the local concept of person and mode of Being.

The concept of personhood refers to conceptualizations of what it means to be a person – notions that differ culturally, but can contain ideas about, for example, soul or spirit, mind, body, illness and well-being, agency as well as relations with other people, places, things, and spirit beings (Rasmussen 2008: 38). However, personhood not only refers to formal notions but also relates to practice. Grace G. Harris (1989) suggests conceptualizing ‘person’ as a purposeful agent embedded in a moral order of social relationships. Agency is a culturally constructed capacity of persons to act, mostly but not necessarily intentional, conscious and self-reflexive (see Ortner 2006; Otto and Pedersen 2005). Thereby ‘not all persons are living humans or, indeed, human at all, nor are all human beings persons’ (Harris 1989: 602). In Timbunmeli not only humans are persons, but spirits and in certain contexts also things contain aspects of personhood, such as agency. All those entities form a network within the world in that they exist and in that human life takes place. How people experience and understand their lifeworld and ascribe meaning to Being derives from their experiences with humans, non-humans, and their general surroundings – their being-in-the-world.

A defining aspect of the person in Timbunmeli is its composite being. A person is composed of maternal and paternal matter as well as an invisible substance, and can also detach parts of herself/himself. With that the topic of dividual personhood is relevant for my discussion of the Nyaura concept of person.

The concept of the dividual was introduced to Melanesian Anthropology by Marilyn Strathern (1988) as part of her critique of the application of Western concepts to Melanesian contexts. She criticized a Western preoccupation with an ‘antinomy between society and individual’ (ibid.: 12) that would not reflect Melanesians’ reality (also Wagner 1991). In fact, she suggested that Melanesian individuals would not be distinct from the social relations that brought them together, but that they would be constituted by them. Melanesian persons could be imagined as a social microcosm:

Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm (Strathern 1988: 13).

While being very influential in Melanesian anthropology and beyond, Strathern’s model has also been criticized for exaggerating differences between Melanesians and Westerners and for not taking into account processes of change. LiPuma (2000), for example, replied that

persons everywhere contained individual and dividual aspects of personhood and actualized the one or the other depending on the context they find themselves in. Sabine Hess (2009: 44) has criticized Strathern for not including Christianity as an important new influence on the person and for not discussing aspects of indigenous spirituality.

I see Being in Timbunmeli intimately connected with other beings and entities to such an extent that it has to be seen as an existential condition of Being in Timbunmeli. The person here, has to be understood as an inherently composite being, constituted of relationships with visible and invisible others, and moreover constituted of visible and invisible substances and entities. Like other Melanesian societies, latmul groups are kinship based – a person's scope of agency largely stems from her/his position in kinship and descent networks (see also Silverman 2005: 88). Although I will briefly address the topic of dividual personhood from the perspective of social relations that define rights and obligations connected to names, gender, and marriage as important properties of personhood, in this chapter I will emphasize the dividual aspect of personhood in regard to what may be called a substance dualism – the detachment and attachment of visible and invisible entities and substances that are important for understanding the local concept of personhood that is intimately connected to the visible and invisible part of people's lifeworld.

Some Western philosophical traditions, that derive from the 17th century philosopher René Descartes, postulate a substantial division between body and mind. While such theories have been influential in the twentieth century social sciences, recently attempts have been made to overcome the dichotomy for example with embodiment theories. The body has been described as the visible expression of our being-in-the-world. It is also the seat of person and self as well as the existential ground of our sociality and culture, the site of our experiences and actions, our engagement with the world. It connects outside and inside, personal and social, material and immaterial (Csordas 1990, 2011; Mascia-Lees 2011; Van Wolputte 2004).

However, the Nyaura understanding of body and person bears similarities to Cartesian dualisms with a separation of body (*bange*) and spirit (*kaik*). But, it is not a dualism between body and mind – the mind, localized in an organ called *mauk*, is embodied. It is rather a dualism that corresponds to the Nyaura experience of the world as being divided into a visible and invisible part. Therefore, I suggest that the Nyaura person can not only be called a social microcosm (Strathern 1988: 13), but can also be understood as a cosmo-ontological microcosm reflecting basic principles of people's cosmos and existence. Whereas human bodily matter conceptually relates to the visible part of their cosmos, the invisible matter of spirit is connected to the invisible part. In the following chapters it will become apparent that the visible and invisible spheres in Timbunmeli's lifeworld are connected and mutually influence each other.

Also body and spirit are not completely separated in people's thoughts but are mutually dependent. With that the issue of what may be called substance dualism in Timbunmeli is more complex than a mere separation into a material and spiritual substance that relate to the invisible and respectively invisible part of the world. A body without its *kaik* will die and the spirit of a living person will turn into a spirit of the dead (*undumbu*) when its body has died. Therefore, people have developed complex practices to maintain the connection of body and spirit, which is vital for their well-being and health, but also for their agency as will be presented below.

Other Sepik groups, such as the East (Silverman 2001) and Central Iatmul (Moutu 2013), as well as the Manambu (Aikenvald 2015; Harrison 1985a, 1990) and Ambonwari (Telban 1998, Vavrova 2014) have understandings of personhood that are similar to that found among the Nyaura in Timbunmeli. For example, all groups perceive the human person as being constituted by aspects that can be termed spirit, as in life-force, and mind, as relating to empathic and socialized aspects of personhood. While my discussion of the Nyaura concept of persons bears similarities to what others have described for neighbouring groups, the concept of personhood there, has not been discussed under what I see as important, namely the dualism of bodily matter and spirit that relates to ontological premises defining Timbunmeli's lifeworld which had important implications for the way people appropriated Christianity.

First, I will discuss conceptualizations of person, self, and body. As we will see the Nyaura person embodies basic ontological premises constituting people's lifeworld – an intimate connection between the visible and invisible.

Second, I shall present the importance of names for Being in Timbunmeli and describe naming practices as existential acts that have transformative abilities. A person is not only connected with the invisible sphere of existence via the invisible spirit that makes life possible (*kaik*), but also via totemic names that connect a person with ancestral spirit beings.

Third, I will provide insights into understandings of illness and healing practices. As we will see, the interconnectedness of body and spirit is crucial for well-being and health. If the connection is disturbed, severe consequences for the person arise. The intimate connection people have with visible and invisible others does not only provide them with strength and power, but may also diminish their Being if relationships become unbalanced or disconnected.

2.1 On Person, Self, and the Body

Bange is the Nyaura term for skin and body. The outside skin is referred to as *bange simbe*, whereas the inside skin is called *aura bange* and contains flesh (see appendix p.250f. for list of terms related to the concept of personhood).

Inside of the body are bones (*abba*), blood (*yarroweng*) and fluid (*gu*). The matter of a person's body is created from the semen of the father and blood of the mother. In the womb of a woman both substances mix and slowly develop into the form of a human being – the semen transforming into the bones of the child, the blood of the mother being the basis for the flesh and blood of the newborn (Bateson 1958[1936]: 42, 208n1; Moutu 2013: 44, 187; Silverman 2001: 47; Stanek 1983: 290, 322-323).

Bones (*abba*) are considered to be the seat of a person's strength (*abbanbau*). If a person feels weak s/he says: '*una abba kai*' – 'I have no bones'.⁴⁰ In disputes you can hear people shout '*Mi sanap long bun bilong papa*' – 'I stand on my father's bone.'⁴¹ This statement is a reference to the composite being of a person whose bones are made up of male bodily substance that contains the strength of one's forefathers. It can be understood as a threat or a reminder that one's ancestors are there to protect and give strength to a person (see also Silverman 2001: 48-49) – they are with a person and contained within her/him. The mode of Being in Timbunmeli can be described as a being-with the visible and invisible other.

Men have to go through initiation to get rid of their mother's blood and become fully male. They have to detach a gendered substance from their body to attain full male personhood. In Timbunmeli no male initiation has been taken place since the 1980s and in fact even some men in their late forties do not bear the mark of the crocodile on their skin. The importance of the scarification during the male initiation for attaining full male personhood has been described as crucial by different anthropologists who worked with latmul societies (Herle and Moutu 2004; Moutu 2013: 29, 95, 102-103; Silverman 1996: 46n.11; Wassmann 1991: 33-35). Herle and Moutu (2004: 15) state: 'All latmul people who are not initiated are "female"'. We could therefore say that the emerging generation of men in Timbunmeli are not fully male – they have not achieved full male personhood. Currently, one can hear people refer to the fact that young men have not undergone the initiation process as a reason for their lack of proper behaviour as husbands and fathers or leaders in the community. It can be anticipated that the abandonment

⁴⁰ Here, as well as with other aspects of the West latmul personhood, we can see striking parallels to the Manambu concept of person as described by the anthropologist Simon Harrison and the linguist Alexandra Aikenvald (Aikenvald 2015; Harrison 1985a, 1990). Aikenvald (2015: 100) states that also among the Manambu a physically weak person is referred to as having no bones.

⁴¹ '*Una nyaik abba qwaak abba qerregaoung.*'

of male initiation will not only lead to a further loss of mythological knowledge and ritual practices (Tuzin 1997) but will also, in the long run, impact on people's conception of what it means to be a male person.

Part of the initiation process in Timbunmeli was further the consumption of ancestral bone (see also Stanek 1982: 81). Scraped from a leg bone the pulverised bone was mixed with scraped coconut meat and eaten by the initiates (*bandi*). Through the eating of the ancestral substance the strength and power of the ancestors was embodied in the male body.⁴² According to Stanek (1982: 81) among the Palimbei latmul ancestral bone was also consumed by men before they went on headhunting raids. Also one of my interlocutors told me that men ate scraped bone together with coconut meat before they went to fight with others.

A central organ that is important for understanding the local concept of personhood, is *mauk*.⁴³ It is situated in the middle chest region and was translated by my interlocutors as 'heart'. The *mauk* is not only a vital organ, but also the place where understanding takes place, thoughts come up, memory⁴⁴ and knowledge are stored, and feelings arise – all of them are grouped under the term *yerrebik*. The expression '*una yerrebik mauk*' ('my thinking/known heart') refers to individual thoughts or knowledge and translates to 'I know'. People also use the expression '*mauk si*'⁴⁵ to refer to the process of thinking. The heart creates thoughts and with that is responsible for people talking. Thereby, one should think before talking: '*yerrebikkang gambungiong*' ('I think before I will talk').

Feelings are felt in the heart of a person. If a person wants to express that she is angry, s/he says '*una mauk ningi irrigande*' – 'I am angry'⁴⁶. If s/he is worrying the person says '*una mauk grandetegaun*' – 'my heart cries'⁴⁷ and if s/he feels good '*abman mauk yerrebik katagaun*' – 'I have good thoughts in my heart'⁴⁸ or '*abman mauk yendetegaun*' – 'I am walking around with a good heart.'⁴⁹

The work of the linguist Gerd Jendraschek (2007, 2012), who sketched a grammar for the latmul in Korogo, confirms my findings that feelings and thoughts are situated in the heart.

⁴² Bateson (1932b: 427-429, 1958[1936]: 46-47) describes an East latmul ritual called *pwivu* in which a *laua* (ZS) had to eat a mixture of ancestral bones from the mother's clan bestowed with magical spells. However, not only the *laua* were receivers of the ancestral bone mixture, but generally children of the village. Also the ritual seems not to have been part of male initiation but was performed separately, including girls and boys.

⁴³ See also Kanganamun latmul conception of *mawul* and *kayik* in Moutu (2013: 116-118).

⁴⁴ Bateson (1958[1936]: 221) also states that the heart is the seat of memory.

⁴⁵ According to Jendraschek (2007: 20) '*si*' can mean 1. shoot, 2. dig, 3. plant.

⁴⁶ Translation into Tok Pisin: '*lewa bilong mi belhat na stap*' – 'my heart is angry'. My interlocutor's translated '*mauk*' as '*lewa*' in Tok Pisin, and 'heart' in English. Note that in Tok Pisin *lewa* can also translate to 'liver', which in Nyaura would be called '*hudming*'.

⁴⁷ Translation into Tok Pisin: '*lewa bilong mi kalai na stap*' – 'my heart cries'

⁴⁸ Translation into Tok Pisin: '*gutpela lewa tingim mi stap*' – 'my heart has good thoughts'

⁴⁹ Translation into Tok pisin: '*gutpela lewa mi wokabout*' – 'I am walking around with a good heart'

According to his dictionary (2007: 18) 'I am sad' is expressed as 'wuna mauk viyaadi' and 'to be depressed' would translate to 'maukba li'. Forget, according to Jendraschek, translates to 'mauk ti'vi'. I have transcribed 'I forgot' differently as 'mauk tibbonung' instead of 'mauk ti'vi'wung', but these, I think, are only orthographic differences. The same occurs probably to the word that I have transcribed as 'yerrebik', whereas Jendraschek (ibid.: 25) used 'yalavi'k' to refer to 'think, understand, consider, evaluate, want, be worried, remember, trust'.

Whereas in western medicine, the brain plays a central role in cognitive and sensual functions and is considered to be the centre of self-awareness, among the Nyaura this is not the case. Here the skin and heart are associated with these functions. People understand that a person dies if the brain (djaurak) is destroyed, but traditionally they do not see the brain as central to cognitive processes. Mental processes take place in the mauk. A person sees her/his surrounding through the eyes, but only understands what s/he sees because of the mauk: 'The eye sees something and the heart already knows [what it is].'⁵⁰

A good or bad feeling (or thought) in Timbunmeli can lead the whole body feeling good or bad. Kerowin explained: 'When you feel depressed in your mauk, your body, too, won't feel happy. Your skin will feel heavy.' If the skin feels heavy, the person is not happy: 'Bange wareirregande' ('skin is heavy' = 'I am sad'). If the skin feels light, the person is happy: 'Bange raakande' ('skin is light' = 'I am happy').

A certain form of consciousness that in English would probably be called presentiment is expressed via the term bangewagen, which translates to 'spirit of the skin'. The bangewagen warns a person if something bad is dawning upon her/him by giving a sensation the skin. It is also called *wasman* in Tok Pisin, meaning someone who is looking after you. Anna David explained after I asked her how a bangewagen could warn someone: 'You will feel [it on] your skin. It will tell you, "you cannot stay here, something will happen to you."' The bangewagen that each person has, is also called kaik.

The kaik is an invisible substance that is vital for life. People translated kaik into *spirit*. I suggest that it may also be translated to life-spirit, since life without it is impossible.⁵¹ When a baby develops in the womb, it is already bestowed with kaik.

The kaik is closely connected with an invisible sphere of people's lifeworld. Today people say that God bestows a baby with its kaik and also takes it back from the body after death.

⁵⁰ Some of my interlocutors said that the heart and brain work together in processes of understanding and thinking – that these two organs are connected. In their accounts, the initial thought comes up in the heart that then sends a signal to the head where the process of thinking and understanding takes place in connection with the eyes, brain and the heart. I tend to attribute this interpretation to the influence of western body concepts and Tok Pisin. The local expressions point to a prior conceptualisation of the body and mind that does not attribute a central function to the brain.

⁵¹ My interlocutors supported this suggestion.

However, traditionally the *kaik* is perceived as coming from and as ending in an invisible part of the world that is called *undumbunge* (place of the dead).

When a person dies, its *kaik* leaves the body together with the last breath (*muk* = breath, wind) and becomes part of the place of the dead as a breath of wind. The place of the dead is associated with a wind called *woli* (e.g. Wassmann 1991: 200). According to Stanek (1983: 177, 365), Woliragwa was not only the name of the south-east trade winds but also the name of a female mythical being. She was the first dead in the mythical past and her father the first mourner.

Woli is also the term that refers to the eastern part of the world – the term *wolinimbanagepma* (*woli* = wind, *nimba* = people, *gepma* = place) refers to the countries of white people. Woliragwa starts to blow at the beginning of the dry season. Then the grass along the river banks starts to grow – this is the time when Savi, the roller bird whose name was given to me, returns to the Sepik to feed on the white flowers of the grass. People in Timbun say it comes together with the wind from the place of the dead.

Stanek (1983: 365) states that the mythological system of the Palimbei latmul equates the east wind with the breath of the living and the dead. In Timbunmeli the wind connected to death (*kia*) is called *kiawoli*, whereas the wind that brings life (*ivut*) is called *ivutwoli*. Both are related to the invisible realm of *undumbunge* – the place of the dead – from where life comes and goes (Chapter 3). Also Gregory Bateson's theory of reincarnation supports my claim that the *kaik* comes from this invisible realm of people's lifeworld. He writes that among the latmul groups he worked with a son is regarded as the reincarnation of his grandfather: 'the ghost of the dead is blown as a mist by the East Wind up the river and into the womb of the deceased's son's wife' (Bateson 1958[1936]: 230). Similarly, Stanek (1983: 319) states that the Palimbei latmul believed that small children were closely connected with the land of the dead from where they came.

Also, other anthropologists have documented that latmul societies connect wind with the creation of life. Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin (1977: 161) cites a myth in which two primeval ancestresses, called Wolinyan and Woliragwa, get impregnated by wind.⁵² Likewise, Eric Silverman (2001: 51) states that Eastern latmul identify wind with conception and creation. In the Nyaura creation myth (Wassmann 1982, 1988, 2001), a wind stirred up the primordial sea from which then ground arose – it was Kavakmeli, a crocodile. From the first ground, ancestral beings arose – until today human bodies are called 'bodies of the ground.' Whereas human

⁵² It is interesting to note that the primeval female beings in the myth cited by Hauser-Schäublin are described as looking like white women: 'They looked like European women. They had long hair and light skin. They were really good looking women. They did not look like black women' (Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 161, my translation).

bodies are conceptually related to the visible part of the world, people conceptualise the materiality of the space from which the *kaik* of a person comes and goes to after death as invisible and airy. Spirits of the dead are said to be something close to wind or rain: 'When we can see wind and rain, we will be able to see the spirits of the dead' or 'when we die we will become like wind and rain', my interlocutors said. After death, the *kaik* is detached from human matter, albeit as an *undumbu*, and reunites with the invisible realm of *undumbunge*. There it stays together with its maternal ancestors (see also Wassmann 1982: 306).

Therefore, we can say, that people in Timbunmeli not only through their bodily matter, but also via an embodied invisible substance (and their names, see 2.2) have to be considered as inherently composite beings. A person can be understood as reflecting basic principles of people's lifeworld and therefore I suggest calling it a cosmo-ontological microcosm. But people's position in kinship and clan groups, and the maternal and paternal matter as well the spiritual substance that they are composed of also sets human beings in direct connection with present and former beings. Thus, borrowing the expression from Strathern, a Timbunmeli person can also be understood as a 'social microcosm', made up of different relationships with visible and invisible social others.

Furthermore, similar to what Jadran Mimica (1988: 74-95)⁵³ and Borut Telban (1998: 147-155, 226ff.)⁵⁴ have suggested for the Iqwaye and the Ambonwari respectively, I want to suggest that Being in Timbunmeli shows characteristics of 'being-one', which at the same time is also 'being-many'.⁵⁵ After death, a person's body rots and becomes ground again, while a person's spirit reunites with the invisible realm where people's ancestors reside. With death a person's substances are reabsorbed into the cosmos that itself was created from a primordial being's body (see also Mimica 1988) – Kavakmeli.⁵⁶ *Kavak*, the Nyaura term for primeval ground, is nowadays also used to refer to God. With that the human being in Timbunmeli embodies visible and invisible substances that at once connect it with human and non-human others, but also with its world and its creator.

⁵³ Mimica describes the Iqwaye creation myth, in which the creator being Omalyce split and thus created the Iqwaye's cosmos. From mud he created men, giving them the names of his five fingers. While Omalyce is not only one with the cosmos, he is also one with the men he created and they are one with their creator.

⁵⁴ Telban, referring to Mimica, suggests that the identity between an Ambonwari clan, individual clan members, and the clan's founder may be grasped as 'oneness'. The primordial ancestor is not only an individual but also signifies a whole group of patrilineal descendants, who identify personally and collectively with him because they embody his ways and share a common path that he created.

⁵⁵ I would like to thank Borut Telban for pointing my attention to this aspect of Being in Timbunmeli.

⁵⁶ Note that Moutu (2013: 201) states that the latmul do not have a single cosmological hero comparable to that of the Iqwaye. But Wassmann documented the West latmul's creation myth that sees heaven and ground coming into existence by the splitting of a crocodile's body, which also my interlocutors confirmed. Today this traditional creation myth has become integrated with the Christian Genesis (Chapter 4). Note that the creation of sky and earth from the crocodile's body is mirrored in the social stratification of Nyaura clans into a sky (*nyoui*) and earth (*nyame*) moiety.

The term 'kavak' is further used as a collective term for all Nyaura originally stemming from Kandingei – it is a term of identification that stresses their 'oneness' by referring back to the creator of their cosmos. At the same time 'kavak' is many and represented by different Nyaura villages, clans, and persons. The aspect of 'being-one' and 'being-many' is furthermore expressed in the bestowing of people with totemic names. A person comes to identify with an ancestor via its name – it becomes 'one' with the ancestral being (see Mavak's statement on page 9 in which he identifies me as Savi), whereas one could also say that the respective being becomes 'many' by sharing its name with different living namesakes. The close identification with an ancestral being is especially visible in men's usage of the first pronoun 'I' when talking about their namesake's actions in the mythical past (e.g. Moutu 2013: 166-168; Stanek 1982: 67-68; Wassmann 1990: 32; also Harrison 1990: 161-162; Telban 1998: 152-153). Thereby, I noticed that men may not only say '*mi*' (first person singular) when talking about an ancestor (one individual being), but also in reference to their clan (many individual members, see Mangas' statement p.117). I would like to pick up on Telban's suggestion, that 'Through this use of 'I' the man presents himself as embodying both personal and collective identity. Intersubjective and personal identities are aspects of one another. They enable a living man to assert his own sense of self, because he embodies what it is "to be Kapi" [an ancestor of an Ambonwari clan]' (Telban 1998: 152-153).

The idea that living persons share characteristics with their respective ancestral namesake is common (see Silverman 2001: 28). A man from Kandingei once told me about two of his wives. One had a totemic name that referred to a strong wind (torro) – when she got angry, she was like a storm, swirling strongly and out of control. His other wife had a name that referred to tongs (saggeri) that are used in cooking for turning and serving food. If she had gotten hold on something she was like tongs, she would not let go of it until she had her way. With both wives the man found it hard to live as quarrel was always on its way and thus he preferred to stay away from them.

Silverman (2001: 29) states that the East Iatmul share a consubstantial identity with ancestral beings (see also Harrison 1990: 48 for Manambu). He describes an incident that occurred in Tambunum during a Christmas dance in 1988. A drunken youth had slashed the wooden figure of a fish that was the totemic namesake of a man called Aguotmali, who got offended by the act. Silverman explains: 'Notwithstanding the obvious corporeal difference between the man, the wooden image, and the ancestral creature, all three entities embodied the same totemic soul. The assault on the fish was at once an attack on Aguotmali's sense of self.' Whereas Silverman states that a person in Tambunum receives a kaiek (kaik) with a patriline (Silverman 1993: 139), this is not the case in Timbunmeli. Here a child is already

bestowed with a kaik in the womb of the mother, independent of a patriname. Therefore, my information only partly agrees with Silverman's who states that a person via his name can be perceived as embodying the same totemic soul as an ancestral creature (Silverman 2001: 29). In Timbunmeli we can say that a person becomes to identify with the totem her/his name is referring to and also her/his kaik becomes connected to the name(s) s/he receives.

Although a person is already bestowed with a kaik in the womb of the mother, her/his lifespirt is not fully developed yet. The kaik will grow strong when the person grows up. When a person eats, her/his kaik is also nurtured and strengthened. Kaik and body are closely interconnected. Kaik flows through the body and its organs. One of my informants told me that I should imagine the kaik of each person like an invisible overall covering the whole body. If the kaik was removed from the body, the human person will suddenly lose weight since its spirit receives no food.

A child grows through the nurture that its mother provides. It should wash before a meal as water is believed to contribute to the child's growth. People say, water goes into the hair situated on the body and will mix with the food that the child eats afterwards. The skin will grow strong, especially through the morning bath. After a child took its bath, it should eat well and rest afterwards, ideally take a nap so that the body can grow. Many times I heard parents complain about their children running around and playing outside all day long – they should sometimes sit in the house and rest. If they play all day the entire food would go into the arms and legs without contributing to their growth and well-being.

The kaik of small children are wild and uncontrolled – visible in children roaming around all day. It is the responsibility of parents to control their children. The body-spirit connection of a child is not strong yet – the kaik may leave the child's body during the day. Therefore, when a mother takes her newborn baby to the bush, or a new area for the first time, she will call the child's name before she intends to go back to the village and tells it to come with her back to the village. With that she informs her child's kaik to follow them. On the day of a motor-canoe race in Yensemangua in December 2013, I sat next to a woman who had passed a cord between herself and her baby's wrist for the same purpose – to control the kaik of her child and keep it close (photo no 20, p.44).

During the process of their socialisation children learn the socially accepted behaviour and acquire understanding and empathy. They learn to control their impulses, which is necessary to develop into a fully social and moral person. We can say that the quality of understanding that develops in the mauk of a person enables a person to govern individual impulses that are related to the individual spirit. After death the organ mauk rots together with the body in the ground while its qualities (understanding, knowledge, feelings etc.) stay with a

person's spirit, now a spirit of the dead. Interestingly, the concept of person among a neighbouring group called the Manambu (Harrison 1985a, 1990, see also the linguist Aikenvald 2015) bears striking similarities to the Nyaura conceptualization by sharing the notion of 'mawul' (*mawul*) and 'kaiyik' (*kaiyik*) with the West Iatmul. Harrison describes 'mawul' and 'kaiyik' as two aspects of the personality among the Manambu; 'mawul' referring to mind or understanding and 'kaiyik' to spirit. Like among the Nyaura the 'mawul' can be understood as the seat of the socialised being among the Manambu, whereas the 'kaiyik' refers to the uncontrolled life-force of an individual. Also the Ambonwari share a similar concept of person, differentiating between spirit and heart⁵⁷ (Telban 1998: 56). Among the Ambonwari a spirit of the dead also has the character and qualities of the living man or woman (ibid.: 57). The Manambu however conceptualize spirits of the dead as lacking aspects of moral personhood and are therefore understood as being potentially harmful and unpredictable (Aikenvald 2015; Harrison 1985a on disembodied spirit).

For the Iatmul the material body is a shell covering the invisible spiritual essence of life that endures the ephemeral body. At the same time people believe that a person can change the body. In former times, knowledgeable men could slip into animal bodies or hide in trees. Also, spirits can change their form and appear as animals or humans (Chapter 4.2). This understanding of the world and person explains why people found it so easy to accommodate me into their lifeworld as a spirit of the dead that had returned in a white body. The idea of reincarnation is deeply rooted in their culture (Bateson 1958[1936]: 42-43, 230, 244; Silverman 2001: 28-29; Stanek 1983: 3 19; Wassmann 1990: 30-32) and has received a reaffirmation with the influence of Christianity proclaiming the resurrection of the dead. While the material body can change, the spirit stays. It exists over time and in a different realm that nevertheless is part of the same existential space, people's lifeworld.

However, during life the *kaiyik* depends on its body and vice versa. The material body and spiritual substance of a human person are mutually dependent. If the *kaiyik* is removed from the body, the materiality of the body will start to decay – the person will fall sick and eventually die. The separation of body and spirit is deadly for a human being. Its body will lose its vital energies – it cannot be nurtured properly anymore since its life-spirit is not fed. When the spirit of a person outlives its bodily form, it will transform into a different being – a spirit of the dead – as it has lost its bodily matter. However, spirit is persisting or even eternal especially in more recent

⁵⁷ Note that Telban does not refer to heart as a physical organ. He translates the Ambonwari term *wambung*, literal 'insideness', as Heart, understanding (following Harrison) or consciousness.

Christian descriptions. It goes on in a different sphere of existence (this is discussed further in Chapter 3).

Whereas some informants told me that the kaik of a person is situated in the heart (mauk), others said that it is found in every part of the body; it flows through it. Others explained that the kaik of a person and the mauk work together. The heart circulates the blood and water through the body and with that also moves the spirit around within the body. When the mauk stops to work, the body and with that the kaik will die.

When a person dies, s/he breathes out for a last time and the last ruk (breath, wind) leaves the body: Muk tamba girregande ('her/his wind has already left' = s/he died). A dead body is called tsing (corpse). The kaik leaves the body with the last breath and turns into an undumbu.⁵⁸

While the kaik is an invisible thing it may be visible on certain occasions. Kaik also refers to a person's shadow or image and is nowadays also used when referring to photographic pictures. When removed from the body by a sorcery act it can appear as a reflection of a person – it may show itself roaming around in the bush. However, it is not possible to talk with the kaik taugwa (female spirit) or kaik du (male spirit). A person may believe that s/he sees the real person but it only is her/his image. This experience may be frightening because it is associated with the realm of death. After a person has died her/his spirit may be seen in the village. People fear that the spirit of the dead may trick their own life-spirit into coming with it – and with that causing them to die.

This fear is also expressed in the practice of placing a mallu – a humanlike figure (photo no 21, p.57) produced from leaves – into the coffin of a dead mother who had a small child. Her relatives would produce two figures and place them close to the small child so that its kaik may leave a trace on it. When the mother is buried, one mallu goes with the mother into the grave, while the other one stays with the child. Thereby the spirit of the dead mother is tricked into believing that it took its child with it while the kaik of the child is safe and stays with the child who will stay alive. The same is done in reverse practice if a small child dies – a mallu with traces of its family members will be placed with its dead body in the coffin and thus preventing its undumbu from taking one of its family members with it to the place of the dead.

At night the kaik may leave the body and roam around. During this time a person dreams – her/his kaik can enter the invisible realm that surrounds the village. Ancestral beings, dead relatives and spirits of God, Jesus, Mother Mary and so forth can now communicate with it.

⁵⁸ Note that among the linguistically unrelated Karawari-speaking Ambonwari the term for a spirit of the dead bears similarities to the Nyaura term (wundumbunar m., wunduma f.) (Telban 1998: 56).

However, they usually do this in metaphorical language (*tok piksa*) that has to be interpreted in the right way to reveal its meaning. During this time, one's body is not conscious and cannot hear for example if dogs bark outside. At night, when a person sleeps deeply it is easy for a sorcerer to catch her/his kaik and remove it from the body by employing magical spells.

A yanonyang (yano = blood, nyang= child; *blutman*= bloodman; shaman) can find out who removed the spirit of a person from her/his body while being possessed by a wagen (clan spirit). If the kaik of a person was caught and removed by *black magic*, people say 'kaik tamba kuti' – 'they caught the spirit'. To find out who is responsible for the removal of the kaik, the sick person has to roll betelnut on the skin and give it to the *blutman*, who will eat the betelnut together with *dakar* (betelnut pepper) and *kambang* (lime). He will then ask questions and feel in his blood who pulled the spirit away. Afterwards, he uses magical spells to pull the spirit back into its body. He will pass a cord (kaikmanje) around the leg ankles, wrists or/and around the neck of the person to tie the spirit to the body.

A kaik can also be frightened away. This may happen if a person is suddenly scared – literally the kaik then may jump out of its skin and then wander around disoriented. Since it is dangerous if the kaik leaves its person, occasions that lead persons to be suddenly scared should



No 21: Children playing with humanlike figures, called mallu (C.Falck 2013).

be avoided. If someone suddenly scares you off, you would say: '*yima wapa una kaik taugwa late*'.⁵⁹

If the *kaik* of a person is removed from the body (see also Moutu 2013: 114-115) – either because it was scared away or because someone used black magic – the person will feel weak, would want to sleep a lot and fall sick. If the *kaik* is not found and brought back to the body, the person will eventually die.

2.2 Naming and Names

A human being is connected to the invisible part of her/his lifeworld not only via *kaik* but also via names. Being bestowed with a name, a person becomes connected with past beings (Wassmann 1990: 32; Moutu 2013: 168-169). Names have transformative abilities – they connect human beings with clans, ancestral beings, places, things, landscape features and natural phenomena, resources, animals, and other humans.

Deborah van Heekeren (2014) has recently applied Heidegger's philosophy to names among the Vula'a people of south-eastern Papua New Guinea. Van Heekeren suggests to consider naming as a form 'techne because it brings forth beings' (ibid.: 182, italics removed). She says:

For the Vula'a, names reveal persons, places, events, and sometimes their inter-corporeity. [...]. Vula'a naming brings the past, present, and future into proximity and thus may be understood as a form of historicity. Moreover, when names are implicated in the kinds of transformations commonly referred to by anthropologists as magical, they can be powerful (ibid.:169, italics removed).

I have already alluded to the transformative power of names in Chapter 1.4 when describing how bestowing the island Timbunmeli with a Nyaura name, transformed it into an inhabitable place. Also James Weiner has commented on the transformative power of names in this sense for the Foi in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. He suggests that existential space is brought into being by bestowing it with a name (Weiner 2001: 15-16). In this sense, naming is an existential act, but it is also a way of knowing (Van Heekeren 2014: 170). When I was given a local name, I was officially adopted into the Yak clan and Kaiban family. By giving me a name my Nyaura father Leslie Kaiban claimed me officially as someone from his family, as one of his and his brother's children. Another purpose for bestowing me with a name was my transformation into a being that would be recognizable by Timbunmeli's spirits. Since I fell sick shortly after my arrival in Timbunmeli, Leslie was concerned that the spirits in

⁵⁹ '*yima wapa* (yu mekim) *una kaik taugwa* (spirit bilong mi (f.) *late* (kirap) (=yu mekim olsem na *kaik taugwa* bilong mi i kirap nogut.)', meaning 'you made this and my spirit (female) jumped out of my skin.'

Timbunmeli did not know me since I had no clan name. With my Nyaura name, Savikakanambumange, I became recognizable for the spirits in Timbunmeli as the name connected me with a mythological being that was part of them. Furthermore, with my new name I also became officially recognized as a community member. When the elections for the local level government and councillor of Timbunmeli were about to start in 2013, people would comment on me being not enrolled as a voter, saying that I was living with them and already had received a name – that I was a woman of the village and should vote.

In Timbun a child is usually named a few days or weeks after birth. Today, it may also be named on the same day of its birth. It receives a local and a Christian name. While the father gives a local name to the child, the Christian name may be decided upon by both parents. Normally parents give a Christian name to the child shortly after birth, but they usually wait to give a local name to their child until after the umbilical cord fell off; some parents wait until a child can sit on its own (see also Stanek 1983: 319). Then the child is considered to be strong enough to survive.

When a woman is pregnant for the first time, the unborn child may be attributed with a name to strengthen it. This kind of name is called *nyang yak si* (literally child stomach name) and is given by maternal relatives.⁶⁰ However, today this practice is not followed anymore. People are no longer in full command of their clan specific name repertoire and are 'short' of names, as I was told.

The names a father can give to his children are part of the totemic repertoire of his patriclan. This type of name is called *gwaak si*, meaning the name of the patrilineal forefathers (*gwaak* = paternal grandfather, forefather). Every name is part of a bundle of names that are closely interconnected and that may be made female or male via respective suffixes. They are the names of clan owned totems and do not only refer to humans, but also to spirits, animals, plants, natural phenomena, and things – practically everything that is part of people's lifeworld (see also Silverman 2001: 28-29, 52-54; Stanek 1983: 174-175; Wassmann 1982: 285 ff., 1991: 20, 24).

Names have been described as being central for latmul personhood. Silverman argues a 'name bestows a numinous quality of beingness' in Tambunum and that persons 'through their names, identify with living, dead, and future agnates in the same totemic line' (Silverman 2001: 28, see also Wassmann 1990: 30-32; Harrison 1990: 88 for Avatip).

⁶⁰ This practice may relate to the belief that a spirit stays with maternal relatives in *undumbunge* from where it returns to the living. Moutu (2013: 188) states that among the Kanganamun latmul the dead stay in the place of the dead under their matrinames. Also Wassmann (1982: 306) documented that an initiated man stayed under the name he received after the initiation from his mother's brother (*mbaandi si*) in the land of the dead, whereas his patrilineal name would be called again upon the living.

The right to use a name is inherited through patrilineal descent. Before a father receives the right to give a name to his child, he has to do some work (kill chicken and pigs, build a canoe, carve paddles, etc.) for his sister. The sister has received her names from her father who fulfilled customary duties (*kastom wok*) for his own sister. The sister is not allowed to give her names to her own children; she can only be called the owner of her names in the sense that her brother has to pay her with his work to pull the ownership of the names to his side. People say 'the name is on/connected to her skin' (*'bange ballange si'*) and that a brother has to pull a name from his sister's skin/body to his skin/body (*'bange ballange si viagraning'* = 'to pull the name from the skin'). We can say that the name has to be detached from the female carrier of the name to be attached to a new person. When taking on the responsibility to perform the customary duties for his sister(s), a man receives the right to give the names to his children. His sons will later do the work for their sisters to pull the names to their side and so on.

A man knows to which of his sisters he has to perform duties – he has to share the same *gainimbu*⁶¹ with her. His father will assign his sons with the respective sister. If there are more brothers than sisters, a man can do the necessary work for a clan sister. If a woman has no brothers or if her brothers show no interest in performing the customary work to receive the names, a clan brother will carry out duties for her. Also, if a man has no sister, he can perform the customary work for his paternal aunt (*yau*). A man may also work for several sisters, aunts, and other female clan members if he aims to pull many names to his side and with that enhance his status.

The lastborn son receives the name of his father's father. His last born son, again, will have the right to use his name for his last born son. So the grandfather's name will go to his last born male grandchild. This alternating generation principle was also described by Wassmann (1991: 35, 277-283) and Silverman (2001: 28). However, while Wassmann and Silverman state that a boy will carry the names of his grandfather, in Timbunmeli this, ideally, holds only true for the last born son.⁶² A man receives the names of both boys and girls from his sister to give them to his children – they are made female or male with respective suffixes.

There is also another assemblage of names, called *bambu si*. They are names that belong to the mother's father's clan. A person may receive a *bambu si* from the mother, a maternal

⁶¹ A *gainimbu* refers to a knot in the patriclan's *kirugu* (knotted cord, Chapter 4.2) that symbolizes a place in the mythical past where the ancestor with the respective name was born or lived.

⁶² When I noticed that a member of the Possuko clan carried the name of his grandfather although he was not the lastborn son of the respective family, I was told that this was a mistake. The father had not anticipated to have another son and had therefore already transferred his father's name to whom he thought to be his lastborn son.

uncle or another person from the mother's clan on certain occasions.⁶³ However, a *bambu si* cannot be passed further on to one's children since it is not part of the patrilineal repertoire.

Moutu (2013: 126), Stanek (1983: 319-320), and Silverman (2001: 52-54) document that East and Central latmul children receive names from the father's lineage as well as from the mother's lineage, but this is usually not the case in Timbunmeli. As Wassmann (1991: 35) states for the West latmul in Kandingei: 'Only under exceptional circumstances does the child receive its personal name from its mother or from its mother's brother [...] instead of from his father.' In Timbunmeli, these occasions are sickness (see also Wassmann 1982: 306, 1991: 35), affectionate bond, and aiming to preserve the right of one's family line to a name.⁶⁴ For example, a Nyaura clan woman, called Anna David, was named Kwoliange as a child, but the spirit that was connected to her name made her recurrently sick. Therefore, she received a *bambu si*, Kibrameyagwi, from her maternal relative, Kaiban, a Yak clan member. Her sister, Monika, was named Brunoobmange but received the *bambu si* Mambowali, because she moved to Kaiban's clan area and always treated him kindly. Also the daughter of Justin (Nyaura clan) received a *bambu si* from Justin's *wau* (MB), Mavak (Yak clan). Justin and his wife Utika took the elderly Mavak into their home and looked after him. The old man, being grateful, gave the name Savikakanambumange to Utika's daughter. When Leslie Kaiban heard about this, he became very angry, because he already made the necessary customary work for his clan sister Helen, Mavak's sister, to pull the name to his side. He already owned the right to use the name and had given it to me.⁶⁵ However, since Justin's child only received a *bambu si* and no one from his patrilineage would have the right to bestow a descendant with the name, the dispute was not taken further.

Disputes and rivalry around names are not uncommon in latmul societies (Bateson 1958[1936]: 125ff.; Stanek 1983: 52-53, 242ff., Wassmann 1982: 53; Moutu 2013: 146ff., see also Gewertz 1977b for Chambri and Harrison 1985b, 1990 for Manambu) since rights to land and water areas are connected to the ownership of names. While I was in Timbun a conflict arose between Lalu, a Possuko woman married to a Yak clan member, and Alois, a Possuko clan member from a different lineage. Since Lalu had no male relatives in Timbunmeli she gave the name Sunguademinja of her father's clan to her children to support her family line's right to the

⁶³ As mentioned in the introduction Lina gave me a *bambu si* upon our first encounter in 2011.

⁶⁴ Note that Wassmann (1991: 35) states that a maternal name will be given to a man after initiation. My informants confirmed that during the initiation process the mother's brother would provide a man with a secret name, called *apan si*.

⁶⁵ Leslie Kaiban is the older brother of my Nyaura father, Beno Kaiban. Since Beno, due to his illness, had no names to distribute, Leslie stepped in and gave me a name. Whereas it is not uncommon that other relatives from a clan may help with a name for a child when the father is absent or has no name to give, we can also say that Leslie, by bestowing me with one of his names, adopted me as his child. It was always Leslie, not Beno, who took care of me.

name. The name contains rights to bushland in Kandingei. Lalu's relatives live in town and have not performed the necessary work to pull the name to their side, but since they intend to do so, Lalu strengthened her family's claim to the name and with that to bushland by transferring it to her children as a *bambu si*. Alois Gawi, also a Possuko clan member but from a different family line, gave the same name Sunguademinja to his children and said that he had the rightful claim to the name. When Lalu heard this, she complained and lamented that Alois, a clan brother, had not done any work to pull her name to his side. Her rights as a female clan member were mistreated. Alois on the other hand stated that there was no need to do any work since the name would already be part of his *gwaak si*, his father had told him so. The dispute was not resolved although a knowledgeable man from Kandingei supported Lalu's claim to the name. He said the name was part of her family's name repertoire and that Alois Gawi would have to kill a pig to be able to give it to his children.

Traditionally name disputes are resolved by knowledgeable men who challenge each other in reciting mythological knowledge that contains names connected to places to prove their clan's claim to a name and land. In Timbun those competitions, which have been described as important and collective happenings in the literature, do not take place anymore. They have lost their immediate relevance for the inhabitants of Timbunmeli since they settled on new land. In Timbun land and water is available abundantly and people do not have to prove their rights to land via the inheritance of names.

During my household survey I asked for both Christian and local names and found that sometimes children would not have a local name – parents said that they were not sure about which name they were allowed to give to their child and that they had to ask someone who still remembers the correct inheritance of names. The complicated naming system, which is interwoven with the complex totemic system seems to be in decline in Timbunmeli.

Today a man is not only referred to by his local name, but may be called by his Christian and his father's or grandfather's name. Markus is called Markus Ivut, referring to his father Ivutmali. Leslie, after his father Kaiban, is called Leslie Kaiban, and so are all his brothers and also children and nephews. Here, we can identify a trend towards the western practice of having a surname. To have a surname is part of the modern person. The surname is used together with the Christian name to open a bank account and further found on ID cards. Married women are called by a combination of her Christian and her husband's or her husband's father's name. Leslie's wife for example is referred to as Anna Leslie or Anna Kaiban, Lina is called Lina Beno or Lina Kaiban and so on.

Although there may be uncertainty in Timbun's current generation about the ownership of certain local names, and some children do not have a local name, people say that their local

names are very important to them. Through their names people are connected to ancestral beings and spirits in their surroundings. Furthermore, names are important for a person's identity – rights and obligations come with it. The adoption of a child is finalised when the adoption father gives a name to the child. With this the child, if male, receives the right to the names of the patrilineage of his adoption father and will not be perceived as the rightful owner of the names that belong to the patriline of his birthfather. Also, I was told that the naming system would strengthen the status of sisters and aunts. Every man knew that he has to perform certain duties before he can call a name his own – the respect he shows to his female blood and clan relatives is regarded as being important for the position of a woman in her family and clan. Also, when people travel to other villages their belonging to a certain clan can immediately be identified via their names – usually they are then looked after by clan or family members. I was also told that a local name is necessary for magical spells (*sibbukundi*)⁶⁶. When a sorcerer would want to harm a person, he would need her/his local name for his magical spell to be more effective. Also, when a person falls sick and a healer needs to perform a healing ritual, the name of the spirit that brought the sickness is needed to be able to chase it off.

2.3 Sickness and Healing

Among the Nyaura of Timbunmeli people can die due to old age or by violence, but a much more common cause for illness and death is what people call '*samting bilong graun*' ('something of the ground'). With that expression the Nyaura refer to acts of sorcery and spirits that may cause serious illness and death if not counteracted in time. 'Something of the ground' is always suspected as having caused illness and death when a person stays sick over a longer period, falls suddenly seriously sick or if a young and otherwise healthy person dies. In these cases, people analyse what may have caused the harm – sorcery (*sibbukundi*), or wrongdoings of the sick/dead person or of someone in her/his family that angered a spirit and caused the ominous situation to appear.

Sorcery is often the consequence of jealousy, envy and disputes, or is understood as an act of punishment. The sorcerer (*sibbunyang*) may act on his own behalf or may be paid by others to put a spell on someone. The magical spells used to harm a person may involve clan spirits and spirits of the dead. The *sibbunyang* will activate them by using secret spells that

⁶⁶ Note that in the local vernacular there is no differentiation between good and evil magic – both are summarized under the term *sibbu* (*sibbukundi* = magical language). In Tok Pisin however, people differentiate between *sorcery*, *black magic*, *black power* and *singsing* (a term which is mainly, but not exclusively used to refer to magic that is not harming others).

contain their names and instruct them to remove the *kaik* from the victim's body. In a similar way that van Heekeren (2014: 181) has so aptly described for the Vula'a in the Central Province, names are essential for magical knowledge in Timbunmeli. The knowledge of the correct names is powerful. Used in magical spells, names 'bring into relationship the being who invokes them [in Timbunmeli: *sibbunyang*], the powers which are accessed through them [in Timbunmeli: the agency of spirits], and another being who is the recipient of an intention' (Van Heekeren 2014: 170).

The sorcerer may also remove the *kaik* himself. It is easiest for a sorcerer to remove the *kaik* from its body at night when the *kaik* is said to leave the body and travel around. To trick the *kaik* into following him, the *sibbunyang* goes to the victim's house and charms the *kaik* to cling to a leaf or rope that he holds in his hand. Then he will slowly move backwards, always facing the *kaik*, to bring it away from its house and sleeping body. Once the *kaik* is brought away from its home, the sorcerer may lock it to a place or thing with a spell to hinder it from finding its way back to its body. If the sorcerer intends to kill the victim quickly, he may pull the *kaik* into a *mallu* (see 2.1) and trick it into believing that it is its body. The sorcerer will then go on to destroy the *mallu* causing its body to die immediately.

A sorcerer may also place a *jambia*, a sorcery bundle, close to the intended addressee of the sorcery attack causing her/him to fall sick. Often the *jambia* is used if one intends to kill a person slowly over time. The sorcery bundles found during my fieldwork often contained a rope or leaves with knots symbolizing the time (months or years) that the person had left before s/he would die.

The *jambia* is usually placed close to the home of the victim so that s/he will constantly be in contact with it – by overstepping or sleeping on it. Also betelnuts, tobacco or food are ways to poison a person with malevolent spells that become effective when the ensorcelled item is consumed and thus the spell enters the body.

However, a person may also become sick and die due to own or other's wrongdoings. If a person angers a spirit of the dead, or a clan spirit (*wagen*, *miunjumbu*, *wanjemook*, Chapter 4.1), that spirit may take revenge by making the person ill. If the offended spirit is not appeased by a certain ritual behaviour (containing magical spells and offerings) an ominous situation (*nglambi*) will hover over the family and clan and cause further people to fall sick and die. However, while Wassmann (Wassmann 1982) describes *nglambi* as causing illness and death itself, in Timbunmeli it is not the condition of guilt itself that causes a person to fall sick and eventually die, but the agency of spirits that was activated by misbehaviour. Until the guilt that hovers over the family is compensated and the spirit appeased, the spirit will go on with taking revenge and kill (see also Bateson 1958[1936]: 52-73). In all cases, the operational sequence is

the same: the *kaik* of a person is removed from the body – either elicited from the body by magical spells of a sorcerer or by a spirit.

Illness, as will become clear in the following, can cause people to lose their full status of personhood when it causes them to be unable to fulfil their responsibilities and duties. Since people in Timbunmeli can be described as being dividual persons the loss of personhood of a family member may affect others who are connected with that person through social ties.

In the following I will consider two case studies, describing contemporary healing ceremonies for a sick person. In both cases the composite being of the person and the dependency of the body of its spirit will become clear. In both cases the explanation for the illness was the distortion of the body-spirit-connection and the healing ceremony focussed on pulling the *kaik* back into the sick person's body. Also in both cases the influence of Christianity is prevalent, although in the first case only marginally with a prayer and a bow in front of a house altar, whereas in the second case the healing is performed by a spirit of a Catholic priest, called Thomas, subsequent to a prayer meeting. The first healing session that we will take into account was performed by what can be called a traditional healer or shaman, a *yanonyang*. Possessed by a *wagen* (clan spirit) a man called Mossong treated Beno Kaiban with magical spells and certain performances to free him from the influence of evil sorcery and pull his *kaik* back into his body. In the second healing session that shall be considered in Chapter 6, a woman, Helen, was possessed by a spirit of God who applied himself to heal a sick woman, called Maria, whose *kaik* had lost connection with her body. With that the two ethnographic vignettes can be considered as exemplary for an ongoing process of change – whereas in former times only initiated men could be possessed by powerful clan spirits, today also women are possessed by spirits of the dead and spirits of God (Chapter 5,6). With that another parallel in traditional and new healing ceremonies becomes apparent: the agency of a spirit is central to the procedure.

2.4 Beno is Sick

Beno Kaiban was sick for years. He was mentally as well as physically handicapped. While his mental problems were widely attributed to his excessive marijuana consumption during the past, his bodily impairment was ascribed to 'something of the ground.'

Beno's bodily movements were slow and so was his sluggish speech. His left side of the body was unsettled by spasms that came and went – sometimes every few minutes sometimes less often. When Beno was experiencing a spasm, his left shoulder and neck muscles cramped so that his head and arm moved abruptly towards each other. Also his left leg was impaired by



No 22: Beno Kaiban (C.Falck 2013).

the spasms causing him to stumble and fall. Every now and then he got mentally confused and uttered nonsense.

Apart from his clumsy behaviour and cognitive difficulties, Beno often looked untidy and unclean – his hair then was uncut and unkempt, his body dirty and his clothes filthy. Cleanliness and a proper appearance, though, are attributes of adult personhood and expression of well-being. People wash themselves several times a day and take care to wear clean clothes when not working. Men in Timbun are expected to wash their clothes themselves, but since Beno did not wash his clothes regularly, relatives sometimes washed his clothes for him. The outside appearance of a person is perceived as reflecting the inside state and in Beno's case the state was obviously not what it was supposed to be for an adult man.

Furthermore, Beno was known for having an indecent appetite. Family members often complained that Beno was never saturated and sneaked around to search for and take food that was not intended for him. With that he behaved highly immoral – 'he has no shame', his family complained. The sharing of food is a social value with which social relations are strengthened or established. To hold oneself back from consuming food for the benefit of others is considered to be a morally good act and can in fact enhance one's own prestige (see also Munn 1986). By eating a lot and even stealing food from others, Beno was doing the contrary.

The fact that Beno was eating what is considered to be indecent amounts was worsened by his reluctance to work. He was well known for sleeping all day without attempting to work.

Work is an attribute of adult personhood and people take pride in being known as hardworking. In fact, men and women occasionally boast about their diligence and accomplishments. Everyone knows that a hard working body needs food to keep up its energy and strength. Eating a lot without working is thought to produce nothing but faeces – the food is going to waste without producing anything for the family good. Manual labour is further considered to be healthy – it produces sweat that is perceived to clean the body system. A lack of exercise is considered to lead to fatigue, sloth and loss of strength. Therefore, Beno's family recurrently tried to encourage him to do what is considered light work, such as cutting grass. Often I heard his older brother Leslie say 'try to exercise; you will see that you will feel good in your skin.' Nevertheless, Beno seldom took the initiative to work and if he did his work was perceived as being sloppy. His bodily impairments had worsened during the last two years and people also got frustrated with his slow and clumsy movements.

During my fieldwork Beno was no longer able to fulfil his responsibilities as a father and husband. His wife, Lina, and his children, Marleen and Davis, suffered from Beno's health condition. Marriage in Timbun comes with responsibilities that every husband and wife should fulfil. The wife takes care of the children, provides food and catches fish for selling at the market, while the husband is supposed to provide her with a canoe and paddle and should help her to find firewood. He is also expected to provide his family with a house, do necessary repairs, work in the garden, and cut the grass around the house. Beno did none of these things. The heavy workload rested on Lina's shoulders alone. Often I heard her complain in tears 'Am I a man?'

Marriage and the gendered responsibilities that come with it are essential for Being in Timbunmeli. The cooperativeness of wife and husband sustains and secures not only the family household, but also on the large scale the existence of the village. The state of Lina's and Beno's marriage did not stay unnoticed and other villagers, too, complained about the condition the family lived in. People criticized that Lina received no help from her family and would become like a man (*'Em i kamap olsem man'*). Some even said she lived like a widow.

In 2013 the family house was shabby and falling apart. The roof had holes, and so did the walls and floor of the house. During the high water season in 2013 the house's floor was flooded and the family left the house to stay with Beno's brother Leslie Kaiban. After a dispute between Lina and Leslie arose over Beno, Lina moved into the house of Monika⁶⁷ and Kerowin, while Beno was still staying with his brother's family. But after he got into conflict with Leslie's

⁶⁷ Monika's father took the sister of Lina's mother as a second wife. Therefore, Lina and Monika are considered to be sisters (cousins). Monika is married to Kerowin, a man from Changriman, a neighbouring community. Already Monika's father, although being a Nyaura clan member, lived on the Yak clan compound as he was looked after by Kaiban (Yak clan) when he was young. Monika and Kerowin still live on the Yak clan compound.

family, Beno moved back into his house. As the condition of the house was bad and the posts of the house needed to be replaced, Lina refused to move back into the house.

Beno was not the first member of the Kaiban family who fell sick. His father, Kaiban, and his brothers Barnabus and Stanley, too, fell sick with a disease that compromised their movements and eventually caused them to die. His brother Leslie also suffered from the same symptoms for months but recovered after changing his ways and starting to pray to God. Leslie says that he had put his fate into the hands of God and was healed by His power. Beno, too, was encouraged by his family to join in prayer meetings and devote his time to God, but was then perceived as being not really committed to changing himself.

Some years ago Beno's family took him to the hospital in Wewak where he was diagnosed as being anaemic and received treatment. Beno was advised to stop smoking marijuana and also abstain from smoking tobacco. However, Beno found it hard to change his ways and still took opportunities to smoke.

Beno's lack of cooperation in changing his ways led to resentment among his family members. They, when complaining about his misbehaviour, his inability to work, his clumsiness, his dirty clothes, his unrestricted appetite or his mental confusion, called him *sense* or *longlong* (insane, crazy). They said, 'He destroyed his sanity (*tingting*). It/he is lost! There is no way to change it. He will die like that'. His mental state was perceived as being damaged.

Beno lost his ability to be taken serious by his family and community members. His impairments and behaviour caused laughter and mockery. He was no longer his own master and depended on the decisions and help of his family. Beno lost his full status of personhood. This was reflected in his brothers sometimes calling him an *animal* – meaning someone who acts without considering the consequences and not restrains himself.

Although his family often complained about Beno, he was still part of them. However, his state was experienced as difficult for his family. This was not only because he burdened his family by obligating them to take care of things that he was supposed to do, but also because his behaviour caused shame for his family members. It was obvious that he was the object of mockery and ridicule – an unbearable state for an adult man. People do not laugh or make fun of adult men openly. This is considered as being highly indecent and would lead to discord. Adult men are treated with respect and the fact that Beno was not, was hard to bear for his family. In fact, there were cases in which his brothers or *laua* (ZS) stood up on Beno's behalf and got into a dispute with others for mistreating Beno's rights. This was the case when the wife of Beno's *laua*, Jayson, laughed about Beno stumbling. Jayson immediately punished his wife with a slap in the face for laughing about his mother's brother (*wau*) and with that also offending him. On another occasion Beno's children were making fun of Beno and his brother Leslie loudly scolded

them and her mother for not respecting Beno and not giving him a break. Another time, Beno's brothers and sisters and other family members complained publicly when his wife Lina did not move back to the family house after the high-water was over. Since Beno was not successful in getting his wife back to the house himself, his family came on his behalf and even threatened her with violence if she did not move back to her home and stayed with her husband.

This last incident has to be seen in a broader context of events. In mid 2013 Beno's health condition had worsened. His faeces were mixed with blood and he suffered from pain in his stomach. Also his spasms increased and his family got very concerned. Because a visit to the hospital had brought no cure in the past and other family members had suffered from similar bodily impairments before, the Kaiban family suspected malevolent sorcery that was set out to destroy the family line. But while Beno was also mentally impaired, his father and brothers were not. Therefore, his family suspected that his mental confusion probably largely derived from his drug consumption. However, they were not sure whether not 'something of the ground' affected his mental capacities, too.

In September 2013 a *kastom man*, called Gabriel Mossong, came to stay in Timbunmeli to offer his work to the community. Mossong is a renowned healer from the Iatmul village Timbunke, further downstream at the Sepik River. Since none of the attempts to help Beno had been successful in the past, his family decided to try the customary way and pay Mossong for his help. After consulting Beno and his family, Mossong affirmed the family's fear. He diagnosed that the Kaiban family had been put under an evil spell. Someone long ago had used malevolent *sibbukundi* to destroy the family line and thus the male members fell sick and died. Mossong declared that Beno's *kaik* had been removed from his body and that this was the reason why Beno was always hungry. Although he ate a lot, he did not get fatter, but felt weak and exhausted all the time – all signs that his *kaik* was not nurtured and got weak.

A day was agreed on which Mossong would remove the evil spell, pull Beno's *kaik* back into the body, and plant a protection spell in front of the Kaiban family houses. He would also strengthen the body-spirit-connection of all family members via a spell on ropes that they should wear. For being able to do his work, a pig had to be slaughtered and 500 Kina paid – offerings to the spirit that guided Mossong during the procedures. Mossong also demanded that all Kaiban family members should be *wanbel* with Beno to achieve best results in the procedure that was to come. *Wanbel* means 'being united; be in harmonic agreement' and being *wanbel* with one's family members is considered to be an important pre-exquisite for being well throughout Papua New Guinea. When Mossong heard that Beno was living alone in his house, he said that his wife should move back in with him. Mossong, as well as the Kaiban family, stated that husband and

wife should live together in one house and with that respect God's laws, whose support was important for healing Beno.

It was at this time that the dispute between Lina and her affinal relatives arose. Beno's younger brother Samuel was the first to demand that Lina would move back in with his brother, then Leslie, his older brother, joined in. When Lina declined to go back to her husband's house that still had not been repaired, the conflict escalated and other family members joined in accusing Lina of neglecting her wifely responsibilities. They referred to Beno's and their rights as a collective to her presence and work in the family house. After Lina accused them not to fulfil their part of the marriage agreement, the situation escalated into a severe dispute during which Beno's family loudly accused Lina of immoral behaviour⁶⁸ and even threatened to bring her back to her husband's house with force. Beno's family argued that they had paid a bride price for Lina – '*mi baim yu!*' – 'I (here meaning both individual members of the Kaiban family and the family as a whole) bought/paid for you!' – and that therefore she was obliged to fulfil her responsibilities as a wife. Lina on the other side argued that their claims were void since neither Beno nor his family was fulfilling the other side of the marriage responsibilities. She gave birth to and was raising their children and was taking care of the family well-being alone. She also provided food for her husband, although she was feeling neglected and mistreated.

This dispute can also be considered with regard to the individual concept of personhood. After marriage Lina became a part of her husband's family line and had to fulfil certain duties. However, with her marital duties came also rights as Lina claimed. She felt her rights as a married woman were neglected and openly accused her husband's family to not live up to the marriage agreement. While she had taken care to fulfil the responsibilities that came with her integration into the Kaiban family and Yak clan, her sense of self was offended by the neglect of her husband and his family towards her. Lina threatened to leave her husband for good if nothing would change and her personal rights would continuously be mistreated. Beno's family should have taken over Beno's responsibilities towards his wife and children by at least supplying a house. By saying 'I bought you' when stating that Beno's family as a collective person had paid a bride price for Lina, individuality (or the principle of being-one and being-many) is stressed. At the end, Beno's family desisted from Lina, who did not move back into her husband's house until I left the village.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The accusations touched upon different social issues from roaming around (unsuitable for a married woman), living with foreigners (Monika is not consanguine with Lina), not providing food for her husband, to acting against the Christian moral expectations of staying together in good and bad times.

⁶⁹ When I returned to the field in November-December 2014 Lina had not moved back to her husband's area. The family house had fallen apart and Beno was living in a small shed-like house alone.

The healing ritual for Beno took place without Lina's support on Monday, the 7th of October 2013, around 7 pm, in Leslie Kaiban's house and lasted for around three hours. Leslie's wife and children were present, but apart from them and myself, only men (also from other clans) witnessed the ritual to show their support.

While preparing his body for the séance, Mossong sat in front of the family's house altar on which candles were lightened. The room was further filled with the light of a neon-lamp fed by a roaring generator. Mossong had prepared for this occasion by fasting and cleansing his body from earthly contamination (food, smell, bodily fluids). He now used betel nuts (*bangra*) and stinging leaves from a plant called *serei* to make his body receptive for the *wagen* that was going to use and guide him during the healing ritual. This kind of *wagen* is called *bangewagen*. It is a clan spirit that moves in the body (*bange*) of the receptive *yanonyang*. For this to happen, Mossong ate a big amount of betel nuts that had been rolled over Beno's breast and armpits. By doing this, a connection between the healer and the sick was established – the *wagen* would get the odour of the sick person and follow its lead in the healing procedure. Furthermore, the *yanonyang* ate *serei* leaves, which people usually try to avoid on all occasions because of the burning pain they leave on the skin. Mossong, however, also touched his body with them to make his body receptive to the *wagen*'s agency. Later he touched Beno's body with them – making Beno crouch in uncomfortable pain.

After the *wagen* had entered Mossong's body, Mossong bowed in front of the house altar of Leslie's house and turned to treating Beno. A utensil that Mossong used during the ritual was a hollowed wooden stick that was cut from a tree called *quambi*, which bark has a clove-like scent. This *smel diwai* (smelling wood) is said to support the power of the spells used.

Mossong placed a bundle of leaves bound to a headdress called *awang* on Beno's head and whispered magical spells into the *smel diwai* that he held in his hand [photo no 23, p.73]. Afterwards, he took small bites from the bark of the *quambi* and spit them over the body of Beno. The headdress was covering Beno's head, face and shoulders. I was told that it was supposed to imitate the bush – the area in which spirits like to roam around. Mossong then asked for a list of names of clan spirits that the family had prepared in advance. Studying the names and whispering them into the *smel diwai*, Mossong found out which spirit was used to cause Beno's harm. Using its name and certain secret charms Mossong tricked the spirit that had gone into Beno's body and caused him to be sick to believe that it would be safe to go into the *awang* placed on Beno's head. Then, Mossong took up a different bundle of leaves, whispered a spell into them and smacked them on the ground at Beno's backside with the effect that Beno jumped out of his skin – a sign that the spirit had left the body as I was told. Mossong then quickly used the leaves in his hand to wipe down the headdress from Beno's head and threw it out of the house.

After that he went outside himself, holding a long leaf in his hand to call for Beno's *kaik* that was now released and looking for its body. When he found the *kaik* that held onto the leaf, Mossong came back into the house, walking slowly backwards, holding the leaf in his hand. Visible for everyone, the leaf was moving slightly – the *kaik* was holding on to it [photo no 24, p.73]. Mossong brought the leaf to Beno's body, and moved it over the body so that the *kaik* could slip back into it. He then made a knot on the leaf and gave it to Beno to hold.

After the *kaik* had moved back into Beno's body, Mossong attended to check the body for signs of further harm. Since the evil spirit had been removed and the fog of the harmful spell had been broken, Mossong was now able to see that Beno's body had been speared with sago tree thorns. When he identified an affected area, Mossong put his mouth onto Beno's skin and sucked the spike out of it, then spitting it into a plastic bowl for everyone to see. He removed nine of them.⁷⁰ [photo no 25&26, p.74].

The healing ritual ended with Mossong bowing in front of the house altar and shaking the hands of all the witnesses present. It was arranged that one would meet again at three a.m. that night to end Mossong's work. A protection spell was uttered to shield the Kaiban family members from further malevolent acts of sorcerers and spirits. This contained the killing of a pig as an offer to Mossong's *wagen* and the planting of *jambia* items in front of the Kaiban family houses for protection. After that was accomplished Mossong made a spell over a bag filled with ropes. On Tuesday afternoon family members met to pray, share the meat of the offered pig and passed the

⁷⁰ Bateson (1932b: 415) reports that a medicine-man had removed a piece of wood from a man's arm and a stone from his wife's belly when they were sick.

kaik manje (spirit rope) around their neck or arm- and leg-ankles that had been enhanced with a spell to strengthen the *bange-kaik* connection of the family members.⁷¹

Mossong had informed the family that they had to wait for a while before Beno's condition would improve. Recovery needed time. However, Beno did not recover from his illness after this treatment and his family, being utterly disappointed with this outcome, found the reasons for this in different social and relational wrongdoings. Some said one should not have gone back to the customary way (*kastom*), but should have only turned to God for help. Others said that Mossong might have made a mistake at some point and thus Beno was not healed. Some also said that the family was not united and that it was hard to get better when disunity is prevalent.

During the next months, his family turned to spirit mediums, possessed by spirits of God, to get help for Beno. However, at the end of my fieldwork, Beno still suffered from cramps and during a return visit at the end of 2014 his condition had worsened. Beno was vegetating in a little shed that Lina and a nephew had built from the remains of the former family house. Lina and her children were still living with Monika and her husband Kerowin. Having no canoe of her own Lina found it hard to catch enough fish to provide food for her children and herself, let alone her sick husband. Two of Beno's sisters had started to bring food to his house on a more or less regular basis. Beno was emaciated – his Being had become a burden for everyone. He died in November 2015.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

Not only social relations with others define Being in Timbunmeli, but also names and a dualism of bodily matter and spirit that connect the human being with forefathers and the visible and invisible part of the world. The substance dualism in the Nyaura understanding of body and person reflects a basic principle of people's ontology and cosmology. While people's bodily matter, in reference to the Nyaura creation myth, conceptually relates to the ground, their spirit relates to an airy and invisible substance conceptually related to 'heaven' and 'the place of the dead'. With that the composite being of personhood in Timbunmeli not only relates to people's forefathers but also to different parts of people's lifeworld. Moreover, I have suggested that the

⁷¹ Bateson (1932b.: 416-420) also reports that during a shamanic séance women produced cords that were later bespelled and then worn around the neck 'to retain the *kait* [*kaik*] and prevent it from leaving the body' (ibid.: 420).



No 23: Beno sitting with awang on a stool while Mossong is whispering a spell onto a bundle of leaves later used to chase the spirit away who made Beno sick (C.Falck 2013).



No 24: Mossong guiding Beno's kaik back to his body (C.Falck 2013).



No 25: Mossong removing spikes from Beno's body (C.Falck 2013).



No 26: Spikes that were removed from Beno's body (C.Falck 2013).

Nyaura's intimately connection with the visible and invisible other gives their Being the characteristic of 'being-one' which at the same time is that of 'being-many'. In Chapter 5 I will show how this characteristic of the Nyaura Being has influenced the appropriation of Christianity.

I also suggest (Chapter 4) that the Christian theology has influenced people's perception of the world and person and will discuss the Nyaura ontology and cosmology in a context of change. But before doing so, in the next chapter I will consider people's perception of death, rituals of death, and their relations with the dead. In Timbunmeli, death does not end Being. The Nyaura lifeworld involves a continuous being-with.

CHAPTER 3: Perceptions of Death, Rituals of Death, Relations with the Dead



No 27: Papmangawi's death (C.Falck 2013).

Death is as much part of our social existence as is life. [...] Death is, [...], "between" us rather than "within" us. Our death-to-come [...] involves a vast, tangled network of social relations, including both the living and the dead, which weaves itself through us into the very core of our being (Willerslev, Christensen et al. 2013: 9).

What is death? For Heidegger death ends Being. The character of Being is 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-with' – it ends with death; Being is finite. In Heidegger's philosophy (1993[1927]: 237-239, 2001[1962]: 281-282) the dead are no longer in-the-world nor are they anymore with others. Only a 'corporeal thing' ('Körperding') remains of what the human was. While Heidegger understands death as the finitude of Being, the Nyaura do not.

Like Jadran Mimica (1988: 99) has described for the Iqwaye, for the Nyaura 'Death is immanent in the process of life. It is not its ontological opposite but its very part.' Similar as to the Iqwaye's creation story (ibid.: 75), at the beginning of the Nyaura cosmos a primordial being split into two halves and from its body heaven and ground came into existence (e.g. Wassmann 1988: 12). From a hole in the ground people's ancestors emerged – and it is to ground that bodily matter will return. Nowadays, the idea that Nyaura bodies are 'bodies of the ground' (*bodi bilong graun*) has received a reaffirmation (God created Adam from the soil of the earth) but also a new connotation under the influence of Christianity (the ground, as an existential space in opposition to heaven, is filled with sin). While a person's body turns into ground after death, its spirit (*kaik*) turns into a spirit of the dead (*undumbu*) and returns as a breath of wind to an invisible realm (*undumbunge*, nowadays also called 'heaven') that is situated in the same existential space as that of the the living. From there, especially the recently deceased,⁷² are experienced as exercising influence on people's lives. It is also from there that life comes and goes. Being in that sense is continuous.

In this chapter I concern myself with people's perceptions of death, rituals of death, and their relations with the dead. I will show that the dead stay part of people's lifeworld and act on their lives. In the first section of this chapter I describe villager's perceptions of death by providing insights into people's approaches to death and their experiences of the deaths of others. Furthermore, I will address people's conceptualisation of the place of the dead, which was created by an ancestral being who also introduced death.

In his seminal article Hertz states that death is a social phenomenon (1960[1907]: 86). Death does not only happen to the individual. It is also dealt with by others who not only experience death through the death of the dying person but who also have to align their lives anew after death has happened (Heidegger 2001[1962]: 281f.; Hertz 1960[1907]; Willerslev et

⁷² During my fieldwork it were the spirits of dead villagers who died during the last two decades that were identified as acting in the village.

al. 2013). In section two I describe contemporary rituals of death. Here and in section three, where I will analyse the circumstances and handling of the deaths of two villagers, I aim to provide detailed insights not only into contemporary perceptions of death and death rituals, but also into people's relations with the dead. Rituals of death reveal peoples composite being and their social embedding. Also, people can die due to the actions of a social other with whom they are intimately connected with. By comparing my findings with the writings of other anthropologists who worked with latmul and other Sepik societies, I further articulate some insights into what has changed in people's handling of death and the dead.

3.1 Perceptions of Death

'Death finds everyone, young and old, children and adults', the pastoral worker Stephen Saun said during a Sunday church service in November 2013. 'Death is truly close to us. Death is in our trouser pocket, or string bag that we carry around. Death is waiting for us,' the pastoral worker went on. In his sermon Stephen reminded his audience that death could happen anytime, no one could escape it.

Death is a phenomenon of life that is often experienced in Timbunmeli. When I arrived in the village in December 2012, people were about to end the mourning period for an old man who had recently died. During my fieldwork in Timbunmeli (December 2012–January 2014) eight people died⁷³ – another nine⁷⁴ have died since I left the field (February 2014–end of 2015).

Death is part of life in Timbunmeli and accepted as an 'immanent horizon of existence' (Mimica 1996: 215). Bateson (1958[1936]: 158-159), describing the proud male ethos that he encountered among latmul men, reports a story about 'how a man should behave when his own death stares him in the face.' In the story a man gets caught by a crocodile. Grasping the inevitability of his own death he sends his dog to get his wife to bring him his ritual ornaments. The man decorates himself with his things and removes one after the other from his body while being pulled deeper and deeper into the water. Before the crocodile drowns him completely he ends with the words: "'It is done'", and then he said, "Go my wife, my child, go! What is become

⁷³ Nancy and Eddi Gawi's baby † Jan. 2013, Nelcy † April 2013, Brisa † June 2013, Magda † June 2013, Sila's baby † Oct. 2013, Vienna's and Joel Gawi's baby † August 2013, Papmangawi † Sept. 2013, Josephine † Dec. 2013. Also, in 2013 a young man from Timbunmeli was killed in Madang. Concerning the death's of the babies: Vienna's baby was said to have been only 'blood and water' and was not perceived as being a real human yet. No collective burial took place as in the case of Sila's baby boy, who was also born premature (approx. 6th or 7th month), but lived and was cared for a day before he died. Nancy had a miscarriage and was brought to hospital in Wewak. The body of the child was brought home and buried there.

⁷⁴ Bandi † 2014, Mavak † 2014, Jennet † 2014, Elisa † 2014, Joseph † 2014, Katharina † 2015, baby of Gennebi and Anderson † 2015, Alois † 2015, Beno † 2015.

of me?’” Also Mimica (1996: 213) has described a sense of acceptance of death among the Iqwaye despite their fear of death that I encountered among the Nyaura in Timbunmeli. I remember well when I encountered people’s attitude towards their own possible death for the first time.

Papmangawi, an old man who had been sick for a long time, told me during one of my visits in which were talking about the men’s intention to build a new men’s house that he had offered to take the lead in handling the spirits necessary for its construction. But the village men were still hesitant to get to work on it. They were afraid to be affected by the spirits’ power; they did not feel confident that they knew the right words to control them. Papmangawi said he had told them many times that they should just build it; he would take care of the spirits. If something would go wrong, it would affect him. ‘I am already done’ (*‘Mi bagarap pinis’*), he said. He had made a lot of *sibbukundi* (magic/sorcery) during his life – and its power was now killing him. The Nyaura believe that magical power can bounce back to the human who activated it and will over time take its toll on the *sibbunyang* (see also Bateson 1932b: 423; 1958[1936]: 55, 164, 166 on kick-back of sorcery). I talked to Papmangawi about his health condition and the possibility of getting him to town for medical help, but he said ‘It is enough. I have been on this ground for a long time.’ He was convinced that he would die anyway and he was at peace with it. When I talked to others about Papmangawi’s health condition, they just said ‘Let him be. He made too much *sibbukundi*.’ Papmangawi died in September 2013.

On another occasion seventy-year-old Katharina and I were talking about the end of my fieldwork. She asked me where I would go to afterwards, and I replied that I would go to Germany first to visit my family and friends there and then to Denmark to study before I would return to Australia. She asked whether I planned to return to Timbunmeli, which I answered with ‘yes’. Katharina said: ‘I do not know, will I still be alive when you come back to Timbun, or...?’ Then she added perkily, ‘I’m already old. Maybe I will die and see you there?’ She started to laugh when I looked at her baffled, not knowing what to say except that I hoped that she would still be alive on my return.

Katharina was still alive when I returned to the field in November 2014. It will remain the last time that I saw her. She died a few months afterwards. I learned about her death first from a SMS that I received from one of her sons, whom I never met personally. He had travelled to Timbunmeli upon her death. In the village he heard my story, obtained my phone number, and started to send me text messages.

Son: 05.03.2015 14:16

My name is xxx, I am the big brother of Roy Mandi and Cathy Sangun is my mother, I am married to Biwat, my mother died and I came to Timbun, I want to request something from you. It is not a small thing, it is a big thing. Is it ok or not. Thanks.

Misreading his text message after a long day, I did not pick up on the information that Katharina had died and replied:

I: 5.03.2015 00:06

Good night xxx. Sorry, I do not know you. Are you staying with Roy and Frieda and Katharina in Timbun now? Tell me about your worry first and then I will know if I will be able to help you or not.

I almost forgot about the message, but when the son replied about ten days later I was utterly shocked about the news of Katharina's death. Now the missed calls I had had from my Nyaura father Leslie Kaiban made sense. I had tried to call him back several times, but had not reached him – which was not uncommon due to network and battery problems in the village.

S: 16.03.2015 22:16

Sist! A very good night! Sorry, I did not see your *text* because I was at a place without *network* and only now did I come to Angoram and saw it. I went to Timbun. My mother Catharina died and I went and saw only her grave and I stayed with Roy and Freda for four days and I went back to Biwat – my mother – your friend Katharina died, did you know that or not

16.03.2015 22:30

Sist! My request, I cannot tell you yet – but I would like to ask you and know about a story that Freda and people from Timbun told me first. What I will ask you and what you will tell me is our secret. I heard that you are a dead woman who came to stay in the village, I went and saw your house on the mountain at papa Leslie's area. [...]

I: 17.03.2015 19:01

Good night brother xxx. No, I did not know that Katharina died. When I read your text I worried a lot and cried. I will not see her face again when I return to Timbun. Why did she die? Did she get sick or did something happen to her? Please, can you tell me?

17.03.2015 19:06

About your other question: It is good that you asked me. But I am not a spirit of the dead. I know that many people in Timbun have these thoughts but I do not believe this and all the time I say that I am student of a university in Australia and Denmark and that I came to Timbun to study their way of life, custom, belief. [...]

I learned that Katharina had died after being sick for two weeks. She was considered to be a fit elderly woman and was well-liked by everyone, including myself.

I received further messages from the son in which he raised more questions:

S: 17.03.2015 22:08

Sist! Frieda told me that you showed her your *sacret* book of your life and that she saw it. This *sacret* book, what is it about? Did Frieda say the truth or did she lie?

I replied that I was not sure which book Frieda was talking about but that I suspected that she must have meant a book of photos that I took with me to the field to show people photos of my home in Germany. After that the son replied:

S: 18.03.2015 06:18

Sist! I am very sorry to have asked you all these questions they followed the nonsense of the people in Timbun. [...]



No 28: Katharina (C.Falck 2013).

However, although it seemed as if Katharina's son had been satisfied with my answers to his questions, I received a new text message weeks later:

S: 13.04.2015 22:31

Sist, a very good night! I want the phone number of my mother Catha. If you really are a spirit of the dead. I still think that you are a dead woman ya, I think you lied to me. A very good night.

I have not received a reply to my response in which I asked Katharina's son why he would still think that I was a dead person and in which I stated again that I was not. However, what this conversation shows, is what I have already alluded to before – that the dead do not leave people's world behind (cf. Heidegger 2001[1962]: 282) but remain within it, and that the mobile phone is a technology that is able to bridge over to them.

Death only ends the visible form of Being and opens the door to the place of the dead. In the local vernacular this door is called *babmo*. In December 2013 I was talking to my Nyaura aunt Erika about the *gwaak da* (totems) of the Yak clan, of which my namesake, the roller bird Savi next to everything that is related to death, is one. Erika took up the opportunity to tell me about the meaning of the little bird that is connected to the door of the place of the dead, and today also to the Last Day:

Savi, it is that bird of which we say it died and went away. [...] And there is a time for it to return. We use to say this. When it is the time of the cane grass, it comes. [...] It is our *gwaak da*, they call it Savi. Savi is a kind of, for us, it is *babmo*, it is like a door. *Babmo*. *Babmo* is like a canoe, the worn

out canoes,⁷⁵ but there is one door that we call undumbungenababmo. It is this babmo of the place of the dead. That babmo. Ok, when they remove it, they will open that door now, it [Savi] will come; like a person will die, a person will come. Or something like that. We say, on the Last Day now, the dead will return.⁷⁶ We say it like babmosavindi – it removed its babmo and it will come. We have that kind of story. Of Savi. That bird. We call it like that. It is our gwaak da.

It is said that the ancestral figure Kibbinbange himself put a barrier between the place of the dead and the living. Among the West latmul Kibbinbange is the agent of death (Wassmann 1982, 1991). Kibbe refers to the cold that crawls up a dying body, bange is the local name for skin/body. When people feel seriously sick they often state that they feel cold or that a cold is crawling up their arms and legs.

The ancestral being who is called Kibbinbange in Timbunmeli, seems to be called Kambaimbange in Kanganamun village (Central latmul) – it is perceived as being an ‘undertaker’ and ‘credited with bringing the world into existence’ (Moutu 2013: 127). Bateson (1958[1936]: 233) talks about an ancestral being called Kava-mbuagga that bears similarities to what the Nyaura call Kibbinbange. Bateson was shown a carving in Mindimbit (East latmul) that represented the powerful wagen, who was involved in creating the first dry ground from the primeval mud:

Kava-mbuagga, the wagan who set his foot upon the mud and thereby created dry land, is a representation both of the living and of the dead, and there are myths of his visit to the land of the dead. A figure of him which I was shown in Mindimbit was painted in two colours, the right-hand side of the figure in ochre to represent living flesh, and the left-hand side in black to represent stone, the kava (paralysis, or “pins-and-needles”) which creeps over the body in death. Thus in the figure the two sides of Kava-mbuagga’s personality are diagrammatically shown [underlining added to mark latmul term].

How the place of the dead came into existence is told in a myth that I recorded from two Yak men, Mavak and Moses (appendix p.251ff.). In both versions the ancestral being Kibbinbange created the place of the dead. Nowadays Kibbinbange is also reinterpreted as being Jesus/God, who overcame death. My interlocutors say that the mythical figure went to the place of the dead alive – and so did Jesus when he ascended to heaven.

While we do not learn about Kibbinbange’s intentions for creating the place of the dead in Mavak’s version of the myth, in Moses account Kibbinbange was annoyed by the noise of his fellow villagers and left the living to create a new place. Mavak portrays Kibbinbange as having murdered his family to take them with them, Moses states that Kibbinbange’s family committed suicide to be with him again. In both stories, Kibbinbange blocks the passage from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead, who live a better life. In Mavak’s version, Kibbinbange separated whites from Papua New Guineans.

⁷⁵ Worn out canoes have been used to block the entrance to the family house. Today people construct doors from wood, sometimes also recycling old canoes.

⁷⁶ For millenarian expectations in Timbunmeli see Chapter 6.

Furthermore, in Mavak's version of the myth, it was because of Kibbinbange that death came into existence. In this context, it is noteworthy that Schmid and Kocher-Schmid (1992: 55) cite an informant from their fieldwork in the early 1970s stating that Kivimbangi (Kibbinbange) tried to kill a woman so that she could be the first human who died. Stanek, too, documented a myth according to which the first dead person was a woman. Her father (whose name the anthropologist Stanek was asked not to reveal in public versions of the story) created the place of the dead. In the myth cited by Stanek (1982: 186-191), the father kills his daughter accidentally and later his wife (on purpose) with a spear (also Stanek and Weiss 2015: 76). Also Wassmann (1982: 124, 191, 237, 318; 1988: 30; 1991: 80, 137, 182, 251) documented that it was the ancestral being Kivimbangi (Kibbinbange) who created the land of the dead and introduced death.

Whereas, among the West and Central latmul a male ancestral being created the place of the dead, Silverman (2012: 123, 2013: 245) writes that for the East latmul in Tambunum an ancestress called Avawundumbu was not only the first person to die but also that it was her who established the village of the dead and blocked the road to the village with a broken canoe.

Similar as in Tambunum (Silverman 2012, 2013) and Ambonwari (Telban 2014; Telban and Vávrová 2010), also in Timbunmeli the place of the dead has become associated with the place of white people – America, Australia, Asian and European countries are places where the



No 29: Mavak (C.Falck 2013).

dead live. Thereby, *undumbunge* is not far away, but found within the Nyaura lifeworld. Especially, in the beliefs of the Thomas Souls Ministry (Chapter 6) an integration of white people's countries into Timbunmeli's lifeworld is found – the visible islands of Timbunmeli and Wondunumbuk, are in their invisible appearance 'Japan' and 'Poland'. The invisible realm that the spirits of the dead inhabit is conceptualised like a parallel world within Timbunmeli's lifeworld – walking paths are said to be highways on which cars drive, seating platforms are workshops, and the water of the Chambri Lake is a city.⁷⁷ Graves are the doors to the houses of the dead through which they can travel between the different realms of the living and the dead.

Silverman (2012: 124) sees the dead's association with whiteness connected to the 'local conception ideology, wherein the soft, fleshy parts of the body gel from maternal blood and eventually decay, leaving only white seminal bones.' At the place of the dead, the dead would be boiled in water 'to slough off their black skin and leaving a white, bone-like, ghostly appearance' (Silverman 2013: 245), which would explain the affinity between Europeans and the dead (ibid.: 245). In Timbunmeli my enquiries into the reasons for the whiteness of the dead have usually been answered with a reference to the perception that Jesus, Mother Mary, God, Saints, and other biblical figures would be white. The dead, too, receive a white body once they left the 'ground' and enter the place of the dead that nowadays is also called 'heaven'.

Formerly, like Wassmann (1982, 1988, 1991) has documented, among the West Iatmul mortuary ceremonies called *minjango* and *kitagamat* aimed to guide the spirit of the dead to the place of the dead. Today, the ritual chants are not practiced anymore. Whereas once ritual chants guided the spirit to the place of the dead, today families pray for the *souls* of the dead and give special offerings intending to assist the dead to enter the Kingdom of God. While formerly every person could enter the place of the dead and was guided there by a collective practice, today people are influenced by the church's doctrine that teaches the separation of good from sinful persons after death. Those who led a good and just life will find it easy to go to heaven, whereas sinners will have to suffer their time in purgatory or hell before they will be released and can stay with God. Here we can identify a trend towards the individualisation of one's afterlife – every person has her/his fate in her/his hand. During contemporary rituals of death, the dead person is still mourned for and then roused off via the last ritual washing by a collective (see below) – but, according to the church, to which place the soul then goes to depends on her or his doings during life. This reasoning is also expressed in a church service held in December 2013. Stephen Saun stated: 'I cannot take you to heaven. Your own belief [will take

⁷⁷ Not only spirits of the dead are believed to live in cities, but also bush- and water-spirits live in villages and cities, drive cars and ships.

you]. Hold on strong [to your belief]. [...]. Someone else cannot carry you into heaven.’ However, there are villagers who strongly doubt the existence of the purgatory and hell – they consider those places to be inventions of the church. Some of my interlocutors said that they believed that the Catholic Church had come up with the idea of hell and purgatory to frighten people into following their rules. Also, one church leader said that he had never come across any talk about the purgatory when studying the bible – he, too, questioned its existence.

3.2 Rituals of Death



No 30: The last ritual washing in the context of Nelcy's death (C.Falck 2013).

When people fall seriously sick in Timbunmeli, families try to prevent their death by finding out who has caused their condition and by reversing the disturbance. Usually only if people are old, their death is accepted as unavoidable. Since illness is customarily seen as being caused by sorcery or spiritual agency, medical help is not always sought. Also, if people are taken to the hospital they often return with the statement that no sickness was found and with the advice to straighten their *kastom*. When efforts aiming to appease involved spirits fail, or underlying reasons for a person's health condition cannot be identified, death is perceived as inevitable.

After a person has died, people still feel her/his presence – the spirit is still with them. In fact, it often happens that they can see, hear, or feel the spirit of the dead person in their surroundings: After the death of Josephine Pippi, her daughter-in-law who went to fetch water at a freshwater creek encountered her spirit on her way into the bush – scared by this encounter, she dropped the containers she carried and ran back to the village.

After the death of Papmangawi, his granddaughter Olbin received phone calls from a number unknown to her. Her grandfather's spirit had tried to contact her. On his first call he had called out her name, but when Olbin asked 'Who is it?', he had complained why she would ask since she would already know who he was. Olbin identified the voice of the man calling her as that of her grandfather but their call connections were disrupted and when she tried to call him back, she could not reach him – he had switched off his phone.

The certainty that Being does not end with death is also expressed in contemporary rituals of death (see below). As with other cultures, in Timbunmeli death 'is not understood as finitude per se, but as a transitory realm' that transfers a person 'into another state of communal existence' (Willerslev et al. 2013: 5).

Also Silverman (1993: 126) states that death among the East latmul in Tambunum only terminates the body:

The body is a vehicle for the self and volition, not its sole embodiment. [...], in Tambunum, death merely terminates the human body (*mbange*). Jural identity persists through the transmission and inheritance of the deceased's personal names. This explains, in part, why the corpse receives only superficial treatment during interment and funerary rites. By contrast, totemic names receive extensive elaboration during mortuary ceremonies through chanting, singing, and art [underlining added to mark latmul term].

I am inclined to agree with Silverman that the corpse does not receive much elaborate treatment in mourning rituals – today the body is buried shortly after a person has died. However, the statement that the body appears to be secondary in funerary rituals has to be carefully evaluated. I was told that the practice of burying dead people on the same day or on the day after their death is a recent one. People say that they find it unpleasant to keep the corpse when it is already stinking and loosing bodily fluids like their ancestors used to;⁷⁸ also they are aware of hygienic standards and fear that a decaying body might transfer diseases.

Furthermore, we have to keep in mind that in former times the corpse, in the form of its bones, did receive much attention since it was practice to excavate the bones, clean them and keep especially the head, modelled with clay to imitate the face of the dead, and the leg bones in the family house (see e.g. Roesicke 1914: 515). Wassmann (1991: 73; see also Stanek

⁷⁸ See Telban (1998: 250n2) for former funerary practices in Ambonwari and Roscoe and Telban (2004: 111) for Imanmeri and Wamblamas. Also, at the beginning of the 20th century Roesicke documented in different Sepik villages the practice of leaving the corps for decay (in Schindlbeck 2015; Roesicke 1914).

1982: 123-124, 154-166) describes the excavation and preparation of skulls for a ceremony called *minjango* still performed during the 1970s among the Nyaura.⁷⁹ Today, this practice is no longer followed. However, I was told that formerly the bones of one's male ancestors were kept tucked under the roof of the family house for protection and support. Today, as far as I am aware, only one member of the Nambuk clan keeps ancestral bones in his rooftop. The Possuko and Yak clan hold bones of male ancestors (photo no 31, p.87). They are used or have been used in bamboo divination rituals, in initiation rites, and in *sibbukundi*.

Moreover, if a family member dies in town, people take great efforts to bring the corpse back to the village. Ideally one's corpse should be buried in one's village and cried about by family members. People believe that the dead want to stay with their family members – they belong to the village. If the body is buried in town the person's spirit might not find its way back home. Also, to be able to cry over the body of a beloved one helps the family to come to terms with death. Before a body is buried, close family members have time to sit close to the dead



No 31: Bone of a Possuko clan member (C.Falck 2013).

⁷⁹ See also Adolf Roesicke's reports and diary entries (in Schindlbeck 2015): in 1912 (p.20, 69) Roesicke found a female skeleton wrapped in palm leaves hung up in a house in a Nyaura village (Jambonai); in 1913 (p.260) Roesicke also found a figure imitating the body of a deceased woman and her skull modelled with clay in a family house in Mindimbit. In different Sepik villages Roesicke saw and (tried to) acquire(d) skulls of dead kin or enemies that were kept in houses. Roesicke also noticed that people decorated themselves with human bones in different villages (e.g. p.50), among them also Nyaura villages (p.69). See also Roesicke's descriptions about rituals of death in his report on ethnographic outcomes of the Sepik expedition (1914: 515).

body, to touch and hug it for the last time. Thereby they are surrounded by their extended family and friends who come to support the grieving family and also to cry themselves and with that express their own sorrow about the death of a community and family member. It is the last time that a direct bodily experience with the familiar body is possible and formerly it has been the last chance for family members to see their beloved one's material appearance (except for in dreams and visions). Today, people may take photos of the deceased if they have a camera or a mobile phone with integrated camera to keep a memory of their loved one with them.

Nevertheless, compared to other cultures like those in ancient Egypt, some Asian and South American cultures, the body of a dead person in Timbunmeli does not receive much attention in funerary rites. It is perceived as the perishable hull of the invisible spirit of a person. It is this spirit (*kaik*, *undumbu*) that carries a person's Being on – the body is not part of the afterlife. In the November sermon referred to in 3.1. Stephen said: 'But, brothers and sisters, death does not end our lives! In death, the body alone vanishes. Life goes to the Father.' Today the belief in afterlife is clearly influenced by the Christian doctrine. The Christian concept of heaven has been integrated with the Nyaura understanding of *undumbunge*. Both are a place of happiness and peace.

During his fieldwork in the 1970s Wassmann (1982: 73-78, 111-218, also 1988, 1991) documented practices related to the preparation and execution of *minjango*, a ritual containing totemic chants performed for men of importance that aimed at guiding the spirit of the deceased to the place of the dead.⁸⁰ Although the practices described by Wassmann are not practiced anymore in Timbunmeli,⁸¹ certain formalised procedures are followed today when a person dies.

The first phase starts with the death of the person and ends with a collective bath after the funeral. Family members and friends gather inside and outside of the house where the dead body is kept. Men may stay outside in a *haus win* to express their compassion, only entering the *magen gai* (*haus wari/krai* = house of grief/cry) for short times during which they cry and mourn over the dead's body. The house is filled with women and immediate family members who cry together. Close relatives sit close to the corpse, touching and hugging it, trying to come to terms with their loved one's death.

⁸⁰ My informants stated that the *minjango* and *kitagamat* were also performed for women. See also Roesicke who found a mortuary figure of a woman in Mindimbit (Schindlbeck 2015: 260), which might have been part of a death ceremony. In his report on the ethnographic outcomes of the Sepik Expedition 1912/13 Roesicke (1914: 515) states that it was a common practice to produce ceremonial figures of the dead.

⁸¹ In fact, I was told that a *minjango* has never been performed in Timbunmeli. This is contrary to Wassmann's (1991: 68) statement who witnessed a mayor death ceremony in July 1973 in Timbunmeli. A minor ceremony of the dead is remembered to have taken place for a Nyaura clan woman, who died in the 1980s.

Usually the family waits until the next day with the funeral and buries the corpse before the midday heat of the next day accelerates the decomposition of the body. The grieving family mourns together with those who came to stay with them throughout the night until the next day. Grief and devastation about one's loss is expressed in emotional outcries. The collective crying contains wailing that refers to the dead person and how she/he will be missed, usually taken in turns by related women.

Early on the day of the funeral men start to cut an old canoe to the size of the dead body, giving it the shape of a coffin. When it is time to bury the body, the coffin is carried into the house and the corpse is placed inside. Usually people place the corpse, dressed in its nicest clothes, on a foam mattress or mat, put the head on a pillow and cover the body with a cloth. The coffin will stay for a while in the house to give the family the chance to adapt to the fact that the body will be removed from them soon to be buried outside.

After a while men enter the house to carry the coffin outside to a place where they had dug a grave. In Timbunmeli each clan buries its dead on the clan compound and sometimes near the respective family house.⁸² When it is time for the burial, the people gather at the graveyard and loud cries fill the air. Usually someone speaks a prayer before men start to shovel soil onto the body. When the grave is filled, the family returns to the house of cry. After a while they take a first collective bath in the nearby lake. In the following they will pass black cords around their neck, hand- and leg-ankles. They are signs that the *kaik* of the dead family member is still with them – they tie it to their bodies. Monika said: 'The black ropes mean that the spirit of the dead is still with us. It is a sign for that we are mourning.' Formerly, these cords (*kaikmanje*) were produced from the fibre of tree bark and had a natural light brownish colour.⁸³ Today black yarn is bought in stores and knotted to a necklace, arm- and leg-bracelets.

Feelings are said to be felt in the heart (*mauk*) or skin (*bange*, also meaning body) and grief is also felt on the skin and expressed by bodily appearance. People say '*wari i stap long skin bilong ol*' – the grief is on their skin. In former times, the mourners would paint their bodies with mud to express their sorrow.⁸⁴ Their skin had to be dirty as a sign that they did not feel well and mourned. The outside appearance reflected the inner state. However, today this custom is not followed by many. Nevertheless, the bereaved will stop caring about their bodily appearance

⁸² Roesicke documented that formerly graves were found under the respective dwelling houses (e.g. Schindlbeck 2015: 203 in Korogo). See also Stanek (1982: 160) on European influence on the former practice to bury people on clan ground or underneath family houses.

⁸³ Adolf Roesicke describes in his diary entries from 1913 in Nyaurangei that mourning women wore plaited cords in ears, noses and as necklaces, while mourning men wore only necklaces (Schindlbeck 2015: 274, also p.266 in Korogo).

⁸⁴ At the beginning of the 20th century Roesicke documented the practice to colour the body with white/grey clay/ash for different Nyaura and other Sepik villages (Schindlbeck 2015: 96, 145-46, 168, 229, 266, 274).

and well-being – they will stop cutting their hair, wear old clothes, feel no appetite and eat little, sleep without mosquito nets and only take bath every now and then. Harrison (1985a: 120) documented similar practices for the Manambu:

Over the months of mourning, people say they “hear” (pity and long for) their dead kin, and this “weakens” their Spirits. During this period, it is customary for the bereaved to sleep without protection from the mosquitoes; a practice which, on the Sepik River, is a form of deliberate self-mortification. They say they do this in identification with the dead person: “why should we sleep in comfort while our kinsman's body is rotting in the ground?”

During the next weeks or months after a person's death, that we could classify as marking the second phase, the hair and beards of the mourners will grow as an expression of grief. Today, the mourners wear black clothes, which are considered to have no colour, as a further sign of their grief.

The emotional state of mourning is not only expressed by people's outside bodily appearance – via black ropes and clothes, or uncut hair – but also by their behaviour. Especially during the first week after the funeral, mourners⁸⁵ refrain from socialising with others and as long as the official mourning period lasts they do not take part in daily community life. The bereaved spend every day in the ‘house of cry’. During the first week of the mourning period the mourners do not talk, cook, or do any other kind of work. They will sit in a corner of the house, often turning their backs to the centre of the house and with that to visitors that come to mourn with them. However, although the grieving individuals do not seek to engage actively with others, their social embedding is stressed. Women from their family will come and stay with them every night during their seclusion and take care of their needs during the day.

The practice to withdraw from interaction with others does not only offer grieving persons the chance to not have to communicate with others in a moment when nothing feels to provide relief from one's individual pain, it is also a social norm. Withdrawing from one's daily life and spending time on thinking of the dead and giving into one's grief is considered as a form of giving respect to the dead and her/his family. The spirit of the dead person is perceived to observe how the living mourn and a lack expression of grief might lead to anger from the deceased. Also, especially in the case of a widow her movement is closely watched by the dead's family. If a married man dies, his widow(s) is (are) not supposed to leave the house alone if she (they) need(s) to wash or use the toilet. Another woman from the dead man's clan (*wasmeri* – watch woman) will always accompany her and guide her way – a widow is not supposed to look up and talk to anyone. Formerly, she had to wear a head decoration, called *yoli*, every time she left the house during the day. The *yoli* was produced from grass, woven to a hood-like cowl that would hang deep into the face and cover shoulders and the back of the widow. The *yoli*

⁸⁵ In the death cases I witnessed: the spouse, parents, and children of the dead person

protected her from the sight of others and also hindered her to look at them. If a widow did not avoid looking up and at others, especially men, when she had to leave the house, the spirit of her dead husband could become infuriated and bring sickness and death to the living. Also her husband's family could get upset and suspect her of not really grieving but to be more interested in marrying another man. Later the *yoli* was replaced by an empty bag of rice that was placed on the head covering the shoulders and back of widows. When Barnabus Kaiban died in 2003, his two widows Rosa and Rita followed the custom and placed empty bags of rice on their heads when leaving the house. They would go to the river in the early morning hours to wash and cover their skin with mud and sit in the 'house of cry'. Today, I was told, women do not follow this custom anymore. When Papmangawi died in 2013 his wife Gramowi did not use a *yoli* or mud, but she wore a black dress on every day during the period of mourning (photo no 32, p.92).

After the first week of grief has passed, the mourning family may start to talk and do some light work, such as to carve paddles and produce baskets that will later be distributed among the *wau* (MB) and *barre* (MBW) as well as other maternal relatives of the deceased who helped them through their time of mourning.

When the mourning family decides to end the time of grief certain rituals are organised. This third phase usually lasts two days and is called *rausim wari* in Tok Pisin – to get rid of the sorrow. The third phase contains different components: First, the *nubia wegandi* (*brukim paiawood* – cutting firewood) takes place. Early in the morning kin (men and women) head into the bush to cut firewood and bundle it. Before a party left the village to get firewood for Papmangawi's death party, his brother Benny made a magical spell on a leaf that he then tied to a knot and that was placed on the ground in front of the bush so that everyone who went into the bush to cut firewood had to pass it. The magical spell that Benny made was a protection spell – since the bush is perceived as a place where spirits like to roam around, it is a good practice to protect the party from harmful spiritual agency. Also, before the male family members headed for the bush, they ate scraped coconut, mixed with water, and a fried sago pancake. In his spell, Benny had invoked the forefather of his clan (*nyaik*) to protect the family. When male relatives ate the coconut the *nyaik* also consumed the meal as he is part of their body (Chapter 2.1).

Second, after cutting the wood, three bundles of firewood are put aside and decorated with leaves and flowers. They will be hung on two tree branches that are placed into the ground close to the shore of the lake next to the family compound. The tree branches (*monu*) symbolize the father's and mother's side of the person who died – they are part of the totemic repertoire of the maternal and paternal clans and we can say that they represent the composite being of the



No 32: Gramowi in black clothes and with *kaikmanje*, mourning the death of her husband Papmangawi (C.Falck 2013).

dead person.⁸⁶ One bundle of firewood is hung up for the mother's side; one for the father's side; the third one is for the dead person. The tree branches are set up close to the shore and will stay there until they rot away (photo no 33, p.94). I was told that the tree branches are hung

⁸⁶ Silverman (1993: 324-329) documented the Tambunum practice to set up a 'father-tree' that represents the paternal lineage or clan of the dead. In Timbunmeli, the paternal and maternal side is represented by the tree branches set up close to the shore. Wassmann (1982: 191; 1991: 138) also mentions a tree branch which is stuck into the ground close to those who perform the *minjango* in Kandingei, but there it belongs to the maternal clan group.

up as an information for visitors that someone – and from which clan – had died. However, I was also told that the firewood is intended to be for the spirits of those who already died and who are said to come to take the newly deceased with them into their realm; they function as an offering and a last farewell to the dead.

The wau (MB) of the dead person will further receive bundles of firewood for the help provided to the mourning family. He will usually do some last customary work for his dead laua on the day of or after the burial, and/or at the end of mourning – he will kill a chicken, dog or pig to be eaten by the mourning party.

Third, during the time that people left for the bush to cut the firewood a line of clothes (kaikwagunda) is hung up in the house of cry (photo no 34, p.94). The clothes symbolise dead family members who are believed to come and stay with the mourning party during the last cry. The clothes do not have to be the actual clothes of dead family members,⁸⁷ I was told, but can be an agglomerate of clothes usually worn by others as they are mere symbols.

Fourth, after the cutting of firewood, a collective bath takes place that symbolises that the family is ready to let the spirit of the dead person go (in this phase called abbaundumbu, ‘bone - spirit of the dead’) and wash the grief off their skin. Before, this was the time for the widow to lay down her yoli (head dress) and stop painting her skin with mud.

Fifth, the kaik gargandi (*last krai*; last cry) takes place, in which the family cries for the last time together with women from the village starting in the afternoon, throughout the night until the next morning. During the last cry, it is common for women to colour their faces with white clay (photo no 35, p.95). When tears fill up in their eyes, they hold their head pressed back into the nape of their necks so that the tears leave their eyes on the outside, leaving their traces on the skin by washing away the white paint. Everyone should see their sorrow. The dead are said to cry with the living – they mourn for the living as the living mourn for the dead.

Sixth, at dawn of the next day, the last collective ritual bath takes place (photo no 30, p.85). Here people let finally go of the spirit, now called kiaundumbu (‘dead spirit of the dead’) and their grief while bathing in the water and shovelling the water away from their bodies and skin. People say: ‘We are washing ourselves and let it [the spirit and the grief] go.’ It is the last collective bath – people no longer hold on to their grief and the spirit of their dead family member. The family and the dead have to accept that the spirit has entered a different realm. I suggest that this acceptance death is expressed with the pleonasm ‘kiaundumbu’ – ‘dead spirit of the dead’.

⁸⁷ The clothes and things of dead family members may be kept as a memory in the house or may be used again by others; however, some people prefer to burn or bury them.



No 33: Monu for Papmangwi's death ritual (C.Falck 2013).



No 34: Kaikwagunda for Papmangawi's last cry (C.Falck 2013).



No 35: Women colouring their faces with white clay for Nelcy's last cry (C.Falck 2013).



No 36: Erika Kaiban with long hair expressing her grief (C.Falck 2013).

Other anthropologists have documented that the latmul believe that the spirits of the dead travel along the river to the land of the dead (Silverman 1993: 329; 2001: 85; Stanek 1983: 324, 365; Wassmann 1991: 105, 191; see also Bateson 1958[1936]: 230 on spirits of the dead and the Sepik). As mentioned before, Wassmann has documented ritual chants that guide the spirit of the dead to the land of the dead situated in the ocean. I would like to propose that this has to be understood symbolically. The Nyaura in Timbunmeli perceive water as a substance that conceptually relates to the materiality of spirits, same as wind.⁸⁸ By washing in the water of the lake, I suggest, people not only wash the grief off their skin, but also send the spirit of the dead off into the water – like a sign that it has to leave the realm of the living and become part of the spiritual part of the world.

After the last bath the family cuts off their hair and beards and prepares a meal for a mourning party for all who helped them during their time of mourning. After this, the official period of grief has ended. However, the fourth phase of mourning has to be conceptualised as a phase with an open end. Close family members may carry on with mourning and express this via black ropes that are worn around the neck, ankles, and wrists. Also black clothes can be worn for a longer period of time and sometimes family members decide to let their hair and beards grow as a sign of their grief.

The hair of my aunt Erika Kaiban, who had lost her brother Stanley in 2010, had grown into long dreadlocks when I arrived in December 2012 (photo no 36, p.95). She had promised to keep her hair for three years to express her grief visible for everyone to see. Erika had planned to cut off her hair on the day of his death in April 2013, but could not bring herself to do it when the day had arrived. The meal that she had organised in Stanley's former house went by without her cutting her hair. Upon Stanley's death, Erika had left her house to live in Stanley's former house with one of his three wives, his half-brother Peter Kaiban and other family members who had moved into the house when Stanley passed away. She wanted to remember her brother and could not get over her grief. She had been very close with him and often had dreams in which he communicated with her.

Although family members may eventually cut the black ropes off and grow their hair again to their usual lengths, the process of grief is a long one. As a mother who had lost a child once told me: '*Bai yu no inap lus tingting*' – 'You will not be able to forget.'

⁸⁸ Also, the latmul creation myth sees water as the beginning of everything that exists (Wassmann 1991:91; Moutu 2013:189; Silverman 2001: 27): '[...] it was out of water that everything was first created, and so it is to water that one should return after death' (Moutu 2013: 189).

3.3 Relations with the Dead

In Timbunmeli the dead continue to influence the lives but also deaths of villagers – they stay enmeshed in people's social relations. In the following I consider practices and statements that surrounded the deaths of a little girl and a middle aged woman who died during my fieldwork in 2013 as the case studies not only provide us with information on how people handle death in contemporary rituals of death, but also on contemporary beliefs and relations with the dead.

Case Study 1 – Nelcy's death

Nelcy, a girl around the age of 10, died in the night of 30th of April 2013. She was buried the next day. During the night of Nelcy's death I thought I heard someone crying from far away – but only the next morning I learned that Nelcy had died. I went to the house of Monika, whose father (Nyaura clan) took care of Nelcy's father Bill after his father (Nyaura clan) had died. I was unsure whether it was appropriate for me to go to the parent's house, as I had learned that two co-wives who had lost a child did not cry in my presence because they were told or believed that it was disrespectful to do so.⁸⁹ However, Monika and others said that it was not a problem at all for me to come, I was a Yak clan member (Nelcy's mother's clan), and many people would come to the 'house of cry' to sit and cry with the mourning family and with that pay their condolence. Nelcy had been considered to be a good person (*abman nyang*); she was well known for being considerate and quick to help and share things with others. Her death was perceived as a tragedy in the community and people were wondering about the circumstances of her death.

Monika, who had held Nelcy when she died, told me the circumstances of her death, which later were also told and commented on by different people: On the morning of her day of death, Nelcy felt hot and told her mother Ellis that she would like to sleep. Ellis was smoking fish over the fire place in the house, when she suddenly saw how the body of her daughter cramped. Immediately she thought of malaria and took her daughter outside into the water of the lake that was surrounding the house due to the high water to cool the feverish body. But it was no help – something else must have had befallen Nelcy.

⁸⁹ Some people believe that the mission discourages people to mourn in their customary ways and that white people in general would not cry for the dead. These ideas are also spread by the spirit of Thomas and his followers (Chapter 6). Instead of crying for the dead over an extensive period, people are encouraged to pray for the souls instead. When I asked the Catholic priest working in Timbunmeli whether the church would tell people not to cry for the dead, he said that this would not be true. The church would only encourage mourners to still attend church services during the period of mourning. However, since it is against people's custom to leave the 'house of cry' and take part in normal community life, the appeal to attend church services may be perceived as a rejection of the local practice of crying for the dead, which should not be interrupted.

Ellis took her daughter back into the house and held her, but Nelcy never gained consciousness again. Her family tested her reactions by putting glowing pieces of wood from the stove on her skin. But her skin was already dead (*skin bilong en dai pinis*) and she did not react. In the afternoon her breath flattened. Her family started to pray for her recovery together with a spirit medium – Sandra. Sandra is a woman, whose body is possessed by the spirit of a dead villager named David during prayer sessions (Chapter 5). After the prayer, David explained that the spirit of Imelda's dead husband Morris (a clan brother of Nelcy's father Bill) was responsible for the situation. Nelcy's father, Bill (Nyaura clan), had done something to anger Morris (Nyaura clan). With that he had attracted a *nglambi* (*hevi*), which had already caused another child of the Nyaura clan to die. Bill pulled the ominous situation to his living area and his daughter became sick. In fact, not too long ago, Bill had had a dispute with Imelda over a sago palm tree.

People in Timbun believe that spirits of the dead, if angered, can bring a fearful situation, called *nglambi*, characterised by sickness and pain (*sikpen*), to the person who angered them or to the family members of those who angered them. The spirits of the dead watch over their families and may harm those that treat them badly. When Bill quarrelled with Imelda, he attracted the attention of her dead husband and pulled a *nglambi* to his family.

To straighten the quarrel and to reunite with Imelda, Bill sent his daughter Nady to ask Imelda for reconciliation. Later Imelda told me that she informed Bill's daughter that she would be *wanbel* (one bel) with the family, but that she did not want to come. Nelcy's family interpreted Imelda's not showing up as a sign that she was not really *wanbel*. Nelcy died during the night of the same day and people said: 'The little girl only died because of Imelda and her husband.'

When I arrived at the 'house of cry', the house was already filled with crying women. The parents were sitting at the backside of the house, turning their backs to the mourning party, crying desperately. Now and then one of the women from the paternal or maternal clan would stand up and go the corpse to cry in a heart-braking tone over the dead body of the little girl – the grief was shared by the social body and the crying distributed on different persons to express not only individually felt emotions but also a collective loss.

Later Nelcy's body was placed into a coffin, once an old canoe. Outside, men had already dug a grave for Nelcy. Due to the severe high-water that surrounded Nelcy's home, the grave had to be dug further inside at a place that was not swallowed by the lake. The funeral took place in the hot afternoon sun. The family had initially wanted to bury the child in the morning hours, but was waiting for relatives to arrive. Some had left the village to travel to town. They had been informed via the mobile phone and immediately started to travel back to the village to be able to attend the funeral.

In the afternoon the coffin was carried outside on the shoulders of men, who carefully made sure not to slip while balancing on the bridge constructions and walking through the water. The parents were held by relatives; their strength had left their bodies. The crying was carried on at the burial side, where many villagers met to mourn the death of the little girl. Then the coffin was let down the hole and closed with a lid. A prayer was said but the words were drowned by cries. After a while, men started to shuffle ground on the coffin and the parents were guided back to their house. Only close family members stayed with them and most of the people, including myself, went back to their houses.

In the aftermath of Nelcy's death, people discussed the circumstances of her death. Some had visions and dreams about her. Wilma, Imelda's daughter, who is said to have a *gift* to catch visions, dreamt that her dead father Morris told Nelcy that she would not go to the hellfire, but that he would take her with him to heaven. Although most people attributed the sudden death of the child to the doings of the *undumbu* of Imelda's husband Morris, there were also other voices that criticized that the little girl should have immediately been taken to the hospital as she had been sick for a few days and had obviously been suffering from a severe malaria attack. If the hospital had diagnosed that the girl was not sick, the family could still have blamed the situation on 'something of the ground.'

On the third day after Nelcy's death the family decided to practice a divination ritual to receive clarification on the reasons for Nelcy's death – her spirit should provide the answers.⁹⁰

In the afternoon, Nelcy's grave was covered with a plastic canvass that was spanned around sticks over the grave. Kim, Nelcy's *wau* (MB), should place his hand on the grave at 7p.m., knock and ask the spirit to use his body to speak out. If he felt that something like a frog would crawl up his arm, it would be the sign that the spirit wanted to use him. Although Kim followed the instructions he was given, the spirit did not take possession of his body. Ellis was sent to try whether her daughter wanted to use her. After a while of chewing betelnut in the house, the mother was guided by Stella Wavi (Nyaura clan) to the grave. There the two women kneeled down; Ellis placed her head and hand under the plastic canvass over the grave, called out her daughter's name, and shortly afterwards her body was already possessed by the spirit of her daughter.

Nelcy, now using her mother's body, went to Kenny's house (Kim's half-brother). She walked unsteady, but knew her way. There, Nelcy proclaimed that she did not want to use the body of another person than her mother as she did not want to utter bad things using the body

⁹⁰ A divination should take place until the third day after a person's death at 7p.m. A spirit of a recently deceased is said to leave its house (grave) with nightfall and roam around in the village. After the third day, its activities start to decrease.

of another person. Then, Nelcy walked over the bridge construction to her family house. She sat down at the back side of the room and started to cry; she cried for her parents. When asked to talk out about the reasons for her death, Nelcy explained that she died because of the dispute between her father and Imelda. Morris, Imelda's dead husband, had made her ill.

When Nelcy left the body of her mother, Ellis sunk back and rolled on her side. She needed to rest and was offered water to drink. Soon after the spirit possession was over, the visitors left the house. Only the mourning party and those women that took care of the family during their time of grief, stayed.

Before I left the house, Bill asked me whether I could come back some day when I was free – he had a worry that he wanted to share with me. After a while, when the period of strict withdrawal from interaction with others was over, I went to visit Bill and Ellis. I heard no one talking in the house when I approached the house of cry – if one had to talk during the time of grief, it had to be done quietly. I announced my arrival and entered the house upon invitation (*'yagwa!'* – 'come!'). Ellis and Bill were sitting in at the backside of their house. As it is customary, the family had put black ropes around their necks, hand- and leg-ankles, and wore black clothes. Ellis was holding a T-shirt of Nelcy close to her body. Bill was working on a paddle. He told me that they were preparing paddles and baskets to hand to Nelcy's *wau* (MB) for his customary work. He had killed a dog on the day after the funeral and gave it to Nelcy's family to eat. Also all the women who took over the tasks of catching fish and cooking meals during the time of mourning, should receive a gift.

Bill said that he wanted to see me because he wanted to ask me whether I could help them to get the spirit of his daughter to stay with them or make it use the body of her mother regularly to deliver messages to them. When I told Bill that I was not able to do that, he accepted my answer. But as often in these situations, I was left with an uncomfortable feeling. I feared that he perceived me as not wanting to help him and sensed that I could not convince him with my explanations why I could not follow his wish.

During the one and a half months of their official mourning, the family sat in the family house and grieved over the loss of Nelcy. Then the parents decided that it was time to end the time of mourning and prepare for the *kaik gargandi*.

The last cry took part on the 20th of June. Women sat on the floor of the house of cry, painted their face with white clay⁹¹ (see photo no 35, p.95) , and cried together for the last time.

⁹¹ The white colour is the colour of death (see also Stanek 1982: 52). According to Stanek, latmul used to colour also the faces of their dead with white clay.

‘Yambiure [Bill’s local name], grieving man, what will you do tomorrow?’, an old woman cried out, stating the inconceivability of the certainty that life had to go on.

Case Study 2 – Josephine’s death

Josephine Pippi died on December 30th 2013. She had been sick for a long time, complaining about stomach pain and weakness. In December, her husband John had taken her to the hospital in Wewak and left her with her brother, a teacher in town. When her situation deteriorated after three weeks, Josephine was sent back to the village. There she died a few days later.

Josephine’s stay in the hospital had brought no help and her family had been told that no sickness had been found in her body or blood. She was advised to return to the village to straighten the *kastom*. In the village her family tried to find out about the reason for her worsening state. Three days after her return, a pig was killed as an offering for spirits that might have attacked her, followed by a prayer meeting in which the family together with the KST leader and the spirit of David prayed for Josephine. David, who possessed Sandra, proclaimed that a *jambia* (sorcery bundle) had been hidden in the family house and had caused Josephine to fall sick. He announced to remove the sorcery bundle on Sunday night when a further prayer meeting for Josephine should take place. Although the prayer meeting took place and the family had placed great hope on it, Josephine died the next morning. She was buried the same day.

Already during the days before Josephine’s death people were talking about the reasons for her sickness and family members blamed not only each other for her state, but villagers also suspected Sambang, a *sibbunyang*, to have poisoned her with *sibbukundi*. Theories spanned around different events that had happened in the past:

- 1) Wilfred, Josephine’s son, was said to have had affairs with widows. With that he had offended the spirits of their dead husbands who took revenge by killing Josephine.
- 2) Wilfred had broken the ban that he had put on his interaction with his first wife Ganja when they had a dispute a few years back. He had called out the *gwaak da* (Chapter 4.2) and since then Ganja was not living with him and his second wife anymore but moved back in with her mother. Nevertheless, Wilfred was said to visit Ganja at night and with that breaking the ban he himself had created. The spirit of Ganja’s father was one of the spirits of the dead that was said to have contributed to Josephine’s death.
- 3) Sambang has made malevolent *sibbukundi* to kill Josephine. Josephine had often blamed Sambang to be an evil sorcerer which had caused Sambang to complain about her destroying his good reputation. When two poisonous snakes had tried to enter Josephine’s house around June, their appearance was taken as a sign for evil magic. Josephine had complained that two stones would move around in her stomach causing pain. The *jambia* removed from her home by David contained stones and rat teeth – put there to destroy her.
- 4) Josephine’s husband John was said to have been involved in the death of Stanley Kaiban. He was said to have helped Papmangawi to do *sibbukundi* to affect Stanley’s health. Members of the Nyaura clan were said to be his client – Stanley was their political opponent. Accidentally, Papmangawi must have touched the *as samting* (source) of the Nambuk and Possuko clan (*nyoui* moiety) and with that contributed to his own death. After Papmangawi had done the magic to destroy Stanley, John’s house caught fire – a sign that he had contributed some thoughts to harm Stanley. When Josephine’s family went to the events surrounding the mourning party of Papmangawi, they pulled the *hevi* that had killed Papmangawi to their side. Wilfred went to cut firewood and the family also contributed money to buy tinned fish.

- 5) Before Josephine was married to John, she had been married to his brother who died. Her former husband's spirit might have been angry about this and took revenge.
- 6) John's brother Jack is married to Anna, Josephine's sister. When they were young they separated and married other partners. Later they reunited and had two children, who are both mentally impaired (one of them is married to Joanita (Nyaura clan)).⁹² During their separation Anna and Josephine's father Ivut mali had, together with men from other Nyaura communities (Kandingei and Yamanambu), done *sibbukundi* to harm Jack. It might have bounced back to Josephine. Since all of the involved men had already died, it was impossible to undo the magical spells then used.
- 7) The marriage between Jack's son Jerremeyer (Nambuk clan) and Joanita (Nyaura clan) had not been straightened.
 - a. No brideprice had been paid although the couple already had two children. The spirit of Joanita's dead father might have been offended by that and turned to harm Josephine.
 - b. Jerremeyer and Joanita are from the Nambuk and Nyaura clan – clans that are said to have a similar relationship to a partnership called *sambla*.⁹³ When clan members intermarry, exchange marriages took place in former times. Today also monetary payments are considered as being valid practices to avoid death. However, neither had been done when Joanita and Jerremeyer married. Furthermore, already Jerremeyer's mother (Anna) and maternal aunt (Josephine), both from the Nyaura clan, had married men from the Nambuk clan – and with that the customary rule was already broken before the young couple married.

The three brothers John, Jack and Timothy,⁹⁴ met several times with Josephine's sons in the aftermath of her death trying to find a consensual explanation for her death. They ruled out that her death had something to do with breaking the *sambla* rule. No problems had affected the family in the past and after all the clans were not real *sambla* partners. Also did they not believe that the spirit of their dead brother, Josephine's first husband, was involved. It is customary for a widow to marry a brother (real or classificatory) after her husband has died. However, since all the other speculations were denied to be true by the parties involved, the family started to argue about who was to blame. Jack denied that Josephine's death had anything to do with his marriage or his son's marriage and Wilfred and John also did not confess that they were at fault. However, all agreed that the pig that was killed before Josephine's death had been killed in vain. To successfully appease the spirits involved the guilty party would have had to talk out on the transgression and apologize, which had not happened.

On the third day after Josephine's death the family arranged to have a bamboo divination to get clarification on the reason for her death. In the afternoon the sons of the family started to cut palm leaves and sticks to install a small shelter on Josephine's grave that would

⁹² The mental impairment of the first son commonly is ascribed to the *hevi* caused by the separation of the parents. Only a few people claim that he has been smoking too much marijuana. However, in regard to the second son, Jerremeyer, the opinions about what is affecting his mental state differ. Some describe his mental confusion as a *kastom sik*, others ascribe it to marijuana consumption.

⁹³ I could not clarify this point, nor the relationship between the two clans. The only information I received was that the Nambuk clan was the second clan after the Nyaura clan to arrive in Kandingei. Therefore, the two clans were considered to be extraordinary close to each other – similar to those of *sambla* partnerships (For a discussion of *sambla* partnership in Kandingei see Wassmann (1982, 1988, 1991) and among the East Iatmul (there called *tshambela*) in Tambunum see Silverman (1993, 2001), also Bateson (1932a: 270). Wassmann states that *sambla* partnerships went back to a common descent of clans. They contained mutual support in rituals and codified certain behavioural guidelines. For example, *sambla* partners should not fight, use sorcery on each other, or call a brideprice for their daughters (1988: 13-14).

⁹⁴ Timothy does not live on his clan compound (Nambuk) but lives with his wife Erika Kaiban on the Yak compound. Because he was not often seen on his clan compound, he was not considered as having something to do with Josephine's death.

enclose it like a house with four walls and a roof (photo no 37, p.103). The bamboo stick had already been cut in the early morning hours and was kept at a safe place to make sure that it would not touch the ground, which would contaminate the bamboo. Ideally the man who cuts the bamboo should go to get the stick before he carried out his morning toilet to avoid possible contamination with bodily smell and matter as spirits are repelled by this and might refuse to go into the bamboo stick to talk out on its circumstances of death.

When the construction of the shelter was completed, the bamboo stick was installed on forks in a way that one end, which was decorated with lids of beer bottles and seeds from a tree that would rattle when moved, hung under the shelter over the grave. When the bamboo stick was hung up, one of the sons made the announcement to Josephine's spirit that the family would return at seven at night.

Before dusk I went to the 'house of cry' to wait together with the family for nightfall. Since I had been asked to have an eye on the time, I announced the time at ten to seven, but no one moved. At seven I called the time again. I had been told before that one had to perform the ritual straight at seven o'clock since it was the time that had been announced to the spirit. If one would not follow the time, other spirits might take their chance and go inside the bamboo to play a trick. But since the daylight still simmered through, the family decided to wait until nightfall; darkness was a precondition for the ritual to work. At twenty past seven Eddi Gawi



No 37: Shelter with bamboo for a divination ritual in the context of Josephine's death (C.Falck 2013).

(Possuko clan), who had been asked to assist during the ritual, came and said that one had to go to the grave at seven o'clock straight. When he heard that the time had already passed, he rushed the assembled men to hurry.

When we arrived at the grave, darkness had already replaced the daylight and covered everything. Eddi took the lead and knocked with a bone in his hand on the bamboo to check whether the spirit had already entered the stick. When no answer came after a few minutes, the men said they had seen a firefly flying away from the grave – a sign that the spirit of the dead had already left the grave and was wandering around. Someone had seen that the glow-worm flew to Wilfred's (Josephine's son) house where the assembled men decided to walk to now. They lifted up the bamboo stick, carrying it in their elbows without touching it with their hands. At Wilfred's house Markus Ivut (Josephine's brother) took the bone to knock the bamboo and after a while the stick started to move and jingle. I was told that not the men, but the spirit was controlling the bamboo stick. It guided the men holding the bamboo to the shoreline of the lake. Then it turned back and guided them to Josephine's family house. I was told to go and wait inside the house with other women – the bamboo stick would probably come inside. Sitting inside the house we heard how the men guided by the bamboo stick circled the house, before the stick went under the house where it paused for a while. Then the men were guided into the family house. There Josephine's husband took the bone and hit the bamboo while asking questions concerning his wife's death. Also her son tried his luck, but no clear answers could be retrieved – no definite information on who had caused her death could be identified. Then the men were pulled outside again by Josephine's spirit who shortly afterwards left the bamboo.

Already while still sitting in the house people started to speculate why there was no clear answer. Josephine's sister Maria explained that the spirit was angry with her family; that she was not *wanbel* with them and therefore did not want to talk out. Later, too, people talked about the event. Some said that the group had missed the right time to ask the spirit and that other spirits had entered the bamboo. Others said that the men had held the stick in the wrong way, with the decorated end showing in the wrong direction, namely to the back. Others interpreted the indifferent statements of the spirit as a sign that different people had contributed to her death. However, all seemed to agree that the fact that the spirit had not disclosed clear information was a sign that the *hevi* would still remain and find its way back to the family. Especially the fact that the bamboo stick had disappeared under the family house was read as an announcement for further death cases.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ It was also interpreted as Josephine's spirit showing the place where Sambang had put a *jambia* to destroy her.

After the bamboo divination had not brought the desired clarification, the family decided to try another divination on day four after Josephine's death. I did not attend this divination as I only learned about it after it was already over, but Timothy who witnessed the event told me about what had happened the next day: Wilfred's second wife went to the grave and put her hand under the constructed shelter. She felt a frog crawling up her arm, a sign that Josephine's spirit started to use her. However, when she got up and was about to leave the grave to go back to the house, the young woman announced that the spirit had already left her and that she felt normal again.

Josephine's family was under considerable stress to find out about the cause of her death; if the respective spirits could not be appeased more family members might die. When also the last attempt to receive clarification failed, the family wanted to ask the spirit of David during the next Friday night prayer meeting. During one of the prayer meetings he had announced that father and son had contributed to Josephine's death, which they, however, denied. When I returned to the field in November 2014, finding a consensus was no longer an issue; different parties had different opinions about the reasons for Josephine's death.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

In Timbunmeli death does not end a person's being-in-the-world. The dead remain part of the world and part of a network of relations. With that social relations outlast death. As mentioned above, the spirits of the dead remain with the living and watch over them. They not only may cause harm, as reflected in the case studies, but also give support as seen in the case of the widow Imelda. Her dead husband looks after her and punishes trespasses against her. Imelda told me that she received strength from knowing that her husband was watching out for her.

When we compare the two case studies, several parallels can be identified that inform us about underlying principles, beliefs and practices. Thereby, both cases reflect ongoing changes in people's practices and beliefs that although being in the process of change nevertheless follow basic principles of people's understanding of the world. In both cases not a medical condition but '*samting bilong graun*' and spiritual agency was seen as the reason for the respective person to die. In both cases the family had tried to change the course of events by praying, but also by following the customary way (*kastom*). In Nelcy's case her family wanted to reconcile with Imelda to appease her dead husband; in Josephine's case one had tried to appease angry spirits by offering a pig. Furthermore, in both cases the family had turned to the

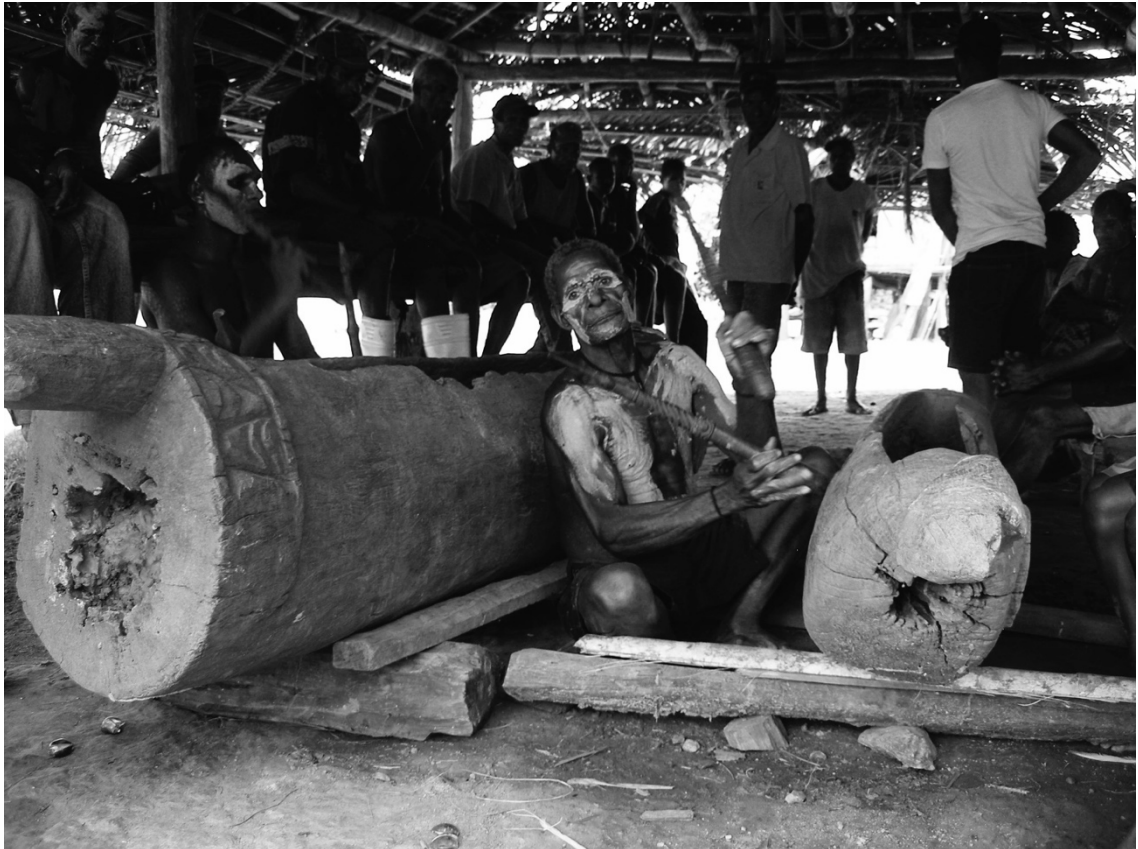
spirit of David to receive help. Also, in both cases a form of divination was undertaken to receive clarification on the circumstances of death.

If offended, a spirit may take revenge by attacking one of the offender's family members, not necessarily the person who caused the infringement herself/himself. The identification of the single person with the social other is obvious. As also described by Silverman (1993: 308-312) in the context of a canoe divination among the East Iatmul, the acts of others may affect an individual since s/he is connected and identified with social others. The death of both Nelcy and Josephine was caused by the trespasses of a family member (or members) for which Nelcy and Josephine were punished. The dead remain part of a network of relations that not only define the scope of agency of a single person, but also the scope of her/his life is determined by relationships formed in social networks between the living and the dead.

Other anthropologists have suggested that rituals of death in the Sepik region aim to break with a deceased person (Telban 2014, Wassmann 1982: 123-124, 1991: 80). Telban argues 'the aim of the whole mourning period is twofold: first, to break with a deceased person, and second, to enable the surviving relative to fill the concomitant specific absence of relations with more or less identical ones' (Telban 2014: 1). He describes how a final hair cutting ceremony that ends the time of mourning among the Ambonwari functions as cutting off the relationships with a deceased person. Since a person is determined by the relationships s/he has with others, after this cut a replacement of the lost relationships is necessary, e.g. by remarrying, giving birth, or adopting a child, so that one is not radically transformed into a person lacking constitutive relationships. Also Wassmann argues that relations with the dead have to be cut off. According to him a fear that spirits of the dead could bring sickness and death to the living necessitates the radical separation of the living and the dead implemented in former rituals of death.

I suggest, that in Timbunmeli today death rituals cannot be understood as an attempt to end relationships with the deceased. Although spirits of the dead are perceived as being capable of bringing sickness and death if angered in Timbunmeli, today villagers do not aim at bringing about a radical break, but in fact strive to build on their relationships with the dead. As we will see in the following chapters, currently many people seek to actively engage with the dead long after the mourning period and its rituals have ended. Currently, villagers actively try to keep up relations with the dead, and try to communicate with them via spirit possessions, mobile phones, and letters (as well as visions and dreams).

CHAPTER 4: Nyaura Ontology and Cosmology in a Context of Religious Change



No 38: Jerry Gawi beating one of the remaining slit drums of Timbunmeli village (C.Falck 2013).

In this chapter I discuss Nyaura ontology and cosmology under the influence of Christianity. I argue that persisting ontological premises of the Nyaura lifeworld were crucial for the way people appropriated Catholicism and made it their own. I also suggest that people have consciously adopted Christianity as a way to bring about change. However, in my assessment, no radical change in the sense of a break with the past can be identified. Rather people have accommodated the new doctrine to their own understanding of the world.

One of the most influential studies of religious change in the anthropology of Melanesia is Joel Robbins' monograph 'Becoming Sinners' (2004a). Robbins argues that the subjects of his study, the Urapmin of the Sandaun Province (formerly West Sepik), have adopted Christianity as a whole new culture. Robbins' monograph has to be seen in the context of a new interest in Christianity within Melanesian anthropology (e.g. Barker 1992; Hess 2006; Jebens 2005; Knauff 2002; Mosko 2001; Stewart and Strathern 1997). Whereas Robbins argues for a radical change, others, similar to myself, have argued for continuity within processes of religious change (e.g. Lawrence 1964; Mosko 2010; Otto and Borsboom 1997; Telban 2015; Van Heekeren 2004b; Wood 2011).

The Urapmin, according to Robbins, have undergone a self-inflicted rapid and radical cultural change. Drawing on Marshall Sahlins' structural history (e.g. Sahlins 1981, 1985, 1992)⁹⁶ Robbins (2004a: 10, 2005) differentiates between three different models of change: In the model of assimilation people integrate new circumstances into their own cultural categories. Their own categories may be expanded without the relations between them changing. In the model of transformation (or transformative reproduction), the relations between the categories change as a result of the attempted assimilation of new happenings. In the third model, which according to Robbins corresponds to the Urapmin case, 'people take on an entirely new culture on its own terms, forgoing any conscious effort to work its elements into the categories of their traditional understandings' (ibid.). Central to Robbins' model of change is Sahlins' notion of humiliation as a driving factor for change (Sahlins 1992). Sahlins has described humiliation as disgrace resulting from the depreciation of 'all indigenous senses of worth, both the people's self-worth and the value of their objects' (ibid.: 24). Robbins developed Sahlins' notion further by suggesting 'that the initial humiliation must take place in traditional terms' (ibid.: 9). In sec-

⁹⁶ Central to Sahlins' model of change is the 'structure of the conjuncture'. Sahlins (1981) suggests that people act upon circumstances according to their own cultural presuppositions (p.67). But, 'nothing guarantees that the situations encountered in practice will stereotypically follow from the cultural categories by which the circumstances are interpreted and acted upon. Practice, rather, has its own dynamics – a structure of the conjuncture – which meaningfully defines the persons and the objects that are parties to it' (p.35). Thus, what might have started as reproduction of cultural categories might end in their transformation.

tion 4.3 I pick up on Robbins suggestion and show how the encounter between Europeans and latmul might have brought about a feeling of inferiority in the self-assertive society (Bateson 1958[1936]). I suggest that the way people appropriated Catholicism and especially the Catholic charismatic movement is in line with ontological premises of the Nyaura lifeworld and can be read as a struggle to regain their former selfworth.

I take the notion of ‘humiliation’ as a broad metaphor for a social and psychological state resulting from the realisation of being overpowered by Western superiority and disempowered in relations with other Sepik societies. With the encounter with Westerners a process set in that started to change relations at the middle Sepik (Gewertz 1983) – relations that the latmul had with others, but also with themselves and their cultural items.

In the following, I will introduce the nature of spirit beings that constitute an important part of people’s lifeworld as their Being is intimately connected with them. Although they dwell in an invisible sphere, their sphere is part of the existential space of humans.

In the second section I present the Nyaura Genesis and the importance that spirit beings play in the process of worlding. Whereas the direct effect of missionisation was a devaluation of the Nyaura spirit world, currently a revaluation process is taking place. The biblical Genesis is adapted to the latmul creation myth and people identify correlations between their own mythical repertoire and that of the Catholic Church.

In the third section I will show how beings and Being presently undergo a re-interpretation in Timbunmeli – framed in Christian terms but based on underlying ontological principles of the Nyaura lifeworld. Part of these principles is the intertwinement of Being with the spiritual other present in people’s lifeworld. During the process of missionisation people have consciously distanced themselves from their spirits after being convinced that they were evil. But those spirits persisted to be present and connected with people’s Being and thus have contributed to people now re-appropriating them as a legitimate force in their life-world. I will present a worlding process that moves from the appropriation of Christian spirit beings to the re-assertion of Nyaura spirits as the powerful source of everything that is.

4.1 The Road of the Dead – spirit beings and different realms of existence

*‘Wara i man!’*⁹⁷, my Nyaura mother Lina explained when waves swept into our canoe and water started to rise around our feet. Heavy wind had stirred up the water of the Chambri Lake to a

⁹⁷ Tok Pisin for ‘The water is a person’. See also Bateson (1958[1936]: 230-231).

white foaming sea. Lina was scared. The water, regardless of our efforts to scoop it out, threatened to sink the heavily loaded canoe. Lina started to pray and hit the sea with her rosary that she held in her right hand. ‘Naughty! Enough!’, she exclaimed.

In Timbunmeli spirits are part of people’s lifeworld, their experienced reality. Here, not only humans have agency, but spirits, and in certain contexts also things, contain agency and are classified as persons. They act, have feelings, are male or female, and spirits have bodies that humans usually are unable to see. Spirits dwell in a concealed parallel world that is invisible to the human eye. There they live in a social order and with their own things, like houses, cooking utensils, men’s houses and today also cars and new technologies. They live in an invisible part of the world and everything that exists in the Nyaura cosmos relates to it. With that the Nyaura cosmology conforms to Miller’s characterisation of ‘an underlying principle to be found in most religions’, namely that: ‘materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real’ (2005: 1). Bateson (1958[1936]: 230) has noted: ‘It is said secretly that men, pigs, trees, grass – all the objects in the world – are only patterns of waves.’ Silverman (2001: 22) states that spirits in Tambunum inhabit a concealed world. Humans would live on the surface of reality. Also Harrison (1990: 55), mentions the ‘idea of two “paths”, or ‘basic orders of being’ among the Manambu: ‘the world of outward, phenomenal appearances in which ordinary men and women live, and the hidden but more “real” order peopled by spirits and ghosts’. Bateson (1958[1936]: 237), too, noted the idea of different realms of existence that are called ‘*iamba*’ in the latmul language – roads. He says:

I was told that human beings, *wagan*, *kurqwa* (witches), and *windjimbu* (wood spirits), have all of them separate “roads”. But some informants were inclined to think that there were only two “roads”, that of human beings and that of spirits; others again discriminated three roads, that of *wagan* and *kurqwa*, that of *windjimbu*, and that of human beings. I was told in pidgin English that *wagan* were “behind true”, i.e. that though invisible they were yet present in some mysterious way which we might express by reference to the “fourth dimension” or to another “plane of existence” The word *iamba* (road), as applied to these spiritual beings seemed, although the roads were described as means of instantaneous transport, to be also an equivalent of “planes of existence” (1958[1936]: 237; underlining added to mark latmul term).

The different roads of humans and spirits occupy the same existential space of Timbunmeli’s lifeworld and are not exclusive domains (Van Heekeren 2004b: 104) – they are interconnected. Experiences derived from interactions with spirit beings are part of the process of worlding and take influence on people’s lifeworld. Sometimes humans feel their presence when perceiving a smell of rot, feeling a touch on their skin, experiencing a suddenly rocking canoe, or seeing the image of a spirit like a vision. Other times they may be hit, made sick, or killed by spirits. Spirits may also manifest in the visible world of humans. Then, they take possessions of human bodies; show up as a wild pig or cassowary in the bush or as a crocodile

or turtle in the water; they may take the form of clan totem, slip into things, or, nowadays, talk to people on the phone (Chapter 3, 6, 7).

The things that are hidden (*stap hait*) intensely occupy the people in Timbun and they have developed practices that aim at making them visible (*kamap ples kliq*) and getting hold of their power, such as magical spells, offerings, and prayers. Currently, people are also very interested in getting access to what they call ‘the road of the dead’ (*rot bilong indaiman*). Thereby, the road of the dead does not only refer to a different realm of existence, but, as Bateson has mentioned, also to ‘means of instantaneous transport’ on which the living and dead can not only exchange messages, but on which the dead could also deliver help (*helpim*) to the living. Especially in Chapter 6 and 7 I will look at practices that aim at accessing the ‘road of the dead’. In the Nyaura context, the main techniques to employ spirit beings for one’s concerns and reveal their power have been magical spells and secret names, but also rituals that contained offerings to a spirit with the intention to either appease it or receive its support. Today also prayers and intention letters are ways to ask for help from the spirit realm.

The West Iatmul differentiate between ancestral clan spirits (*wagen*), spirits of the dead (*undumbu*), spirits of the bush (*miunjumbu*), and spirits of the water (*wanjemook*). Each clan has a powerful ‘headspirit’ (*het spirit*, *wagen*) that has subordinated spirits under it. Until recently, people had an active relationship with *wagen* spirits. They were called upon by knowledgeable men, healers, and sorcerers to get assistance in times of rituals, fights, illness and revenge (see also Spearritt 1982: 110; Wassmann 1982: 48-50, 1991: 40-42 about *wagen* cult (*wagen mbangu*) in Kandingei, and Bateson 1958[1936]: 136-138 for East Iatmul). Their place was the men’s house. There they were bound by magical spells to house posts and other carvings. When activated through spells, they could slip into human bodies to talk to people.

When telling me about the usefulness that *wagen* had for their fathers, Timothy Thomas (Nambuk clan) said: ‘*Wagen* are a good thing.’ Stephen Saun (Yak clan) tuned in: ‘It is like a wireless or something like that. Just like the mobile phone now.’ If one wanted to know how family members in other places were doing, one just had to ask a *yanonyang* (shaman) who could access a *wagen*. He could have told them how their family was doing.

Today people feel that their access to *wagen* has been lost. Whereas *wagen* still exist in the Nyaura cosmos, people have lost their knowledge about how to safely access, activate, and control them – their accessibility has escaped them. While *wagen* spirits are still part of the Nyaura’s lifeworld (see for example Beno’s illness, Chapter 2.4), people cannot actively engage with them anymore without being at risk of severe consequences. Attempts to re-engage with *wagen* have often led to sickness and death since men do not know the correct words and names that have to be used.

In May 2015 I received a text message from one of my clan brothers, Iven Mavak, informing me about a sickness that had befallen a man from the village, Alois Wangi (Possuko clan). Suddenly one day, Alois was not able to move his hands and legs anymore and was since then forced to lie in his house and be fed by others. Alois had quickly admitted that he had tried to do *sibbukundi* (magical spells) involving the *wagen* of another clan, Sigundemi (Yak clan). But Alois had made a mistake and the *wagen* turned back on him and paralysed him. Every effort to straighten the situation was without success and Alois died in August 2015.

As young men, the current generation of male leaders had distanced themselves from the practices of the *wagen kult* and had turned to the Catholic mission. As a result, their fathers died without passing their knowledge about how to control their clan spirits to them and the ability to access them got lost.

In an article Sahlins (1992: 24) describes the driving motor for processes of change as being the stage of humiliation or disgrace that people feel in the face of a supposedly superior foreign culture:

To “modernize,” the people must first learn to hate what they already have, what they have always considered their well-being. Beyond that, they have to despise what they are, to hold their own existence in contempt – and want, then, to be someone else.

Others (e.g. Mead 1978, Telban 1997a: 324n10, 1997b: 26, 2009; Tuzin 1997) have described the mission’s initialisation of the public display and/or abandonment of secret men’s cult regalia and with that their disempowerment in the face of a new deity and in the eyes of everyone. In Timbunmeli people themselves took part in the devaluation of their father’s practices after being convinced that their spirits were evil and that Christian practices were more powerful and successful than their own. Timbunmeli’s current leaders actively initiated processes of change by taking on a new religion and discarding their old practices and beliefs. Some of the secret shrines were sold to artefact buyers and tourists, others destroyed. One man told me how he, as a young man who had joined the mission work, went into a men’s house (*geggo*) and destroyed a carving that represented one of his clan spirits. He wanted to prove to his father that the Christian God was much stronger than the ‘false God’ (*god giaman*, *wagen*) of his father. He ascribed the reluctance of his father to share secret mythological knowledge with him to this incident and his involvement with the Catholic mission.

The lack of interest to learn from the elders has resulted in an abandonment of male initiation and other rituals contributing to the loss of secret knowledge. Today men in Timbunmeli are no longer able to activate and control the spirits necessary for building and inaugurating a men’s house, let alone carrying out an initiation ceremony. Every now and then, I heard talk about men’s intention to build a new *geggo*, but since no one really knows anymore

how to look after the powerful spirits, men are afraid that mistakes might lead to death. Therefore, it is planned to involve the parish priest in the opening of the new men's house – he would be asked to bless it and with that provide protection from spirits that men do not know to handle anymore. The new *geggo* would not contain any *kastom* (ancestral custom or law that contains spiritual agency). It would only be *kalsa* (culture) – without the involvement of magic and ancestral spirits, but with the involvement of prayers and the blessing by the parish priest. The initiation ceremony, too, would be accompanied by the blessing of the church and the marks of the crocodile that decorate the skin of initiated men would only be a sign of upholding one's *kalsa*.⁹⁸

As Sahlins (1992: 24) has argued, 'humiliation is double-edged' – it can lead to cultural self-consciousness and the re-invention of culture: 'The people have discovered they have their own "culture." Before they were just living it. Now their "culture" is a conscious and articulate value. Something to be defended and, if necessary, reinvented' (ibid.: 24-25). In Timbunmeli not only cultural self-consciousness and a reification of culture is prevalent, but as we will see later, currently also a re-appropriation process is taking place propelled again, I would argue, by a notion of 'humiliation' due to disillusionment. Although Timbunmeli men say that in former times, *wagen* were often used to bring harm to others and are identified with a time of wars, head-hunting, and sorcery threats, they nevertheless regret that they are left without the ability to access them. *Wagen* gave strength and power to men and communities and people believe that their forefathers were more powerful than they are today. Often I would hear men say that their fathers and forefathers were *powerful* men, Gods of the ground (*god bilong ground*), whereas the current generation would live ignorantly (*stap longlong*). Leslie Kaiban, remembering his father Kaiban, said:

L: My father, I use to say, he was a God of the ground. Everything he said would come up. My father had that kind of wisdom [*save*]. [...].

I: He was a man of the *kastom*.

L: He was a man of the *kastom*.

I: Was he man of the church, too?

L: Oh, the church, no. His belief was, his belief was of all sorts of things. And he said 'Who are you? I, too, I am God.' He had a big wisdom. He had a great *power*. [...] I do not know what kind of thoughts my father had and he did not pass all of this on [to his sons]. [...]. We did not want to, or it was something that belonged to God, or. I do not know. They were the Gods of before [the knowledgeable men]. The God that we are looking for now [the Christian God], he is hiding. He is on the ground, it was these people, ya. They had the knowledge [*save*] to break the ground, and go, go, go, go [in it] and only the head would be visible. They had the knowledge to break a tree and go inside and stay there. You would not be able to see them. [...]. They held the power to hide. And, you see, he [Kaiban] had all this kind of power.

⁹⁸ Already in 2012 there was talk about building a new *geggo*, but until I left the village in January 2014 no action was taken. When I returned in November 2014, men were still talking about building a men's house, but were afraid of negative consequences.

Although people had actively distanced themselves from the practices of the past, today the notion arises that they might have lost more than they have gained by doing away with their secret knowledge and practices, leaving them powerless and in a state of decay. The notion of ‘humiliation’ that has led the Nyaura to distance themselves from their past, has returned with people realising that the desired development and betterment of their living conditions did not occur after they had changed their practices and denomination.

Whereas wagen spirits are nowadays withdrawn from people’s daily lives, spirits of the dead (undumbu) are most present. To a certain extent we can say that they have stepped into the void that the wagen have left. Although spirits of the dead have communicated with the living also in the past, via bamboo and canoe divinations,⁹⁹ today they also slip into human bodies and thus offer a direct bodily experience with the spiritual (see esp. Chapter 5 & 6). Today people ask spirits of the dead during spirit possessions for guidance and help – sometimes more often than once a week.

In former times, human bones were important aspects of practices connected to the religious domain. Scraped bone was used to empower men with ancestral strength, but also hair and bones (e.g. jaw, skull, leg) were kept and used in rituals to receive the protection and support of the dead during gardening, fishing, hunting, and fights. During his visits 1912/1913 in different Sepik villages Adolf Roesicke found skulls and skeletons kept in houses, and bones worn as body decorations (Schindlbeck 2015). Also in Bateson’s early ethnography we find descriptions and photos substantiating the importance of bones as spiritual relicts among the *latmul* (Bateson 1932a,b, 1958[1936]). However, although the dead seemed to have always had an important part in people’s lives, what has changed in current practices is that today the recently deceased have acquired a new importance while the access to wagen has become difficult. Today people turn to their dead fathers, mothers, children and siblings to receive support. Spirits of the dead, however, do not only assist people and watch over the living, but they can punish misbehaviour against themselves or family members with misfortune, illness and death.

Water- and bush-areas in people’s surrounding are further enlivened with spirits. Bush- and waterspirits control those areas and have to be treated with respect. Before working in the bush men are supposed to offer coconut sago to the miunjumbu (bush-spirit, also called unjumbu, *mi* = tree, wood) that inhabits the region. If offended by an unobservant human who urinates, defecates or swears in its living area, or who cuts the bush without informing the spirit

⁹⁹ During a bamboo (Chapter 3) or canoe divination the spirit moves a bamboo or canoe and men can ask questions about the circumstances of its death. The spirit answers the questions with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ by moving the bamboo or the canoe (see also Silverman 1993, Telban 2001, 2009, Telban and Vávrová 2014).

before, a bush- or water-spirit may take revenge by harming people. If it gets offended by human misbehaviour, it can punish the offender or his family. This was also the case during the high-water in April 2013 when one morning a huge grass-island was drifting in front of the village – driven there by an angered spirit of the bush (appendix p.252, photo no 39, p.115).

A *wanjemook*, too may be angered by disrespectful behaviour, such as swearing, defecating or urinating in its area. When enraged a water-spirit may send a thunderstorm or heavy wind and rain that not only threatens to destroy people's houses but also endangers those who are travelling in their canoes – like us upon my first journey to the village. While Lina did not know what had stirred up the spirit whose action threatened to capsize and sink our canoe, she tried to control it by praying to God – the most powerful being there is in Timbunmeli today.

Nowadays the village is a Christian community – with mainly Catholics, but also AOG and a few SDA and SSEC followers.¹⁰⁰ The mission work became strong during the 1980s in Timbunmeli. In 1988 a church building was inaugurated and, as the pastoral worker Iven Mavak



No 39: A *miagwi* floating in front of the Possuko clan compound threatening to destroy Pampangawi's house (C.Falck 2013).

¹⁰⁰ The denomination of the adult population (292 people) of Timbunmeli Island is as follows: 220 Catholics, 56 AOG (Assemblies of God), 6 SDA (Seven Day Adventist), 6 SSEC (South Seas Evangelical Church), 2 Israel Ministries Church, 1 Four Square Gospel Church, 1 Revival Fellowship.

remembers the important day for the village's history, people received the three sacraments of baptism, confession, and marriage on that day. During the 1990s a charismatic movement had swept the Catholic communities of the Chambri Lake and more people in Timbunmeli got baptized and converted to the Catholic mission. With that a profound change took place: The rich ritual world of the past vanished, but new rituals were appropriated and integrated into local practices. Today Christianity, prayer meetings, and church visits on Sun- and Catholic Feast days have taken over the activities and beliefs surrounding the *wagen kult* of the past. Interestingly, as will become clear in the following, although a lot has changed in people's lifeworld, underlying ontological premises apparently have shown a strong resilience to change. These premises are an intimate connection between spirits, the world, and human Being, an existential relation between spirit (*kaik*) and body (*bange*), the possibility to change material appearances, as well as the immanence of the spirit sphere as part of people's lifeworld.

4.2 Nyaura Genesis and the Agency of Spirits and Things

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2 The Holy Bible 2016).¹⁰¹

Water, wind, and ground, are the elements from which the Nyaura lifeworld was created. At the beginning of the Nyaura cosmos there was only water. Then a wind stirred up the primordial sea and slowly ground came up – *kavak*.¹⁰² It was Kavakmeli, a crocodile. This primordial being split and from its body heaven and ground came into existence (Wassmann 1988: 12).

From a hole in the ground near a place called Mävimbīt, situated in the Sepik Plains, a dog appeared, started to wander over the ground, and left his footmarks on the yet unsolid ground. Within the hole other beings sat, surrounded by darkness. When they left the hole, they opened their eyes and saw light. Those ancestral beings (*kiparl*, *kipdu* m., *kiptauqwa* f.) started to wander the ground, making it firm and solid with their footfalls. They migrated into the world, formed the landscape, created villages and descendants, and named everything that exists – plants and trees, birds and fish, animals of the bush, things, natural phenomena, and spirits (for

¹⁰¹ The Tok Pisin version of the vers is: '*Bipo bipo tru God i mekim kamap skai na graun na olgeta samting i stap long en. Tasol graun i no bin i stap olsem yumi save lukim nau. Nogat. Em i stap nating na i narakain tru. Tudak i karamapim bikpela wara na spirit bilong God i go i kam antap long en*' (Anonymous 1989).

¹⁰² The term *kavak* is used when referring to the first ground that came into existence. In the Nyaura mythology it is related to an ancestral spirit being, Kavakmeli, a crocodile that started to float in the water. The common term for ground is *kipma*.

latmul creation myths see also e.g. Bateson 1932b: 404-405; Moutu 2013: 161; Silverman 2001: 27; Stanek 1983: 200-202; Wassmann 1982:65, 1988: 12, 1990: 24, 1991: 50).

Kiparl is a term that specifically refers to ancestral beings that came up from the ground (kipma) and that were involved in the creation process. Some of my informants equated those ancestral beings with wagen spirits (see also Stanek 1983: 253, 453). Whereas the expression kiparl seems to be used when reference to the mythical past is made, the term wagen is used when people talk about the acting or communicating ancestral being. I would like to borrow Stanek's definition of wagen as a term that refers to the 'present, acting, appearing ancestor' (Stanek 1983: 253, my translation) in opposition to all other terms that refer to the ancestor as a category, which in case of the Nyaura in Timbunmeli would be nyaik, or gwaak.¹⁰³

Some of the ancestral beings (kiparl) had humanlike bodies – but they were much taller (see also Schmid and Kocher-Schmid 1992: 13), stronger, and their bodies were well built. Men told me about two graves in Kandingei – they are the graveyards of two kiparl. My Nyaura uncle Mangas, too, told me during one of our conversations about these two beings. They were two of his clan ancestors who emerged from a hole in the ground in Mävimbit and wandered through the land before they finally arrived in Kandingei where they then died:

We, the Nyaura, originated from one place that is Mävimbit. [...]. We came from one place, where a hole is situated. [...]. Our ancestors came from there. [...]. Two men, we call them x and y¹⁰⁴, they were two tall men, very tall men. If they would stand at the bottom of this mountain, their heads would be as high up as this house [which is situated on the mountain]. They were tall men. Their graves are in our bush [in Kandingei]. [...]. They came up with the ground. When the ground came up, they came into being. They arrived at our place [Kandingei], then they died.

Other ancestral beings resembled animals. They, too, are considered to be forefathers and people strongly identify with them. Mangas:

When the ground came up there were no men on this ground. A dog walked across the ground first. According to our story, we call this ground kavak. [...]. We say Kavakmeli, it is a crocodile. When we say it [kavak] we mean crocodile, together with ground. [...] When the ground came up, there were no men. Ok. The dog was the first person. Dog. [...]. There was nothing on this ground, but then the dog was the first thing that came up from that ground. And he put his leg on this ground. The story goes like that. And that is why we say that the dog is our ancestor, of the Nyaura and me, that is Gama. We say that they are our ancestors. The dogs. So if someone hits a dog, I say 'Do not beat our ancestor!'

Those ancestral beings are considered to be persons – whether they are plants, or animals, or humanlike figures. Through their (re)productive power, villages and families were formed and the social order was established (see also Wassmann 1988: 12ff; Schmid and Kocher-

¹⁰³ See also Stanek's remark: 'Bateson talks about 'ancestors' and 'shamanic spirits' as if they were two different categories of beings. He was not aware that they were two aspects of the same ancestral being. This is most obvious in the usage of personal names: in the statements about wagin (shamanic spirits) the same ancestral names occur as in those of the ngwal (ancestors). Bateson calls the ancestral being Kivinbangi - without noticing it - once ngwal (p.406), another time wagin (p.402)' (Underlining added by author to mark latmul term; Stanek 1983:453, my translation).

¹⁰⁴ The names shall not be revealed.

Schmid 1992: 13). When they died, they became spiritual substance again, and so do people after death. Like human bodies today, their material form conceptually relates to the ground. Some of my informants mentioned that some of the *kiparl* turned into landscape features, like stones and mountains. Wassmann (1991: 85-86), too, cites informants stating that the ground was made up from ancestral bodies and documented respective myths (see also Stanek 1983: 251, 253). Although I could not record a Nyaura myth reflecting this, I was told a myth inherited from the Manawi, the original landowners of the island, about a spirit being called Ukata that changed into a stone after being betrayed by humans. The myth, the spirit and the stone, which is located at the backside of Timbunmeli island, have been appropriated by the Nyaura on Timbunmeli since the spirit being is part of their lifeworld now. Ukata can help people, but also punish misbehaviour as I learned on a trip to the spirit stone in October 2013. I accompanied a family who wanted to ask the *kiparl* during a washing ritual to help the family's children who were often sick. Although in former times humans had treated Ukata unjust by betraying him with a false brideprice payment, he was not an evil spirit. He was willing to help humans who treated him with respect. But those who were careless in his presence and mistreated him, he would punish. Once a man from the village had, against all warnings, sharpened his bushknife on the stone and in the aftermath was haunted by Ukata's spirit who gave him pain. Only after the man returned to the stone and apologized to Ukata, his pain ended (appendix p.253).

Every clan traces its origin back to mythical beings and holds a totemic repertoire of names, spirits, animals, things and myths that relate to their mythical clan founders. Song cycles (*sagi*) contain the migration paths of the clans' founding fathers and enclose rights to names and land. As a memory assistance men competing for rights to names and places used a knotted cord, called *kirugu*. Every clan had its own *kirugu* and *sagi* as every clan has its own history (see Wassmann 1990: 26 for a map showing the routes of ancient migrations of Kandingei's clans, also in Wassmann 1982, 1991). Before, the *kirugu* and the connected song cycles played a central importance in reciting song-cycles in rituals of death (*minjango*, *kitagamat*), during the inaugurations of houses (*gai sagi*) and canoes (*waala sagi*), and for resolving ground and name disputes (see also Wassmann 1982, 1988, 1991). However, in Timbunmeli this is no longer the case. All of the village founding fathers have died and with them the song cycles. There is no men's house (*geggo*) in Timbun – a place of ancestral power and rituals, where men also meet to socialize and talk about topics of ritual, political and social importance. The last *geggo* fell apart during the 1990s and the last male initiation took place during the 1980s. Only bits and pieces of the complex system remain – mirrored in the falling apart of the last *kirugu* (photo no 40, p.119).



No 40: The *kirugu* of the Possuko clan (Falck 2013).

Today, canoes are not inaugurated and if families wish to inaugurate their homes, people ask the Catholic priest to bless the new building with prayers and holy water. Also, since the Nyaura only recently came to settle on Timbunmeli, they do not need the knotted cord and song cycles to resolve ground disputes within their community. Land and fishing grounds are plentiful and if a dispute over gardens arises, one gathers those who can witness where one's parents planted their gardens or trees.¹⁰⁵ The *sagi* and *kirugu* seemed not be relevant for people's lives in Timbun and the song lines are no longer remembered.¹⁰⁶ If disputes around names arise that cannot be resolved, experts from other Nyaura communities are invited to provide clarification.

While men do not remember their clans' song cycles, they remember their families' migration histories, their totems and location of spirits. Following the oral history, the larger part of the Chambri Lake belongs to Kandingei (see also Wassmann 1982, 1991). The mythological repertoire of the Nyaura clan claims Timbunmeli Island. The Possuko clan relates

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Moutu (2013) has studied latmul ownership and found that landownership is connected to totemic names, but may also be established via historical precedence 'so that the first person who 'cuts *pitpit*' (wild sugar cane) and makes his or her garden on that parcel of land can claim ownership over it' (ibid.: 19).

¹⁰⁶ Note that already during the time of Wassmann's fieldwork people had difficulties to recite the complex song cycles, and some clans were not able to reproduce their *sagi* anymore (Wassmann 1982, 1988, 1991).

its ancestors to the swamps and grasslands opposite of the island called Tonagwan where their bush- and water spirits still live today, and also the Yak and Yagun clan locate some of their spirits in the surrounding area of the island. The spirits dwell in people's surrounding and still have immediate relevance for their lives.

Each clan holds a totemic repertoire of names, things, animals, and spirits that refer to ancestral beings; it is called gwaak da in the local vernacular or *tumbuna samting* in Tok Pisin, meaning 'paternal ancestor's thing'. The things contained in this stock are also called *as samting*, which can be translated to the 'source' or 'origin thing' of a clan. All these things were animate beings in the mythical past and today their names are still given to the living.

Each person is related to things of their ancestors through matrilineal and patrilineal descent. While the gwaak da refers to the patrilineal inherited things and is considered to be especially powerful when used in magic and sorcery, reference to the bambu da (maternal ancestor's things) of a person is made when a term of endearment is sought (e. g. interview excerpt in, p.12). Also in times of disputes, people may call out their gwaak da or bambu da and with that put a ban on their conflict partner promising not to interact with her/him anymore.¹⁰⁷ The conflicting persons should then pay attention to not interact with each other until the ban is ended; they should not talk to each other or share food. If they break their ban by interaction, sickness and possibly death will follow. A ban that was brought about by the bambu da of a person is considered to be not as severe as the one caused by calling upon a thing of the paternal totemic repertoire. To break the ban of the bambu da a male member of the maternal clan (genealogical or classificatory wau = MB) has to be presented with betelnuts. To appease the gwaak da an offering has to be made to the ancestral spirit involved, which usually consists of betelnuts and money and which is given to an elder of the respective patriclan, but may also contain the killing of animals. When the elder consumes the offer, the spirit being is said to consume the offering, too, since its ancestral power is embodied in the person of an initiated man (Chapter 2.1).

Whereas spirits contain an agency of their own, things can only act through the agency of humans and spirits. As the human body has to be filled with a life-spirit (kaik) to be alive, things have to be filled with a spirit to become a being with agency or be used by human agents to act. A human body loses its former beingness with death – when the life-spirit (kaik) has left the body for good, the body (bange) turns into a corpse (tsing) while the kaik turns into a spirit of the dead (undumbu). We can say that in Timbunmeli, things, too, change their beingness

¹⁰⁷ Bateson mentions 'if a man angered by his wife calls out the name of his important ngwail [gwaak] it is tantamount to turning her out of the house' (1932b: 431, underlining added).

when enlivened by a spirit. When a thing is used by a spirit being in Timbunmeli, it becomes that respective being; without the spirit using it, it is just an empty hull. Stanek (1983: 256-257) also states that things among the Palimbei (Central latmul) are conceptualised as empty shells (saba) that can only be animated by spirits and humans:

I also have a saba, I have the saba of a human. Only when a winsumbu [(mi)unjumbu] goes inside, I can move, only then I am alive. When a human steps out of a car, it will stop, as we saw it in the villages of the whites. As long as it is empty, it will not move. When a winsumbu goes inside, it will move. Same with an airplane. As long as it is empty, it will not move. If a winsumbu goes inside, it starts to move and flies. All sorts of saba, made by humans, shall not stay empty, they are destined for a winsumbu to go inside. It is the same with the mai-masks and mai-costumes. We construct the saba and put it up. Only when we winsumbu go inside and carry the costumes will they start to move and start to sing; they leave the enclosure of the man's house, dance and sing. After the performance is over, they go back and set aside. Without a winsumbu they will not move anymore [underlining added by author to mark latmul term; my translation].

The same holds true for spirit possessions – when possessed by a spirit, a human body becomes that respective being (Chapter 5&6). Thereby spirit beings themselves can slip into things and humans or they can be made to do so by magical spells and certain practices such as prayers or those that accompany bamboo divinations.

While saba refers to the empty hull of a thing, in Timbunmeli the 'outside skin' of the human body is called 'bange simbe'. Interestingly, Bateson states that the terms t/imbi [simbe] and t/ava [saba] were 'important words connected with the theory of possession and life':

The latter [t/ava] is the shell and framework of a mask, as distinct from the human being contained inside it. When a shamanic spirit enters into a crocodile the body of the crocodile is described as the t/ava of the spirit. But when a shamanic spirit possesses a shaman the latter is not the spirit's t/ava but its t/imbi. The body is apparently referred to as the t/imbi or t/ava of the kait [kaik]' (Bateson 1932b: 418n40, underlining added to mark latmul term).

When people's totemic ancestors want to show themselves to humans today and communicate with them, their substance can slip in material forms, like the bodies of fireflies, birds, reptiles, and other animals (see also Wassmann 1991: 291, 169- 172; 1988: 17, 23, 28-32). In former times things that were part of male ritual life – carvings, masks, and slit drums could be used by a spirit. Men could call spirit beings with magical spells or certain drum rhythms and send them into things. Telban (1998: 173-174) states that carvings ('spirit-things') in Ambonwari are considered to be beings themselves. When I asked my informants in Timbunmeli, I was told that carvings were only representations of respective spirits, not the spirit itself. With the spirit not residing in the thing, a carving might still have been considered to be the representation of a spirit being whose respective name was attributed to the thing.¹⁰⁸ But without the spiritual essence in it, the carving was a mere thing that for example could be sold, or renewed and

¹⁰⁸ Note Bateson's statement: 'I was told that all important individual objects to which personal names are given (e.g., flutes, big canoes, houses, etc.) possess kait [kaik]' (Bateson 1932b: 420n56, underlining added to mark latmul term). As stated by Silverman (1993: 139) among the East latmul a person receives a kaik with a patriname. This, reading Bateson's statement, seems to hold also true for things. However, it is not the case in Timbunmeli.

replaced.¹⁰⁹ People's fathers and grandfathers had sold carvings to buyers and collectors who had come to their village – they were only things that could be replaced. Nevertheless, those things that belonged to the ritual regalia had to be treated with respect since the spirit beings they were representing, could take offence otherwise. However, similar as in Ambonwari, in Timbunmeli a thing exists through its 'name, its place in ritual, its relationships with humans' (Telban 1998: 175) – we can say that it has a social life (Appadurai 1986). As we will also see in Chapter 7 a thing can acquire different identities and different forms of beingness, but always only via the practical engagement of humans and spirits with it.

Whereas in former times spirits only seemed to have slipped into male cult regalia, animals, and stones, today they also act in the material form of statues of Mother Mary.

Today Timbunmeli is a Christian community. People have appropriated Catholicism into their local cosmology, in which spirits have always played a central role. The Nyaura accommodated the existing beings of their lifeworld in the new worldview and identified correlations: The wind that stirred up the primordial sea is considered to be the breath or wind (*kundimuk*) of God who used magical spells (*sibbukundi*) to create the ground. The first ancestors of humankind are today called Adam and Eve. While Timbunmeli's oral history has the first beings originate from the ground, also God formed Adam from the ground that He created (Genesis 2:7, 21-22 The Holy Bible 2016). Like the Christian God blew the 'breath of life' into Adam's nostrils, the Nyaura believe that a person receives her/his life-spirit, the *kaik*, from God who will also take it back as an *undumbu* after the person dies. The graves of the two *kipar* situated in Kandingei are said to be the graves of biblical figures – their enormous size is related to the Bible verse that states that 'there were giants in the earth those days' (Genesis 6:4 The Holy Bible 2016).

4.3 The (Re-)Appropriation of Spirit Beings

While listening to the priests' sermons or reading the bible, people found similarities between bible stories and their own myths and integrated them coherently. Not only the creation story contains outstanding similitudes, my interlocutors told me, but also Noah's story is identified as being a myth about a place that was flooded by waterspirits as a punishment for sinful

¹⁰⁹ In Ambonwari an old carving became useless when being replaced with a new one since the spirit that was residing in it had moved to the new one (Telban 1998: 175).

villagers.¹¹⁰ Jerry Gawi (Yagun clan), a former pastoral worker,¹¹¹ told me his clan myth in November 2013 (appendix p.253ff.): A younger brother overheard other men talking about the wife of his older brother whom they desired. To punish the villagers, the two brothers decided to get two crocodile spirits to destroy their village with a flood. Before the village was flooded the brothers collected animal species and put them into a big doubled canoe. There they survived together with the brothers' wives and children. After the waterspirits had done their work, they demanded a payment – a daughter of the brothers whom they took with them underwater. Everything was covered with water. The brothers then sent out a bird to see if ground was to be found. After it returned with a branch of a tree, the water spirits moved the canoe to the safe place and the rescued animals and humans started to populate the ground. But before they left the ship, a dog was the first being to wander the ground – like it did in the Nyaura 'Genesis' story.

People found elements of their clan myth in the Noah story. Furthermore, the daughter given as an offering to the waterspirits is interpreted as being Mother Mary. Some people suspect that Noah and Mother Mary are their ancestors, some men also suspect that God is not an alien power, but the new name for what their forefathers had called Nyauginduma, or Kibbinbange – powerful *wagen*. Also, the *kirugu*, a knotted cord that was used by initiated men during chants containing secret knowledge about the ancestors, is considered to be similar to the rosary, an object most prevalent in the village. Praying the rosary is considered to be a way to communicate with God. While the beads of the rosary guide people through the prayer sections, the knots of the *kirugu* helped men to remember their chants that connected them with their ancestors while reciting their ancestral journeys and names.

We cannot eliminate the possibility that the local creation story was influenced by that of the Christian Genesis and because of that bears similarities – after all the Society of the Divine Word started to work in the Sepik area already in the mid 1890s¹¹² and had by 1913 established a mission station in Marienberg, by 1932 in Timbunke, and by 1957 the St Mary's Mission Station on Chambri Island had been built (Garrett 1992; Gewertz 1983; Huber 1987,1990; Peltier et al. 2015). Contacts between Iatmul and Europeans already took place in the mid 1880s. In 1885 Otto Finsch travelled 50 km upriver on the steamer Samoa. In 1886 the steamship Ottilie entered

¹¹⁰ Similarly, also in Chambri (Gewertz and Errington 1991: 154ff.) people see parallels between their own ancestral and bible stories, ancestral power and God's power. Also Lattas (1998 e.g. p.17, 24) for the Kalai on New Britain. A myth about a flooding is also mentioned by Silverman (2001: 86), Wassmann (1982: 201-203, 1991: 146-148), see also Moutu (2013: 66).

¹¹¹ Jerry Gawi quit his church office after taking a second wife. Polygamy is not approved of by the Catholic Church and Jerry feared God's anger if he would continue to work for the church. He nevertheless considers himself a strong believer.

¹¹² 1896 in Tumleo Island near Aitape; 1908 Yuo Island; 1908 Boiken (Gesch 1985: 20).

the Sepik as far as the West latmul village of Japandai (Sapandei) and its launch reached as far as 550km upriver. In 1887 the vessel Samoa again, carrying also two missionaries of the Rhenish Missionary Society, journeyed upriver and had contact with the West latmul villages Yensemangua, Korogo, Sapanaut, and Yamanambu (Claas and Roscoe 2009: 333-334; Schindlbeck 2015: 110). Claas and Roscoe (2009: 337) state:

In 1886 and 1887, Europeans made at least four journeys far up the river and back, while three of them, along with 20 other foreigners, spent over three months in the interior. When all was done, in fact, some 40 Sepik villages and many more than 3000 villagers had encountered and engaged Europeans for the first time.

Later more expeditions followed, among them the Hamburger Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910 that travelled 436 km up the Sepik in 1909 and the Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss-Expedition 1912-1913 (Adolf Roesicke and Richard Thurnwald were part of this expedition) that also entered the Chambri Lake.¹¹³ Then, the ethnographer Adolf Roesicke spent a prolonged time in Nyaura territory (Claas and Roscoe 2009; Peltier et al. 2015; Schindlbeck 2015).

However, while one might wonder whether the local creation story has been influenced by the biblical genesis, people in Timbunmeli see it different. Recognising similarities in the traditions of the Catholic Church with their own, some people suspect that the Catholic faith really is something local. They share the idea that in the past missionaries have taken something meaningful from them, confused them with metaphorical messages and stories, and now hold secrets to the truth hidden from them (see also Lattas 1998; Lawrence 1964). The hidden truth is suspected to contain secret knowledge about ways towards a better life, among them information about how to receive money from the dead. To regain access to the hidden truth, people have to change themselves and become faithful Christians as for now they are living a sinful life.

People accept that not everything in their belief and practices can be understood; some things are hidden and only known to a few. Only those who cling to their belief will finally become *initiated*, as the local church leader told me, into the secrets that surrounds Catholicism. Here, a correspondence to the male cult is obvious that in former times gave meaning and direction to people's life-world. Initiated men gained access to the secrets of the cult. However, also initiated men had only fragmented insight into secret knowledge – not everyone knew everything but there were specialists for different spheres. Women, at least ideologically, were without access to the secret knowledge of men. The belief in and the sensual experience of something that they could not fully understand or explain has always been part of people's lives.

¹¹³ Also the Crane Expedition had contact with latmul villages in 1929 (see Webb 1997). For more German, a German-dutch, and American expeditions that travelled up the Sepik see for example Schindlbeck (2015 with a focus on collections done for museums).

Now, within the situation of cultural loss, today's generation struggles to regain a meaningful life and holds on to their Catholic faith. The desire to believe is strong and during my fieldwork people recurrently reminded themselves to hold on strongly to their belief (*sanap strong long bilip*) – the slogan of the Catholic year 2013, the year of faith.

The idea of receiving assistance from the spirit world is nothing new, but is now mainly attributed to the spirits of the dead. In former times, people could ask different sorts of spirits (*wagen*, *undumbu*, *wanjemook*, *miunjumbu*) for their help and support and connect with the spirit world via visions and dreams, rituals, chants, and séances. The spirit world was people's source to power, wealth and well-being (see also e.g. Coupaye 2009, Haiveta 1990, Huber-Greub 1990, Leavitt 2005, Mitchell 1990, Silverman 2005, Smith 1990). Also the idea of punishment for wrong doings or ill behaviour from the world of the spirits is not something that has recently been introduced. The concept of *nglambi* describes a baleful condition of guilt that if not counteracted with an offering to the spirits, will take a fatal end in illness and eventually death. Today, misfortune, illness and death are also interpreted as punishments for sinful behaviour from God. Moreover, the living condition of people today is also considered to be a punishment for the fall of mankind. God has created men from the soil of the ground to live in paradise and look after his creation. But Adam and Eve (people's ancestors) did not follow God's instructions and sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, meaning having sexual intercourse, and with that brought about the fall that now separates people from the good life – the original sin, like *nglambi*, hovers over their lives.

Although people know that other countries do have an advanced economy, technology and better functioning political systems, inequality between Westerners and Papua New Guineans is not attributed to unequal power relations in the world system alone, but is tangled up with moral and racial connotations that usually make people perceive whites as being superior (see also Bashkow 2006, Lattas 1998). The binary oppositions of heaven: ground; white skin: black skin; the countries of whites: Papua New Guinea fall into this reasoning. '*Pasin bilong graun*' (translates to 'behaviour of the ground' – too much or illegitimate/extramarital sexual intercourse, jealousy, envy, uncontrolled desire and instincts, disputes, rivalry, etc.) and '*samting bilong graun*' (translates to 'something of the ground' – sorcery, *nglambi*, unknown causes of death etc.) are expressions often heard to describe types of behaviour and phenomena that people try to avoid but still feel subjected to. People say that they are sinners, they are not unified, they do not listen to authorities, and they do not master their instincts and desires. If they would change their behaviour, change would come upon them. This belief is especially obvious in the church chairman's statement: 'Sin is hiding the road. [...]. If we would be united,

became one with God, straighten ourselves, change our ways – then the missionaries would open the road, and we would live alike.’

It becomes apparent that white people and the Christian God have become perceived as being superior or more powerful. I suggest that a motivation for people to take on the new religion was a feeling of inferiority or ‘humiliation’ in the light of supposedly more powerful God and His followers. But why, one could ask, did the main conversion to Catholicism only happen in the late 1980s and mid 1990s? Missionisation had already begun in the 1920s¹¹⁴ and the mission station on Chambri Island had already been built in 1957. In the 1960s some people from Timbunmeli already converted to Catholicism, but the mission work did not become strong until the 1980s. I suggest that the sense of inferiority that led the Nyaura in Timbunmeli to become increasingly interested in the Christian God, evolved in a context of other changes that impacted on the latmul’s position as the ‘princes of the Sepik’ (Gewertz 1983: 124). I further suggest that we also have to take the re-settlement of the Nyaura to Timbunmeli into account for understanding religious change.

It is possible that strict rules and intricate structures that held the complex religious system of the Nyaura together already underwent a slackening during the first half of the 20th century when some men moved from Kandingei to Timbunmeli Island to found a new village. Only men from some of Kandingei’s clans resettled to Timbunmeli – it is likely that already here some of the knowledge, practices, and rules still in place in Kandingei got lost in the transition. One example of change is the complex systems of totemic names. As I have mentioned before, it is connected to ownership of land and water resources in Kandingei, but has lost the central significance in Timbunmeli. While totemic names are still given to the living, they are not connected to land on Timbun itself, where land and water resources are available in abundance. However, I am not suggesting that the West latmul already then had consciously distanced themselves from former practices. On the contrary, from conversations with my interlocutors I have the impression that much had been done to establish a strict order in Timbunmeli based on the model of Kandingei. Often men have told me how their fathers and grandfathers worked hard to drain the swampy ground after they arrived on Timbunmeli to make it inhabitable. While the village was yet small, two men’s houses (Timbumbi (*nyame*), Kanjimbik (*nyoui*)) were built and approximately during the 1950s the first initiation took place. Transgressions of customary rules were punished and the power of the *wagen* was feared. Deborah Gewertz (1983: 141) mentions that the secluded location of the Chambri Lake was attractive to the latmul settlers:

¹¹⁴ Two men from Kandingei called Yaua (Nyaura clan) und Nyaga (Possugo clan) were said to have been taken to Sek (Alexishafen near Madang) by a German missionary to receive training in the mission school.

If life in the lake region initially appealed to the latmul as an escape from Japanese-Allied crossfire, after the war it became a means of remaining insulated from the new Australian administration. The latmul and Chambri who lived there [islands in the Chambri Lake] were not as closely observed as were their river-dwelling counterparts (that is, not until St. Mary's Mission was built on Chambri Island in 1957). Thus, they could hold their ceremonies in peace: scarifying, initiating, divorcing, practicing polygyny, and, sometimes, allowing their young men to earn the right to wear black paint in the traditional manner – through the taking of a head, or through the ritual slaughter of an infant acquired from neighboring people.

However, by the late 1950s the influence of the colonial administration and mission was also felt in Lake Chambri. Fighting and headhunting had already been forbidden since the 1920s (see also Wassmann 1982: 50) and was slowly abandoned. Only their grandfathers, men told me, had taken part in the prestigious head-hunting raids. That head-hunting had been an important cultural practice is stated by Bateson (1958[1936]: 140-141): '[...] we can clearly see the general position of head-hunting as the main source of pride of the village, while associated with the pride is prosperity, fertility and the male sexual act' (ibid.: 141). The latmul, whose raids had been feared by others, had to cope with this change in their political-religious domain. Simultaneously, the regional exchange system, in which latmul hegemony prevailed, had started to change. As Gewertz (1983: 37-40, 104, 106) described, the latmul were not only military dominant, but had also functioned as middle men in the regional barter market system that had evolved from trading partnerships under latmul influence. While the Chambri were producers of specialised commodities such as mosquito bags and stone tools (see also Garnier 2015: 79), the Sawos produced sago but also acquired feathers and shell valuables through inland routes from their producers downriver. The latmul managed to become central in the regional trading network by trading the shell valuables that they acquired from the Sawos to the Chambri from which they acquired mosquito bags and stone tools:

The latmul were entrepreneurial geniuses, well-accustomed to transforming their advantageous geographic position into military and economic supremacy, partially by articulating Chambri commodities with Sawos valuables. Their position on the Sepik River allowed them to continue in this entrepreneurial role after the European intrusion, as missionaries, patrol officers, and explorers willingly provided them with goods in return for safe passage (Gewertz 1983: 115).

But with the introduction of cotton and nylon mosquito nets as well as steel by the Europeans, the items that the Chambri produced became obsolete. Initially the latmul, due to the location of their villages along the river, had a better access to European goods and could retain their central function in local barter markets. However, as Gewertz describes, soon communities such as the Chambri and Garamambu started to migrate out and sell their labour to Whites. Also, the Chambri started to sell artefacts and crocodile skin to Europeans. They had their own access to European commodities and money now (ibid. e.g. 115, 131, 154, 190). Gewertz writes about the Chambri: 'They thereby [by adopting a pattern of circular migration] acquired from Europeans what they had heretofore acquired from the latmul – the valuables necessary to pay for prestige, and, also necessary to pay taxes' (ibid.: 115). We can assume a

shift in power relations – the latmul lost their hegemony, not only slowly in access to European goods, but also in military power due to the pacification of the region and the overpowerment by Japanese and Allied military forces during WW2,¹¹⁵ as well as in spiritual power due to the devaluation of their spirits and religion by the influence of the mission.

We know that the Sepik River area is best understood as a regional political-economic system (Gewertz 1983; see also Harrison 1990: 18-24) and can also be considered as a cultural area in which communities have always influenced each other (Mead 1978). Along vast trading relations people exchanged next to material items, such as mosquito bags, stone tools, tobacco, shells, sago, fish, etc., also non-material culture such as ritual, magic, totemism, myths. Thus we can assume that Sepik cultures have always influenced each other's cultural repertoire. We also know that latmul societies are known for their name disputes (e.g. Bateson 1958[1936]; Silverman 2001; Stanek 1983; Wassmann 1982, 1991) in which the totemic repertoire of clans was challenged. We can assume that the latmul were used to incorporating new cultural items into their own cosmology and adapting it. In fact, the adaptability and readiness to appropriate new things has been commented on before (Mead 2002[1938]: 21; Silverman 2001: 22). However, when we look at the literature we find that the latmul were described as being dominant in their relations with other Sepik societies (Gewertz 1983, Gewertz and Errington 1991: 3). Also their cultural items were perceived as being superior by others, and the latmul perceived themselves as being superior (e.g. Gewertz 1983: 8, 110; Mead 1978: 73; Metraux 1975: 202, 1978: 47). Harrison (1990: 20) states that the Manambu imported many non-material cultural items from the West latmul, who were perceived as being especially powerful.

I suggest that we can assume a shift of the latmul self-perception with the arrival of white people – who were perceived as being more powerful (see also Silverman 2001: 23-24, 2005: 87). In here, we can find a case of 'humiliation' as argued for by Robbins in the Urapmin case. While the Urapmin 'understood themselves to be important players in a regional ritual system' (Robbins 2004a: 15), the Nyaura understood themselves as being superior in the regional system at the Sepik. When this system changed under the influence of Western intrusion, the Nyaura superiority changed into inferiority in light of the perceived superiority of white people.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Gewertz (1983: 133-137) describes how a group of latmul and Chambri men turned against other Sepik societies and Australians during WW2, raping and pillaging their neighbours and also killing white men. She says that the latmul then were 'reestablishing themselves as Sepik warriors' (ibid.: 137). However, at the end they were stopped and the 'latmul living on the Sepik River never did acquire the abundant cargo that the Japanese propaganda had promised. Instead they frequently found themselves caught in the crossfire between Japanese and Allied Forces' (ibid.).

¹¹⁶ In the reports and diary entries of Adolf Roesicke we learn about people's eagerness to acquire western material culture items. Although Roesicke describes that people were sometimes reluctant to exchange ritual regalia (e.g. Schindlbeck 2015: 78, 217-218), he seems to have been successful most of the time as people desired the bush

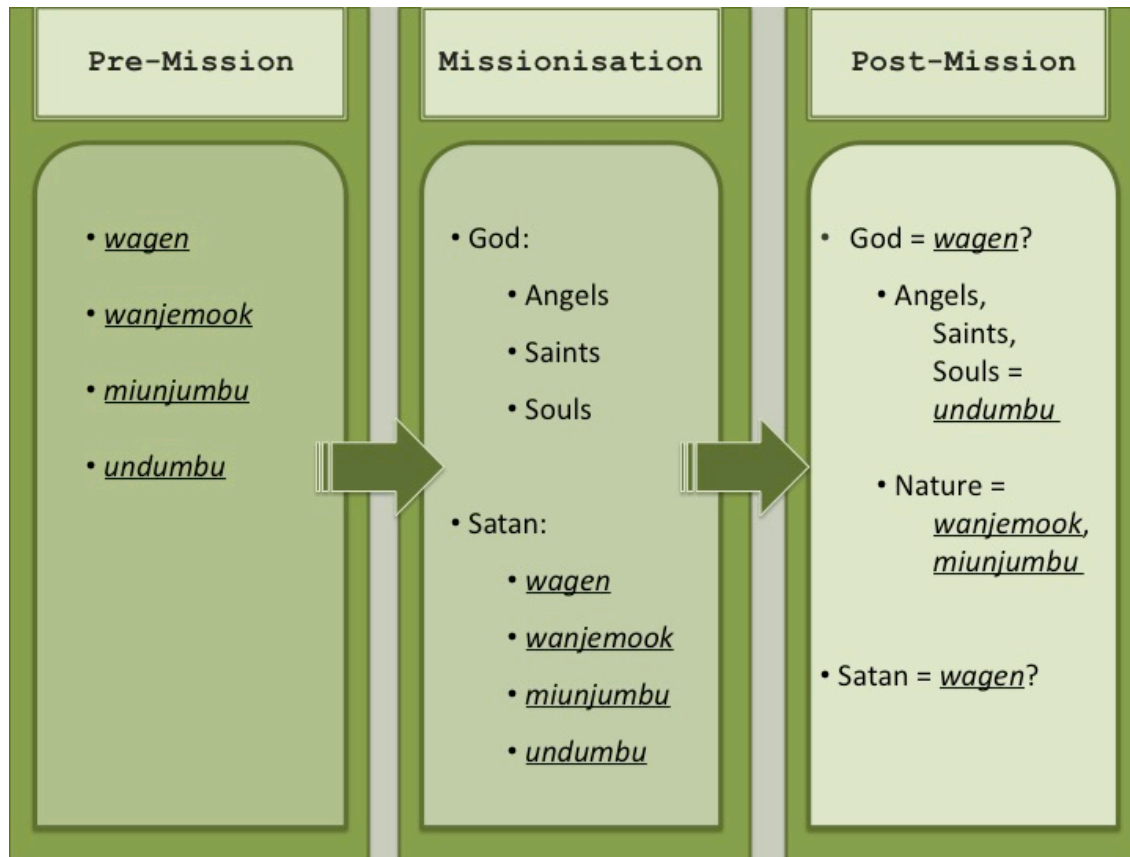
If we can assume that a devaluation of their own cultural repertoire took place, then the adoption of Catholicism may have been important for the latmul to regain their position as the 'aristocrats of the Middle Sepik' (Metraux 1975: 202). Thus, the current presentation of the Catholic belief as being inherently their own, can also be understood as a way to regain their former self-worth.

During the process of missionisation people learned that the spirits in their surrounding are evil spirits – instruments of Satan that try to trick them into sinful behaviour. Traditionally, spirits were not understood as either being bad or good, but usually would be considered harmless unless triggered by people's doings. People could make a spirit revengeful via wrongdoings, or activate it to harm others with sorcery. Today, in what could be called a post-mission situation, people feel left behind, saying that they are living on a *back-page*, far away from the benefits of development and service. On videos that they watch on DVD players powered by generators, or the mobile phone, people see the way of life in other places that seems to be much easier than their own life and they are much concerned to find ways to bring about change to their community. While many see education, employment, and marketing of local products as ways to improve their lives, others try to induce change by turning to God and the Catholic faith, which they have appropriated in a way that meets their concerns (Chapter 5&6). This process is accompanied by a re-appropriation of the spirit world that is now fitted into a Christian worldview. The spirits of villagers' life-world are currently re-interpreted as spirits of God. Today spirits of the dead are called 'souls', 'Saints', and 'angels'; spirits of the bush and water are termed 'nature' that was created by God; and He, the source of everything, is currently re-interpreted as being the most powerful clan spirit there is. Following this reasoning, Lina on my arrival in the village turned to God to calm down the angry *wanjemook* and we arrived soaked with water but safely in Timbunmeli. *Wagen* spirits which had become a synonym of Satan during the process of missionisation are currently slowly re-appropriated as meaningful with some having the suspicion that the most powerful *wagen* might be God himself.

I have produced a schematic table (no 41, p.130) to better show the process currently taking place. The table is differentiated into three phases, called 'pre-mission', 'missionisation', and 'post-mission'. However, the current situation which would fall into what I have called 'post-mission' is still under the influence of the Catholic mission. I suggest calling it a post-mission situation to reflect the dynamics that are taking place despite and also against the influence of the Catholic Church. Also, the phase called 'missionisation' probably reflects rather the

knives and other items that were offered in exchange. Furthermore, we learn that the assumption that whites had contact with the dead was prevalent among the Nyaura. As Roesicke describes, people in Jentschemangua asked him whether he had seen their dead (ibid.: 287).

viewpoint of the Catholic Mission than the actual situation in the village. The elders and their sons then were in conflict about whether or not their traditional spirits really were the evil projected by the Catholic Church. I have reconstructed the 'pre-mission' situation from what people have told me as well as from earlier studies undertaken in latmul societies – however, missionisation was then already part of latmul lives.



No 41: (Re-)appropriation of Spirits (C.Falck).

The belief that the dead can return to the living is widely spread in Timbunmeli, and also other neighbouring communities. In February 2013 Helen Kami from Wondunumbuk told me a story about how people came to believe that the dead can return to the living. Interestingly, Helen said that when the Catholic belief came to the Nyaura, it strengthened their belief that the dead can return:

Other churches they do not believe in the dead [*daiman*] – *kianimba* [dead people]. They say, the dead cannot die and come back. It is only the Catholic Church [who has this belief].

Ok, our ancestral story, I am telling you now. When our ancestors lived, they did not die. The first time that a person died, it was this woman, our *kiptaugwa*. She died and went. This *undumburaugwa* [dead woman].

Saungrimbange and his sister [her children], they were there. They were there and the spirit of Kanjekiptaugwa came. It came like a bird- Mik. Mik, is the name of that bird. It came and called out. Saungrimbange and his sister asked: 'Oi! If you are our mother, you can call out twice. If you are not our mother, you can call out once.' It called out twice. And Saungrimbange said: 'Ey! It must be the *undumbu* of mother ya!' The son did not sleep. He thought, 'Daybreak has to come quickly and I will go and witness the footprints of our mother. I really want to see it. She came like a bird

and I do not believe it. Ok, tomorrow I will see her footprints.' When the mother was a small child, when she was in her mother's womb, her father cut the leg of a crocodile. And when she came out of her mother's belly, she had a short toe. Quickly indeed the daybreak came. He told his sister, he woke her up: 'Saungrimbo, you get up! We go outside and see. Not that I step on the ground and you will think it is my footprint.' And she got up and the two of them went outside to see. This middle toe, it was short. And he said: 'That is enough. It is mother's undumbu. The undumbu of our mother.'

That is why we believe that the dead can rise and that they can come. It was like this, go, go, go, go, and then the Catholic belief, too, came inside and strengthened us. That is it. That is the story of before, before, our ancestors' story.

Whereas the communication with the spirit world has always been a vital issue for people, nowadays charismatic prayer sessions as well as new technologies provide new means to do so (Chapter 5-7). The work of the Holy Spirit/God is considered to be a means to get closer to the truth – in spirit possessions people see hidden places, and find out about and reveal things that have been invisible and unknown before. Possessed by spirits of God people can heal others, talk out on causes of death, find sorcery bundles, talk prophecy and deliver messages from God's spirits. In former times, this function was filled by the yanonyang, who could feel the truth in his body parts, and the sibbunyang, who could use his magical skills also to heal people. Today people doubt that the few men who claim to be a shaman really know what they are doing and also sibbukundi (magical language) is unknown by most. Today only a few men master the craft of magic and sorcery. But those who can are both feared and appreciated for their knowledge. During my fieldwork in Timbunmeli there were four men who knew sibbukundi. Papmangawi (Possuko clan) died in October 2013, Mavak (Yak clan) died in February 2014, and now there are only Sambang (Yak clan) and Benny (Possuko clan) left. Whereas Benny has only returned to the village in 2013 from his life in towns, Sambang, a man from Korogo, a different Nyaura community, has lived in the village for the last 14 years.

In September 2013 two leaders of the Catholic Chambri Lake parish came to Timbunmeli to run a workshop to strengthen the Catholic belief. Bernard, a man from Aibom, and Jeffrey, a man from Chambri, had received training from the Catholic Church to run the workshop in the Chambri Lake communities. Male leaders, also from Mali, Changriman and Paliagwi, as well as women from Timbunmeli community attended the workshop that was held in the Elementary Class room on the Yak clan compound. On the second day, the topic of magic and sorcery was addressed. Bernard asked, whether people in Timbunmeli thought that *black magic* had its good side. The workshop participants seemed a bit hesitant to reply to the question so Bernard raised it again. Then participants started to come up with examples that showed the benefit of magic. Rain magic that involved spirits now called nature, was given as an example. Bernard interrupted: 'It is not good. Because it does not call the name of Christ.' Rex Ivut (Nyaura clan) replied: 'But God is present in the *nature*? Rain magic is working.' Bernard: 'If it [magic] does not

involve the name 'Jesus', it is wrong. You have to integrate God. You have to pray first, and then you can turn back to the *kastom*.' Rex: 'But maybe God is present in the *nature* and our *dialect* [language] can touch Him when we do *sibbukundi*.' Nikki, the KST chairman of Timbunmeli, jumped in saying: 'God is present in the *nature*! Because if not, how would God have been here when there was no Christianity yet? The *nature* is His *blessing* to us! Everything [that He created] is good.' While Bernard tried to deliver what he had been taught by the mission, the leaders in Timbunmeli did not agree. Bernard said that he understood that this part of the workshop would be hard for many because it meant that one had to give up one's *kastom*. Nikki stood up again and said into the room that he found what he had heard very difficult. He had been brought up with the *kastom*. It was in him. If one would demand from him to get rid of it, he would find it hard, 'because I would have to get rid of a part that is in me.' In a break that had followed the discussion, I stood together with Nikki and Rex outside of the Elementary Class room. Nikki, being clearly upset, said about the lecture he had received:

It is fighting in my stomach. Because I grew up with the *kastom* and I believe that it is a good thing. It can help us! God made everything – how can this something be wrong? God was already here when our ancestors lived and they had not received the talk of God yet [meaning the mission had not arrived yet].

Also Rex said that everything was created by God and with that also their *kastom*. But people should only use it in a good way (*gutpela rot*). He, too, did not agree. After the workshop was over, men still talked about what they had been told and how they did not agree with it. The next day, Sunday, I was sitting with Jack Fondi (Nambuk clan), Timothy Thomas (Nambuk clan) and Stephen Saun (Yak clan) in front of Timbunmeli's church building, talking about the workshop and waiting for the church service to begin. The men believed that their *kastom* had its good sides; that *wagen* and spirits of the water and bush were good and had helped people; what was good, should be kept, and that what was bad, such as making others sick and kill them, should be abandoned. Stephen Saun, one of the pastoral workers said: 'The spirits are *nature*. God created *nature* and He gave this something to us.' God had also created the Chambri Lake for people to use and live from. The men looked at the lake. It had looked different in former times, Stephen said. Timothy and Jack filled in that all sorts of birds, colourful waterlilies, and grass-islands had pleased one's eyes then. Everything had looked nice. Not anymore. Answering my question what the men thought about the reasons for this change, Stephen answered: 'I find that all sorts of new fish are here now and they destroy everything. And also the ground is getting short now. Maybe we did not use everything that God gave us in the right way and now He sent this change to come to us.' Jack Fondi added: 'Like a sort of punishment.'

Another question that had been on people's mind during the workshop was whether a baby already had the Holy Ghost in it when it was yet in its mother's womb. People believed

that a baby already had a spirit (*kaik*) when it was not born yet – the spirit came from God and was equated with the Holy Ghost that God gave to people. However, Bernard had answered their question with ‘no’. A baby would come up due to God’s plan, but the Holy Ghost would not be with it yet because the original sin had happened and stuck to everyone. Parents had to teach a child to become a Christian – when it was still in the mother’s womb, it had no Catholic belief yet. The men were confused and dissatisfied with Bernard’s answers and teaching. They wanted to ask the parish priest, who would give the sermon this Sunday. But when the pastoral worker Iven Mavak raised the questions that had led to a discussion with Bernard the previous day, the men received the same answers from their parish priest Piotrek Wasko. First, Iven asked ‘When the baby is in its mother’s womb, does it already have the Holy Spirit or not?’ Piotrek answered (paraphrased):

No. Only Jesus and John the Baptist already had the Holy Ghost as babies. Everyone else, no. The sin of Adam and Eve is with them. The baby did not receive the baptism of God and it does not have the grace of the Holy Spirit yet. But it has some sort of God’s blessing. That is why you should not wait too long to get a baby baptized.

Then Iven raised his second question: ‘If I use magical spells (*singsing long kawawal*) to get water and rain to come, is it a blessing of God or not?’ After having asked the parishioners what they thought and who collectively answered with ‘no’, Piotrek answered that this would be a heathen thing to do. People should not do that. The evil spirit (*spirit nogut*) had a big power, too, and could bring rain. He went on (paraphrased):

You should not follow the bad spirits [*spirit nogut*] whom the ancestors followed before. God made all the spirits, but some turned away from God and they are destroying us [*wok long bagarapim mipela*]. They do not want us to get the good things that they have already lost. If you talk to God, He can make it [bring water and rain]. You cannot use magic.

The priest went on with giving an example from the bible in which Jesus drove out a devil from a man (Mark 1:21-26, Luke 4:31-35, The Holy Bible 2016). The evil spirit told Jesus to let him alone and asked him whether he came to destroy him. But Jesus answered: ‘Be quiet!’, and the evil spirit left the man’s body. ‘If you are with Jesus, you are not afraid of the spirits of before’, Piotrek said. Those who believed in spirits of the bush and water and other spirits of before and believed that they could send sickness, those would not truly believe in God. People should not use magic. They could write an *intention letter* to God, they could give an offering (*offer*) to God – there were different prayers that they could pray, there were many different ways to receive God’s help (*helpim*). ‘You cannot use the things that the ancestors used. We follow the wisdom (*save*) of God. We read the bible’, he finished.

No one dared to start a discussion with the priest and his answers received no resistance. But people were not convinced – for them their former practices and beliefs were right.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

In an article, Robbins (2003) argues for looking at the adoption of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity as a project of discontinuity rather than continuity. Pentecostalism tends to accept local cultures' ontologies, but at the same time starts a fight against the spirit beings that these ontologies entail (ibid.: 223). This paradox, so Robbins, leads to anthropologists being 'likely to be impressed by how well the traditional ontology has held up in the face of the Pentecostal onslaught' (ibid.). He goes on arguing:

With their attention drawn in this direction, they [anthropologists] may not take the full measure of the extent to which people's changing relation to their traditional ontology – a change Pentecostalism has wrought by introducing its own ontology and situating the traditional one within it – has made change rather than continuity the real story in particular cases (ibid.).

Robbins claims, 'For when one takes seriously what Pentecostals understand themselves to be doing, one discovers that most often they are trying to change. They are involved, that is, in personal and collective projects of discontinuity framed very much in Christian terms' (ibid.: 230). Robbins suggests that anthropologists should attend to the 'face of rupture with the local and of discontinuity with old practices' (ibid.:224).

Although I agree with Robbins in the sense that people in Timbunmeli, too, are involved in a project of change that is indeed framed in Christian terms, I would like to add that nevertheless no radical break with their past can be identified as Robbins described it for the Urapmin case. People in Timbunmeli appropriated Christianity and especially charismatic Catholicism in their own terms – in continuity with their own ontology and practices. This becomes especially apparent in current practices aiming to communicate with spirits (e.g. via spirit possessions or the phone, see Chapter 3, 5, 6, 7) that I see as fundamentally related to the Nyaura mode of Being that is intimately connected with the invisible sphere of spirits. In fact, we can say that the 'divine' (for a lack of a better word) is immanent in the single person. Each person is related to ancestral beings via maternal and paternal bodily substance, but also via names and a spiritual substance called *kaik* (see Chapter 2). *Kaik* relates to an invisible part of people's lifeworld, called *undumbunge* in the local vernacular, and today also heaven. We could thus suggest, that the 'divine other' (again, for a lack of a better word) is not only immanent in people's lifeworld, but also in the person. If we consider this possibility, we will come to understand people's practices that aim to engage with the divine, which today are the Christian Trinity, souls, and Catholic Saints and Angel figures, under a different light – namely as means to (re-) engage with and to (re-) legitimate a part of themselves and their world that during the process of missionisation had become a distant other/God.

Additionally, an important point to make is that people in Timbunmeli themselves identify continuances between Catholicism and their own religion. So, replying to Robbins' statement (2003: 230 see above), when one takes seriously what the Timbunmeli understand themselves to be doing, one discovers that their attempt to change is founded in personal and collective projects of continuity though now framed in Christian terms. Although people have experienced a break with the past in the sense that they have lost a lot of traditional knowledge, they nevertheless orient their current practices and beliefs toward their past. I therefore argue that no radical break with their own culture in the way Robbins has described it for the Urapmin can be identified in Timbunmeli.

In the following two chapters I will provide a closer look at and discuss current religious practices. A charismatic movement that swept the Chambri Lake area in the 1990s was appropriated as a way to master powerful prayers that would connect people with God and His spirits (see also Telban 2009) – in spirit possessions people are able to actively engage and communicate with the spirit world. Via prayers and consultations of a spirit medium people now try to employ the spirits of God for their concerns. Thereby, intersubjective experiences that people have with spirit beings and each other reinforce ontological premises.

CHAPTER 5: God is (in) Each One of Us - spirit possessions and the work of God



No 42: Jane, collapsed in exhaustion after a spirit possession in October 2013 (C.Falck 2013).

In the previous chapters I have argued that although profound change has taken place in Timbunmel's lifeworld, continuity is found in the way that people relate to the world. I have identified basic ontological principles that inform the mode of Being in Timbunmeli: an intimate connection between spirits, the world, and human Being, an existential relation between spirit (*kaik*) and body (*bange*), the possibility to change material appearances, the immanence of the spirit sphere as part of people's lifeworld, as well as the principle of being-one and being-many. I have stressed that spirits are part of the worlding process in Timbunmeli and that spiritual agency has to be taken into account if one wants to understand how people experience the world. As we will see in this and the next chapter, those premises also inform current religious practices.

While the last chapter gave a summarizing overview of the interaction of Catholic Christianity with local cosmologies, in this and the following chapter I will analyse and discuss current religious practices – charismatic prayer meetings and spirit possessions. Although the practices I will discuss take place in Christian terms and thereby indicate a degree of religious change, they nevertheless show underlying continuity within change.

It is usually argued that Christianity, and especially evangelical Christianity, focuses on the individual (e.g. Errington and Gewertz 1991; Gewertz and Errington 1993; Robbins 2004a, Telban 2009: 157), supports 'individualist models of social organization' (Bialecki, Haynes et al. 2008: 1141), and promotes individualism as a prominent value in social formations (Robbins 2015). I argue that while Christianity does draw on individualism, the way that Timbunmeli villagers appropriated Catholicism puts more stress on their individual being and relates to what Gewertz and Errington have called a 'socially embedded individuality', which is 'very different from that characteristic of the recent West where individuality has been marked – at least ideologically – by the sense of self-sufficiency that allows a person to remove himself or herself from social contexts' (Gewertz and Errington 1993: 287). Although people do have a strong sense of self in Timbunmeli, they nevertheless remain primarily individuals, embedded in social networks that are predominantly characterized by kin groups and clan memberships (see also Silverman 2005: 88-90).

However, I also have to state clearly that, in spite of strong continuities at some levels, the conversion to Christianity has initiated change in others. A major change in Timbunmeli can be seen in the inclusion of women, children, and uninitiated men in religious activities promoted by the Catholic mission. This egalitarian process, though, rubs against traditional modes of authority and leadership (see also Telban 2009). Whereas before the ability to access spirit beings and the knowledge how to do so was part of the male domain and guarded by secrecy (Wassmann 1982, 2001), today the Christian God and His spirits are accessible in prayers by

everyone and the Christian knowledge is available for everyone who reads the bible or listens to the preaching of church personnel. The charismatic movement has reinforced this change – now principally everyone can receive the touch of the Holy Spirit and feel the Spirit moving in her/his body (see also Robbins 2014: 161). In fact, in Timbunmeli today, more women than men are possessed by spirits and deliver messages from God and His spirits.

Also in other Melanesian societies the new role of women and their numerical dominance in pentecostal, millennial and charismatic religious activities has been recognized (e.g. Douglas 2001: 628; Eriksen 2014: 262; Jorgensen 1996: 198; Robbins 2004a: 135-136; Stewart and Strathern 1998: 136; Tuzin 1997: 10). In Timbunmeli, however, men lay claim to the leadership of all religious activities and stress that they guide the mission work – often competing with each other for influence but also encountering conflicts with women.

Annelin Eriksen has suggested that gendered values have influenced the way that pentecostal¹¹⁷ Christianity has been appropriated in Vanuatu. Eriksen argues that the Christian individualism, based on ‘the concept of belief as an inner state’ (Eriksen 2014: 265) was male in Vanuatu. Men argued that they had been chosen by God for a specific mission, women usually did not. Instead of stressing their individual agency, women described themselves as being ‘vehicles for the Spirit’ (ibid.). Therefore, Eriksen identifies a ‘feminine and masculine way of relating to the Holy Spirit’ (ibid.) in which the male way elevates the individual and the female way ‘does almost the opposite, downplaying the role of the individual’ (ibid.).

In Timbunmeli, I would say, this also holds true: Individual men compete with each other for influence and leadership based on their chosenness and spirituality, but also based on their offices. Women on the other hand rather pursue the work of God in a group – stressing their collective power and dividuality. However, also among women individuals have been chosen by God to obtain leadership positions. They are possessed by powerful spirits and lead religious groups. But, interestingly, those spirits are usually male (see 5.2 & 6).

Eriksen (2014) has described for Vanuatu that the egalitarianism supported by Christianity, which promotes that everyone can have a relationship with God, can lead to problems when individual persons transgress what is culturally appropriate for their gender. In Timbunmeli, currently conflicts arise not only between women and men, but also between older and younger men striving for leadership in a society in which senior leaders had been in charge of village politics and religious activities before.

¹¹⁷ Eriksen draws on Robbins’ definition (2004b: 117) of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity as ‘The form of Christianity in which believers receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophesying.’ Robbins (2003: 222) further adheres ‘to the general convention of calling “charismatic” those churches that emphasizes the gifts of the Spirit while maintaining their ties to non-Pentecostal denominations.’

In the first section of this chapter, I argue, similar to Mark Mosko (2010), that dividuality has to be taken into account if we want to understand the Nyaura conversion to Christianity in Timbunmeli. Currently people not only suspect that God may be one of their ancestral beings, but also say 'God is (in) each one of us'. I will show that the Nyaura concept of personhood that sees a spiritual substance (*kaik*) as crucial for Being has influenced people's appropriation and understanding of Christianity and especially the practice of spirit possessions. Furthermore, in section one I will outline my approach towards the study of spirit possessions and provide insights into people's experiences of being possessed.

In section two I will give a detailed description of events that took place in Timbunmeli in October 2013. Here and in the third section of this chapter, I will show that people currently struggle with spirits and leadership in Timunmeli. I would like to suggest that there is some indication for a shift in power relations between genders. Because women are able to stress their social Being and work together in their pursuits they have an advantage over individual male leaders, who tend to hinder and undermine each other's work. But, I would like to add that women's social embedding in and their primary identification with clan and family groups on the other hand can hinder and in fact also stop their cooperation (see 5.2).

Starting in section three and proceeding in section four, I will place the egalitarian process and current conflicts in a discussion of gender relations and male Being in latmul societies and try to relate current developments to the latmul female and male ethos as described by Bateson (1958[1936]) and his model of schismogenesis. I suggest that the challenge men experience in regard to their leadership in Timbunmeli may be understood in relation to the decline of their traditional male Being.

5.1 God is (in) Each One of Us

'God is each one of us'¹¹⁸, 'God is in each one of us'¹¹⁹, or 'You yourself are God'¹²⁰ are expressions that I heard in Timbunmeli. Together with the announcement that the pastoral worker Stephen Saun made during different church services, namely that everyone has her/his own part in the work of God, these expressions nicely relate to what I want to argue in this chapter: Currently an egalitarian process is taking place in Timbunmeli that practically allows everyone access to the divine or spiritual sphere. Everyone can talk to God in prayers, everyone

¹¹⁸ 'God i yumi wanwan'

¹¹⁹ 'God i stap long yumi wanwan'

¹²⁰ 'Yu yet yu God'

can receive His messages in visions, everyone can be possessed by a spirit – everyone has a role to play in pursuing the work of God. One only has to believe in God and be a Christian.

At the same time these statements, I suggest, can be read as referring to the local concept of personhood in Timbunmeli. In Chapter 2 I have suggested that a person can be understood as being-one and being-many. In section 5.4. I will show how this aspect of personhood influences the appropriation of Christianity in Timbunmeli. In this section I want to refer to a related aspect of Timbunmeli persons that I also discussed in Chapter 2 – their composite being. A person in Timbunmeli is made up of bodily maternal and paternal substance as well as of an invisible substance called *kaik*. The life-spirit of each person is related to an invisible part of the world, which is called *undumbunge* (place of the dead) and nowadays also heaven. Today many people believe that God bestows them with their *kaik* – it is understood as a breath of wind like that which God, according to the bible (Genesis 2:7, The Holy Bible 2016), has blown into the nostrils of Adam to flow through the body. The *kaik* of each person is understood as a part of the divine and the divine as a part of each living person.

Mosko (2010: 215) has argued that ‘people’s assimilation of Christianity [in different Melanesian societies] has been effected through elicitive exchanges involving parts of their persons and corresponding personal detachments of God, Jesus, Mary, Holy Spirit, the Devil, and so on.’ He (2010, 2015) argues that the Christian person has to be understood as being a dividual and that it shows similarities to Melanesian dividualism. These similarities, he proposes, may help to explain why Christianity was so readily adopted. He suggests that no radical change and deep ruptures have been taken place. Rather ‘Christian activity and experience as religious change appear to consist in the conversion of one dividualist form of personhood, agency, and sociality into another’ (Mosko 2010: 232). At least from the Nyaura perspective all persons are dividuals, or composite beings, whether they are human or divine.

Also within the Catholic Tradition God is a partible being. Timbunmeli villagers call Him ‘*God tri-wan*’ – ‘God three-one’, meaning God as Trinity: God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It can transform itself into a human (Jesus) and appear like a spirit (Holy Spirit). Nowadays people feel God’s or the Holy Spirit’s presence within their bodies – like *kaik* it is flowing through them. In a church service on October 6th 2013 the Catholic Community Steering Team (KST) chairman Nikki Tonagon said in a prayer: ‘We pray for the Christian people. Godfather, you who marked them as yours, you are inside their *life* in the form of the wind that blows in their heart, in the form of water and blood. It is the *presence* of you, Godfather, Child, and Holy Spirit.’

As I have described in Chapter 2, *kaik* is also called a spirit of the skin (*bangewagen*) that flows through one’s body and makes it healthy, lively, and aware of harmful situations. People also call it ‘guardian’ (*wasman* = watch man). In addition, people nowadays have a connection

with a spirit of God, a *wassanctu* (watch sanctu) that was assigned to them by a charismatic prayer leader. This patron saint¹²¹ can take over one's body: It floats (*flotim*) one's body during prayers to facilitate the work of God. Thus women and men are floated by God's angels and saints, such as Angel Michael, John the Baptist, Sanctu Cecilia or Sanctu Joseph, and Mama Maria. In these moments people say that the Holy Spirit is filling them up, making them feel drunk (*spak*). Like a child who has not the ability to control its *kaik* yet, people then run around uncontrolled, uttering incomprehensible sounds, going over the top of what is normal for an adult person.¹²² Villagers say that one has to strengthen one's body and mind through prayers and sacrifices to be able to control oneself when floated by the Spirit.

Trying to gather information on the background of the current situation in Timbunmeli, I learned that a charismatic movement had started in Timbunmeli in 1995. The men assigned to lead the charismatic movement in the Chambri Parish were David Mangen and Francis Kemaken (a former seminarian), both from Wombun in Chambri. They had received training organised by the Catholic Charismatics from Wewak. In 1995 people from Wombun came to Timbunmeli, under the guidance of David Mangen, for a rally to pray and sing together, perform dramas and action songs. In 1997 David ran a seminar during which people from Timbunmeli were baptised in the Spirit and in which he assigned *spiritman* (male spirits) and *spiritmeri* (female spirits) to the participants that from then on were their patron saints and bestowed them with gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, healing, prophecy). In 1998 a charismatic rally took place in Chambri (organised by Francis Kemaken) that lasted for a week and in which people from Timbunmeli participated. In 2001 a charismatic seminar and a one-week rally took place in Timbunmeli led by Ken Charles (from Kanduanam parish), a Catholic charismatic leader from the Wewak office.

During this time, the charismatic movement had many followers in the Chambri Lake communities. But, in the aftermath, rivalry and conflicts came up between leaders and those who had received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The movement came to a halt. However, elements of the charismatic movement still persist in Timbunmeli nowadays. Those who had received a gift (*present*) from the Holy Spirit still nurtured their *presentman* (m.) or *presentmeri* (f.) with

¹²¹ Within the Catholic Church patron saints are holy persons and angels that can be assigned to a person, a group, an activity, a building, a country, and so on, to function as intercessors before God. A patron saint is usually chosen based on the relation to a respective place or activity s/he has had during life or because of the name s/he shares with the person s/he is assigned to.

¹²² I have only witnessed women behaving in this way. However, I was told that when the charismatic movement started that also men went *antap tumas* (over the top) when being floated by a spirit. For example, Leslie Kaiban explained that he had to learn how to control himself when Angel Michael is using him. Today, he would not lose control anymore; he had grown into the work of the Spirit.

prayers. Private prayer groups evolved during which spirits were floating (*floatim*) and possessing (*usim*) people.

The Catholic Church, although having embraced the charismatic movement that includes faith healing and speaking in tongues (ICCRS 2013), is critical of spirit possessions as I learned in conversations with the Chambri Lake parish priest Piotrek Wasko. Although the Catholic Church had embraced the charismatic movement as offering new forms of prayers that enable people to experience a close relation with God, it does not support the spirit possessions that are currently happening in Timbunmeli. Spirit possessions are considered to be rare events, and spirits of God are usually not considered to possess a person. The Catholic Encyclopaedia says:

Man is in various ways subject to the influence of evil spirits. [...] He [the demon] may attack man's body from without (obsession), or assume control of it from within (possession). As we gather from the Fathers and the theologians, the soul itself can never be "possessed" nor deprived of liberty, though its ordinary control over the members of the body may be hindered by the obsessing spirit (O'Donnell 1911).

In one of our conversations Piotrek explained that evil spirits might possess people, but that in any case a medical condition has to be ruled out before a possession should be considered. A careful examination by trained personnel had to take place in this instance. If a possession by an evil spirit would be identified, the church had staff especially trained for driving it out, exorcists. Furthermore, God gave the divine graces¹²³ freely and their allocation could not be determined by human will. Considering the frequency that people claimed to have experienced gifts of the Holy Spirit in Timbunmeli, Piotrek was more inclined to consider them as performances of individuals striving for recognition and status.

Although people in Timbunmeli are aware that they proceed in their spiritual practices without the official support of the church, they nevertheless claim to follow God's work and pursue the mission work themselves.

Not only saints and angels float or possess people, but also spirits of the dead take control over villagers' bodies. This does not only happen during divination rituals as described in Chapter 3, but also during prayer sessions in private prayer groups. However, since people have reinterpreted spirits of the dead as spirits of God, namely souls, their possessions are perceived as being legitimized under the practices of Catholic charismatic prayers. I also noticed how a spirit of a dead man, called David, suddenly was identified as being Saint David (*Sanktu David*) when his actions attracted more and more villagers in Timbunmeli, among them the KST chairman. This move can be seen as a struggle for official recognition of local spiritual practices

¹²³ Among the divine graces (*gratiae gratis datae*) are found the gift of healing, the gift of working of miracles, the gift of prophecy, the gift of speaking in tongues, and the gift of the discerning of spirits (Wilhelm 1908).

within the Catholic Church. By attributing Sainthood to common dead people, villagers legitimize being possessed by spirits of the dead and following their prophecies and instructions as part of the Catholic charismatic movement. Also, their spiritual repertoire receives the same status as the Catholic range of spirit beings – they become equal. Therefore, this move can be understood as part of the process that I have described in the previous chapter, a re-interpretation process that allows people to redefine access to their spirit world and reconstitute their power and self-worth.

Furthermore, attributing Sainthood to the dead villager David can be understood as a move of an ambitious young church leader to gain control of a spiritual movement in Timbunmeli that received, unlike him, the support of many community members. The young chairman had the vision to get the spirit of David officially recognized by the Catholic Church. He wanted to receive the official permission to proceed with the spirit possessions, performing miracles beyond village boundaries – with him leading the movement as the official church representative.

Within the Catholic tradition, Sainthood is attributed (via acclamation or canonization) to those men and women who led an extraordinary holy life of virtue or martyrdom. With that in principle everyone can become a saint. This idea becomes also visible in a church service held by the pastoral worker Iven Mavak, after All Saints' (01.11.13) and All Souls' Day (02.11.13) on Sunday 3rd of November 2013. Although Iven argued against the attribution of Sainthood to dead relatives by villagers themselves, he promoted the idea that everyone should try to become holy and with that directly enter the Kingdom of God after death without having to spend time in the purgatory as, according to the Catholic faith, every human being has to before being allowed to go to heaven:

The dead pray for us to help us. And at the same time they feel pain [in the purgatory]. They carry big pain [*hevi*]. And they pray for us to help us. [...]. And they are thinking: 'Woe if my brother, mother or whoever from my side, comes and carries the same pain that I am carrying now.' That is why they are praying for us. So that we have to become holy first, here on the ground, and when we die, we will go straight to Jesus. [...].

And we have to pray for them so that they will become saints. [...] Brothers and sisters, we have to pray for the dead, they have to become saints. But many of us say, 'My dead brother, or my sister or my child who died, s/he died and is already a saint!' How do we know that?! We cannot trick God. We do not know [and therefore have to pray for them]!

In his sermon Iven talks about people's ancestors and recently deceased kin who have to spend time in the purgatory for their sins before they can go to heaven. Although the purgatory (*klinpaia*) is an important concept within the Catholic tradition and is mentioned in people's discourses, it has remained rather alien and impenetrable for villagers. According to their belief, all dead people go to a place of happiness and peace (*undumbunge*). However, in

their prayers, following the Catholic tradition, people pray for the dead and ask God to have mercy on them.

During my fieldwork, I attended regularly the prayer meetings that took place in Kaiban family houses in the Yak clan area and in Mewang family houses on the Possuko clan compound. The prayer meetings on the Yak clan compound centred on the spirit of Thomas, a Catholic priest, possessing a woman, Helen, from a different community (Chapter 6). Thomas guided their meetings when Helen was visiting Timbunmeli. Otherwise Anna and Leslie Kaiban led the prayer meetings. In addition to Helen, also Rita Kaiban was possessed by a spirit – her dead husband, Barnabus – during their prayer meetings. The Mewang family prayer meetings focus on receiving help from a spirit called David, a dead family member possessing the body of Sandra.

Whereas the Mewang family prayer group is local (although with tendencies to expand to other communities, see 5.3), the TSM movement is supra-regional and has members in different communities: Wondunumbuk, Timbunmeli, Chambri, Korogo, Sapanaut, Yensemangua, Saure (close to Wewak), and Wewak. In Timbunmeli, the members of a charismatic prayer group, started by Leslie Kaiban, embraced the movement.

Too late did I become aware of another family prayer group that, for a short time, took place on the Nyaura clan plot. Lilien Ivut had been possessed by the little dead daughter of Adrian, Eva (biological mother, second wife) and Jalien (first wife). Only once did I attend a prayer meeting on the Ivutmali family's clan plot of land, which was guided by the KST chairman Nikki Tonagon and during which Lilien, possessed by the spirit of the dead little girl, showed up. However, because the dead girl's mother, Eva, was said to not support the work of the Spirit and the young father and his two wives often quarrelled, the spirit of the little girl had announced that she would not use her medium anymore, as Lilien told me during an interview.

During the month October 2013 I attended the prayer meetings of the Catholic women's group who met daily on the school ground. Several spirit possessions occurred during this time (see below). It is noteworthy that spirit possessions never took place during church services held in Timbunmeli's Catholic Church building. Only during the month October 2013, did spirit possessions take place in public areas, namely on the village school's ground and in the village during a march that aimed to clean the village from evil influence, guided by the spirit leading the Mewang family prayers, David.

Women, like Helen, Rita, Lilien, Grace and Sandra, who were regularly possessed by spirits, did not only use the word *floatim* (to float) but took the verb *usim* (to use) to describe what the respective spirit did with their bodies. When their *wassanctu*, a spirit of the dead, or

the Holy Spirit was using their bodies, it would make them unconscious of what was happening and the actions that their bodies would perform. I talked with Lilien about her spirit possessions:

- L: One day the spirit of God went inside of me, and I became completely weak. Iven [pastoral worker] was there, too. He helped me praying, I prayed, prayed, the spirit used me and I became totally weak. [...]
- I: And that spirit of God – what sort of spirit is it?
- L: It is the Holy Spirit that is using us. When we, the mother's group, pray the rosary, it will go inside of us. The Holy Spirit comes like that. It goes inside now, and we start to float. [...] At that time you will not feel ashamed for anything. You will talk [in public, with which women usually feel uncomfortable]. [...]
- I: When it has left your body, do you know what you have said?
- L: No. I do not know. Whatever I said, it is over.
- I: And when the [spirit of the] little girl is using you?
- L: It is the same. Spirit ya! Whatever they give [they give] it, and it goes away [again]. We do not know what kind of talk they made. [...]

In an interview I asked Rita Kaiban how she would feel when her dead husband, Barnabus, was about to use her body:

- R: I feel like, when he comes, [...], I feel like I have two heads [I am dizzy]. I feel like that in my head, it is about to come now.
- I: You are dizzy?
- R: I am dizzy, my head spins. He comes from behind and starts to use me. He comes from behind. And he goes inside from my sole of the foot. He goes into my leg, and he goes upwards. Then he will talk.

Before the spirit possession was about to take place, women said that they would feel a sensation on their skin – a cold started to crawl up their limbs and their consciousness completely disappeared. After the spirit possession was over, the women felt exhausted and could not remember what had happened. Grace, who is used by Mother Mary, said about the first time she was possessed:

When the talk out [*tokaut*] comes, I feel like my legs and hands, my whole body, my heart, too, I feel like if I want to say something, it is hard. I feel only cold. And I know that this something like to happen to me now. [...]. How I talk, I do not know. Afterwards the people tell me what happened. [...]. The first time that this thing happened to me, I was afraid. [...]. I was in the house and prayed. I prayed the rosary. I already prayed ten beads, and I wanted to go to the second part – that was it, I was not conscious now. It confused me. I fell down. I was alone in the house. I was in the house to pray, I fell down. And I do not know, I stayed like that; then my thoughts, like the thoughts of a person [*tingting bilong man*], came back to me. I said: 'Eh, what was that? What if a spirit of the dead came to use me? Or that sort of thing.' I saw it happen to others. Spirits of the dead use them. And that is why I was scared. 'If a spirit of the dead came to use me, what will I do?' I was afraid, I got up, I took a plastic bottle with water and drank. It was no use, that thing came on even more. What could I do? I went inside the mosquito net; I took my bet sheet, covered myself and slept. [...]. Ok in the night I dreamt. A white woman came [Mother Mary]. She came and slept on my chest. She said: 'Do not be afraid, I came to be with you.' She gave that dream. I dreamt this and that thing happened to me. I went outside and I shared with Rodney [her husband]. At that time, we used to go to charismatic prayers.

It is noteworthy that the sensation described in relation to spirit possessions is similar to that described in cases of sickness and death. Then, too, a cold (*kibbe*) is crawling up on people's bodies. Like a dying person is losing control over her/his body, so do people when they are possessed by a spirit. When I asked what would happen when a spirit takes possession of

one's body, I was told that one's *kaik* would leave the body (*stap out*), being displaced and overpowered by a different spirit that also cuts off people's sensual and cognitive embodied experiences. Then their *kaik*, being disconnected from their body, is wandering around in the invisible part of the world. When their *kaik* had left their bodies, women did not take any notice of what their bodies were doing. While Helen said that she would not remember anything from the spirit possession and felt similar as when awaking from a deep sleep, Sandra said that when possessed she suddenly found herself in the sphere of spirits, seeing other dead villagers:

I: The first time that he [David] was using your body, where were you?

S: I was in my house.

I: And what did you feel like, what did you think?

S: Like, I will die. I felt that the man was coming, that he was about to use me. My family came, but I did not see them. I do not see them [when David is using her].

[...].

I: And when he uses your body, are you aware of what he says?

S: No. The others tell me. [...], I am not aware [*mi no save klia*]. When he uses me, like, when I get up I can see my friend Nancy, Augusta, Eddi – them. But when he [David] is using me, I do not see that sort of face. I only see different faces. When he leaves me again, I see my family [again].

I: And before that, what kind of face do you see?

S: All sorts of faces, big men, small men, babies, our family members who died.

I: When he is using your body, you see them?

S: Yes. [...]. White people! They will come with white skin. They will wear white dresses, clothes, everything is white only. It is that sort of thing, only white. It [the clothes] will cover your legs, and your hands [long sleeves and trousers]. In white only.

[...]

I: And the first time that he used your body, were you scared?

S: I was not conscious so that I could be scared. When I was conscious again, they told me about it, and I was scared. But now I am not scared anymore. I am not afraid.

I attended a prayer meeting of the Mewang family for the first time in March 2013:

After the prayers were over, everyone sat down. David had started to take possession of Sandra during the prayers – she had coughed and held her hands in front of her face, shaking it. Now David was sitting on a wooden stool; everyone else sat on the floor of the house. [...].

Eddi had announced that everyone who had a problem or a question could consult David. While different people took turns with sitting close to David and asking him questions in private, the rest of the group engaged in conversations. After I observed how others talked to David, I got up myself and sat down on the floor close to David's stool. I asked him, in the same whispering voice that others raised their questions with, where he had been before he started to use Sandra's body. David answered: 'I was at my place.' I asked him: 'And where is that place?' He: 'England.' I: 'England?' He: 'Yes. Did you see me there?' 'No,' I said. 'You are lying!', he shouted loudly for everyone to hear. Then, to my surprise, he slapped me on my face. I was baffled and could not help but start laughing about this situation, rubbing my cheek. Everyone else laughed, too. Eddi shouted in my direction that David was happy about me being there. Defending myself, I said: 'I am not lying! I did not see you. Why do you think that I would lie?' He, ignoring my response, replied: 'Where is your place?' I responded that my home country was Germany. He shouted: 'Germany!', and added, 'I will leave you now.' Then he exclaimed: 'Did you [the group] get it? Shake her hand!' The group members came to shake my hand. My question time was over. I got up and sat down on my former spot. [...].

The following Sunday, Sandra came to see me for an interview. She had seen my vision after I had left the family house on Friday – she could not sleep. She felt the need to apologize to me for slapping my face when David was using her body:

S: That night, sister, I did not sleep! Twice I prayed, and I closed my eyes. I saw your face.

I: Mine?

S: Yours.

I: When?

S: Friday night. I saw it and I said [to the children], 'I see your *aunty*'s face. David is some sort of man!' I said it like that. I told Vito [her son], 'Vito, I see your *aunty*'s face. She came and kneeled down and looked at me.' I said it like that. And Vito said: 'Mum, leave it. She already went away and is in her house now. It is David who is playing a trick on you, showing her face.' [...]. And I said to Vito: 'Sunday I will go and tell her that I saw her face. [...] Your *aunty* likes to stay with us and I dreamt.' [...]. And then he [her son] told me: 'When David used your body, poor *aunty*, she liked to talk with him and David's spirit hit her face really strong.' And I said: 'He is a *spirit* ya! When she wanted to talk with me when he was using my body and she wanted to talk with him, you should have explained that David is happy about new visitors coming to his house. When he is happy, he hits people. Did you say that to her?' And he said: 'No.' 'That is your foolishness! Sunday I will go and apologize to Christiane', I said.

When women are possessed by spirits in Timbunmeli, they are not aware of what is going on. They have lost control over their body. Also, often the language of spirits is an incomprehensible one. They speak in tongues and metaphors, and only those who have the gift of interpreting tongues can translate it. If we compare the experiences of current spirit possessions that involve spirits of the dead and saints with *wagen* séances a change towards a loss of control over the possessing spirit can be identified. The *yanonyang* (Chapter 2, 6) does not lose his sensual and cognitive bodily experiences. On the contrary, when a *wagen* spirit is using his body, the *yanonyang* becomes more alert or aware of his surrounding as he is connected with the spiritual sphere via the embodied *wagen*. It is still the respective *yanonyang* who is present and acting during the séance. The *wagen* only gives hints in form of bodily sensations to his enquiries. Thus the *yanonyang* is fully aware of what is happening and translates the *wagen*'s answers to his questions for his audience.

This change towards a loss of control could maybe be interpreted as an expression of the general loss of control that people had experienced over their spirit world. However, I have found hints about loss of control in spirit possessions of former times among my informants and in the literature (Bateson 1932b, Wassmann 1982). Timbunmeli men told me that the father of John Pippi, Timothy Thomas, and Jack Fondi, had been used by the *wagen* Kibbinbange. During the spirit possessions it was not Tumassemeli anymore who was acting, but the boss of all *wagen* spirits, Kibbinbange, himself. He would consume huge amounts of betelnuts, demand up to ten pigs for his help, and he could crawl up the posts in the men's house with his legs first – something that a normal man could not do. Bateson (1932b: 414-421) describes spirit possessions in Mindimbit, in which also a state of unconsciousness is found:

Meanwhile the shamans were sitting chewing betel nut, [...]. First one and then the other began to tremble. The muscles of the calf are first affected, and the trembling causes the leg to vibrate up and down, supported on the ball of the foot. While in this stage one of the shamans continued to take part in the general conversation. The trembling increases and after a short time the shoulders begin to be jerked to and fro, causing a violent shaking of the whole body. The shaman is still sitting, but suddenly he shoots his legs out forwards, with at the same time a violent spasm of the shoulders, extending his arms sideways and downwards. After one or two jerks of this kind he leaps to his feet and stands still for a moment to get his balance. Then he [sic! he] begins pacing to and fro, stamping with his feet, but he is otherwise almost normal. As he paces he takes little trouble to avoid obstacles, because he is, nominally at least, in a state of unconsciousness. I was told that the shaman

in the state of possession might be burnt or wounded and would know nothing of it until the spirit left him (ibid.: 416-417).¹²⁴

Also Wassmann mentions that during the recording of a *sagi* in 1973 in Timbunmeli one of the men present became possessed by a *wagen* spirit: 'He suddenly trembled all over his body, had foam at the mouth and was rolling on the floor' (Wassmann 1982: 59, my translation). While the people present identified the event as a *wagen* possession, Wassmann informs the reader about his assessment of the event: 'The man had an epileptic seizure' (ibid.: 59n2, my translation).

In former times the description of spirit possessions, visions, or religious movements in Papua New Guinea as pathological has been prevalent among anthropologists and colonial powers (Kaplan 1995: xi; Lattas 1992, 1998: xxv; Lindstrom 1993: 15-40, 66-71; Jorgensen 2007; Salisbury 1968; Stephen 1979: 4). Also Bateson (1932a: 451) suggests that the spirit possessions he witnessed might be 'a late stage in a hysterical upheaval' as part of the assimilation of social change.

Later, these phenomena were understood as coping strategies for social issues (Salisbury 1968), imaginative practices (see Lattas 1998), or autonomous imaginations (see Stephen 1989, Stephen and Herdt 1989). Andrew Lattas approached his analysis of practices and beliefs among the Kaliai in New Britain that are similar to those in Timbunmeli by seeing them as creative expressions of the human imagination, as being creative and imaginative practices (Lattas 1998: xxii). I would prefer to take a different approach. I would like to stress that people's perception of the world is largely influenced by intersubjectivity, shared experiences and practices – not only imagined, but also experienced in social interactions with spirits. For example, charismatic prayer sessions, perceived as a powerful way to connect with God, create a direct bodily experience with the divine when people are floated by the Holy Spirit or can directly interact with a spirit that possesses someone. Thereby, the shared experience of the divine supports people's beliefs and serves as proof for the truth of their faith: Truth 'is what happens to a belief when it is invoked, activated, put to work, and realized in the lifeworld' (Jackson 1996: 11). This aspect is further important in regard to the inability of male leaders to directly criticize female religious practices that challenge their traditional male Being. Because everyone experiences the effects of the women's work as real and powerful, there is little room to criticise the truth of the spirit possessions and with that their legitimation.

The Catholic Church considers spirit possessions in principle as real events that are initiated by an external Other. In the Catholic cosmology, evil and good spirits exist and can

¹²⁴ Note that only a few pages later Bateson (1932b: 424) states: 'I saw in all some ten or twelve shamanic "trances," but I am convinced that I never saw a shaman in any state approaching unconsciousness. On one occasion I saw a shaman nominally simulating a trance.'

speak through a human agent. The historian Sluhovsky (2007: 1-10) has shown that spirit possessions became a major topic within the Catholic Church between 1400 and 1700 when a new spirituality swept Europe. Then the church saw itself confronted with the task to differentiate between demonic, divine, and pathological phenomena. New explanatory frameworks, meanings and knowledge of embodied encounters with the demonic and divine were developed due to an increase of possessed people in early modern Europe. Since 'such encounters were always intersubjective, always interior and always not accessible for external scrutiny' (ibid.: 7) the Church had to elaborate a system of discernment of possession spirits to differentiate the similar looking divine and demonic possessions while being confronted with the question of truth. Sluhovsky argues, 'discernment, [...], was a social practice that involved a process of negotiation rather than a fixed theology or a coherent endeavor' (ibid.: 7, see also 170-173). The Catholic Encyclopaedia states that the judgment whether an evil or good spirit is guiding a person, can be formed twofold: through study and reflection as part of an acquired human knowledge, or 'by means of an intuitive light which infallibly discovers the quality of the movement; it is then a gift of God' (Debuchy 1909).

While the Catholic Church might concern itself with the question whether good or evil spirits, or pathologic states are the source of people's experiences, and other anthropologists may consider religious experiences as mental processes, I am not interested in the question of a spiritual, mental, or pathological cause for people's practices and experiences per se and am thus bracketing it out, treating spirit possessions as real, meaningful events. Other anthropologists, too, may not question the reality of people's experiences per se and also see religious experiences as being constituted by the interplay of (inter)subjective experiences and cultural contexts (e.g. Herdt 1989; Stephen and Herdt 1989). However, they may still consider them as 'mental events that have the appearance of being sensory perceptions of an external reality' (Stephen 1989: 42). In such arguments religious experiences such as spirit possessions, séances, or dreams are considered as phenomena related to a 'creative ability of the individual that is separate from the conscious sense of self but available to it in certain circumstances, an imagination somehow autonomous of the person' (Stephen and Herdt 1989: 2). My interlocutors described spirit possessions in terms of experiences that are exterior to the self and caused by spirits. Therefore, I wish to treat them like that – as events initiated and performed not by a human person, but by a spirit being. I am interested in the question of what spirit possessions are to the people involved – the spirit medium and its audience (see also Knibbe and Versteeg 2008).

In the following sections I will discuss happenings that surrounded the month of Mother Mary in 2013 in Timbunmeli and their consequences.

5.2 The Month of Mother Mary



No 43: Women praying the rosary during the month of Mother Mary (C.Falck 2013).

The Catholic Church dedicates the month October to the 'Holy Rosary' and the 'Queen of the Holy Rosary', Mother Mary, by praying the rosary every day. In Timbunmeli these prayers are organised by the Catholic community steering team (KST) in teamwork with the Catholic women group (*Katolik mama group* = Catholic mother's group) and usually also contain a procession of the statue of Mother Mary through the village. The month October is called '*mun bilong mama*' in Timbunmeli – the month of the Mother. This title refers to the Catholic tradition to pray to Mother Mary during this month, but can also be understood as reflecting a self-perception of women in Timbunmeli who say that Mary is working through them and that it is their task to pursue her work. The identification of women in Papua New Guinea with Mother Mary has also been described by Anna-Karina Hermkens (2007, 2008) for women in Madang, Port Moresby, and Buka in Bougainville. Hermkens stresses that an identification with the submissive image that Mother Mary had 'is in line with pre-existing gender relations and gender hierarchies, in which women are constituted as submissive to their husbands, their primary role being that of caretakers of the families, as mothers' (Hermkens 2007: 7). Hermkens has shown how Marian devotion can be 'instrumental in sanctioning women to tolerate violence' (Hermkens 2008: 151). In Timbunmeli women often referred to the Christian value of forgiveness in conversations we

had and in which they told me stories that revealed how their personal rights had been mistreated and violated in the past: '*mi forgivim em*' ('I forgive her/him) or '*forgivim em!*' ('Forgive her/him!') is often heard in those conversations. However, what I want to highlight as a key effect of the Marian devotion and the identification of women with Mother Mary in Timbunmeli is the empowerment of women as a collective. This will become apparent in the following discussion of happenings surrounding the month October 2013 in Timbunmeli. To understand these events better, I have to reach back a bit to events and conflicts that had occurred in the past and that I reconstructed from interviews with different persons.

In 2011 a procession of the statue of Mother Mary had resulted in disputes among community members and leaders due to clan politics and competing individuals and families, as well as a conflict between the Catholic women and church leaders. As a result, the KST had not organised a procession of the statue in 2012. The fact that the Catholic community of Timbunmeli had not worshipped the Mother of God was described to me as a failure of the Christian community by villagers and perceived as a further expression of the general disharmony and dysfunctionality of the community. Also, community members and leaders and especially the members of the village's Catholic women group attributed the 2012 failure to hold the procession to a poor leadership capacity of the KST chairman, Nikki Tonagon (Yak clan). Although Nikki, a young ambitious man, had been elected by the Catholic community to replace an older leader in 2007, he struggled to find support for his leadership – he felt that other leaders were sabotaging his work and negatively influencing the community.

A vivid expression for his struggles was the state of the church building in Timbunmeli. The old church had fallen apart in 2010 and Nikki, being the KST chairman, had taken it upon himself to organise the construction of a new church. But, only a few young men supported his work. Other people, including community leaders, claimed that Nikki was too self-assertive and not listening to older leaders' suggestions. Furthermore, community members complained that Nikki used marijuana to pay his helpers for their work. This was perceived as being inappropriate and offensive towards God. However, when I asked him the KST chairman denied these accusations.

Nikki had not only clashed with other male leaders, but also conflicted with the *katolik mama group* during the procession of the statue of Mother Mary in 2011. During the procession the KST and Mrs Wavi, a leader of the Catholic women, got into a dispute about the procession's programme. Since then, the women perceived the KST chairman as hindering their work – the work of God.



No 44: Timbunmeli's statue of Mother Mary (C.Falck 2013).

Not only the conflict with the new KST chairman had led to the situation in 2012. Also, the Catholic women, who before had organised and carried out the procession underneath the local organisation of the Catholic Church, had fallen apart. The group members were split due to mistrust, unresolved conflicts and rivalry on the leadership level reflecting conflicts between clan groups. Different clashes led to a collapse of any cooperation: After the old church building broke down in 2010, the Catholic women group had quarrelled about where the statue of Mother Mary that before had been placed in the church building, should be kept. Also, in 2011 group members had quarrelled about who was allowed to carry the statue during the procession. Furthermore, mistrust among group members had led to resentment within the group – the treasurer of the group, Erika Kaiban (Yak clan), was accused of having misused group money that she was supposed to keep safe for the later organisation of ID cards. She quit the group. The women's group fell apart completely at the start of 2012, because the conflict around the activities of the Thomas Souls' Ministry (TSM) on the community level (Chapter 6) was also carried over to the women's group. In fact, most of the Catholic mothers were part of the TSM. Briska Wavi (Nyaura clan, *nyame* moiety) had openly criticised group member's involvement in the TSM. TSM members were mainly members of the *nyoui* moiety and related to the Kaiban family whereas their opponents were part of the *nyame* moiety and Wavi family. Briska's critique led to anger. All women's group activity was closed down.

However, in 2013 members of the Catholic women group had voiced the wish to organise community prayers in the month of Mother Mary. They wanted to reconcile and start the work of the Catholic women group again. Briska, who had committed herself to organize the work of and to strengthen the position of women in the community before, took the initiative to call for a meeting of the Catholic women with church and community leaders. The meeting was set for 22.09.2013, after the Sunday church service. In an emotional speech, Briska apologised for what had happened in former years and for any wrong that she herself could be accused of. She also apologized in the name of the Catholic women. But, she said, she also wanted to criticize the (male) leaders of the community, who would not support the work of the Catholic women and gossiped behind their backs.

Nikki Tonagon (Yak clan) answered that he had nothing against the Catholic women. He, as the KST chairman who was supposed to steer all religious community activity, would be willing to work together with them. The councillor, Benedict Wavi (Briska's brother-in-law, Nyaura clan), however, said that he had to think about whether he wanted to support the work of the Catholic women group first. He would announce his decision later. Benedict, who himself is a rather young leader, had been critical of the charismatic movement in Timbunmeli and the associated spirit possessions. He was especially critical of the activities of the TSM and had brought attention of what he considered to be a cargo cult to the police. He was not perceived as a supporter of what others called the work of God and therefore many of the Catholic women were more than sceptical about his attitudes towards their work.

After hearing what the male leaders had said, Briska rose again stating that the Catholic women would like to do a procession in the month October, the month of Mother Mary. The male leaders should make a decision whether they could start with their work. The meeting was closed with everyone shaking hands. However, the decision of the male leaders was not announced.

Therefore, when in October no decision of the community leaders had reached the Catholic women, Briska, being a primary school teacher and married to the school's headmaster, started a prayer group on the school ground. Officially the addressees were school children who wanted to pray, but everyone who wanted to participate was also invited. Briska's decision was backed up by the Catholic women, who started to meet each afternoon on the school ground to pray the rosary. During this time spirits of the dead, Mother Mary herself and other spirits of God took possession of participating women who started to create what people called miracles (*mirakel*) by finding and removing sorcery bundles on the school ground and cleaning the village from malevolent spirits. Men were only marginally involved – some young men volunteered to accompany the prayer meetings with music, a few men joined the prayer meetings, and a

pastoral worker was invited to close the month of Mother Mary with a sermon that was held on the school ground at the end of October 2013. The community leaders (KST, and village government) did not take part in the daily prayer activities (except for some teachers). However, when it became obvious that something big was about to happen with the removal of sorcery items from the school ground, the KST chairman, pastoral workers, the councillor, teachers, and other male leaders participated in a procession on the school ground and/or attended events following a later prayer session during which another sorcery item was removed.

The spirit of David, possessing Sandra (Possuko clan), and the spirit of Mother Mary, residing in the community statue but also possessing Grace (Possuko clan) during the month October, had announced that sorcery bundles were hidden on the school ground. The sorcery items were seen as a proof that someone wanted to harm the community's well-being. Everyone knew that the school was not functioning well – children were reluctant to go to school and teachers were often absent. The sorcery items that were hidden on the school ground were affecting them. On October 19th the school's chairman John Pippi (Nambuk clan) had been informed and joined the group after the prayer session was over. After he had voiced his support for the women's group, Mother Mary, possessing Grace, asked him to shake David's hand (possessing Sandra), express his support to him, and apologize for the doubts he had had in their work. The school chairman did as he was told. After that the Catholic women group apologized to him for any disunity that had been prevalent in the past. With that the good will of all the parties present had been expressed.

The next day, October 20th, a procession of the Statue of Mother Mary on the school ground was organised. The statue should travel around – tables had been placed in front of the teacher's houses and were decorated with beautiful flowers and colourful leaves. Participants wanted to march the school ground in unity, praying and singing to support the work of the Catholic mother's group and the spirit of David. About thirty women, ten men, several teenagers and many children came to witness the happenings – including the KST chairman and the pastoral worker Iven Mavak. The event lasted from around three o'clock to seven and a sorcery bundle was removed from John Wavi's house, who as the school's headmaster had become a victim of the sorcery attack (photo no 46, p.156, appendix p.256.).

The next sorcery item was found behind the newly built double classroom on October 22nd – this time more male leaders, including the councillor Benedict Wavi, who was asked to unwrap it, were present. The sorcery bundle contained raw sago – something that was unusual for Nyaura sorcery, I was told. This sorcery bundle was especially malevolent because not Nyaura spirits, but spirits of the Manawi, the traditional landowners of the island had been used to activate the spell. Therefore, a woman from Korewui, a descendant of the Manawi, was asked

during one of the next prayer meetings to kill a chicken that was given as an offering to the spirits of the Manawi, telling them to stop their activity.

The last sorcery item was removed on October 24th 2013. David had identified the classroom next to the prayer meeting place as the last space where a bundle was hidden. After the bundle was removed, a spontaneous procession started in which the Catholic women, guided by David, left the village, marching on the narrow path that ran along the shoreline of the lake towards the village (appendix p.256f.) The procession attracted many villagers as it made its way from the school ground to the end of what is considered the main village, singing and praising God and cleansening the village from evil influences.

In the aftermath, especially the pastoral worker Iven Mavak complained about the march that had taken place. Iven had complained before about the Mewang family prayer group during which the spirit of David was possessing Sandra and whose family spirit now was acting in the community. He said that the activities were not officially recognised by the church and that one would not know if a good or evil spirit was doing its work. He had also complained about the initiative of the women's group to start prayer meetings on the school ground – he, as a KST member, had not been informed about the initiative and did not agree with the events that had been organised without the authorisation of the (male) leaders.



No 45: Sandra collapsed after removing the sorcery bundle from the headmaster's house (C.Falck 2013).



No 46: The *jambia* found contained a rope with knots marking the time left until the intended addressee, the headmaster John Wavi, would die (C.Falck 2013).

5.3 A Struggle with Spirits and Leadership

During the next Sunday church service, on October 27th, Iven complained about the event. He started by criticizing the competition within the community in the spiritual sphere – people were competing with each other, trying to drown out the prayers of others when praying. He reminded them that boasting and competition had led to the end of the charismatic activities within the Chambri Lake parish. The Catholic Church had stopped them after jealousy, denunciation, rivalry, and conflicts became rampant. What was going on now, was not authorised by the Catholic Church and Iven urged the community to stop, because one would not know which spirits were working within the community – spirits of God, who were only few, or spirits of Satan, who were many. He called the spirits that were using people in Timbunmeli therefore ‘home-made spirits’, which led to bitter resentment and anger among the Catholic women’s group:

In Timbun, please *Godpapa*, this year, all the talk has passed. Already last year. No, no, no! How will you recognize your *present* [spirit]? How will you recognize your prayers? What kind of spirit is using you now? Some will get up and guess [*gespaia nating*] and say: ‘It is this spirit.’ And that is why I use to say, *home-made presents*. That is one Tok Pisin of mine; I use to say *home-made presents*. *Home-made spirit* ya!

[...]. What night was it that I heard them [the women's group marching through the village] at night and I listened and I said: 'They must be learning songs.' And afterwards I saw the group how they came and I said: 'Godpapa, what is this now!?' [...]. I was completely scared. I was totally scared! It was a Jericho march!¹²⁵ A Jericho march is not something easy [that should be done hasty]. [...]. And I weighted the talk that I use to say: 'Do all of them recognize their *presents*? What kind of work they have?' I thought about the *fallen angels*. The *fallen angels*. Woe us if a big *bump* will come up (see appendix p.257 for longer version).

Iven then went on to remind the community to spend time on praying and meditating and with that feeding their *spiritman*, which he also called *present*. Only if one's spirit that one received from God was strong enough, could one fight the evil that was trying to take a hold on people's life. Here we can identify a parallel to what I have described before: In Iven's speech the *kaik* of a person was compared to spirits (*presentman/meri*) of God. As discussed in Chapter 2, the *kaik* of a person grows and gains strength when the body receives food. In his speech Iven asked villagers to strengthen their *presentman/meri* by feeding it the right food. Iven was equating prayers with food that the *kaik* of a person needs to gain strength:

Brothers and sisters, every day you have to give food to your *present* [spirit]. You have to give even more. It shall not be hungry. When it is hungry, sorry, it will not have the strength to fight. You should not weaken that *spirit man* of yours. [...] Brothers and sisters, pray and you feed that man who is inside of you. [...]. This God Holy Spirit. Give only food to it. [...]. Sing, meditate, give food to



No 47: Josephine (front) and Sandra collapsed in exhaustion after being possessed by spirits (C.Falck 2013).

¹²⁵ A Jericho march is a prayer walk during which a group prays for the intervention of God to change or protect something. The practice goes back to a biblical story told by Joshua (6:1-27, The Holy Bible 2016) in which the Israelites were trying to take the city Jericho as the first city of their promised Land, Canaan. But Jericho was an impregnable city, protected with high walls. God told Joshua to march with his people around Jericho in silence each day for six days. On the seventh day they should circle the city seven times, blow into a ram's horn, and shout, then the city would be theirs. Because they had trusted in God's commands and did what they were told, the city walls fell down on the seventh day and the Israelites conquered the city easily due to their faith.

your *spirit man*. [...] We all have a *present* [spirit]. This Holy Spirit is with you. And that is why we call it *spiritman* of yours. Look after it. Feed it (see longer version in appendix p.257).

Iven's speech was seen as an attack on the activities of the women's group. The women but also some men that I spoke with complained about Iven's speech – they took his resentment of the women's work, in which he had not been involved, as a sign of jealousy. Women said that he himself wanted to lead them and that he was only jealous because he had not been part of the events. Everyone knew that in the month of Mother Mary the women of the community would take the leading role. Turning the accusation that Satan might be working among them around, the members of the women's group said that Satan was using Iven – what he said was the work of the evil who did not want that the work of God was growing in Timbunmeli.

Iven's assault on their work together with the lacking support from male leaders fostered a general frustration about male leadership among women that became obvious in the conversations among group members: male leaders would only misappropriate money, be corrupt and think about their own families and clans. Now that they felt challenged by women, they tried to stop them. They were convinced that Iven, as well as Nikki, would only harm the community – the women had to act.

On October 31st, Iven, possibly having heard about the women's anger, came to the school ground and apologised for what he had said. He understood that probably many women would not accept his apology and still had bad feelings towards him, but, he said, that would be ok. What he had said would remain something between himself and God. If someone had still complaints, they could approach the priest when he would visit the community during the coming week.

The Catholic women reconciled with Iven. However, they still felt unsupported by the KST chairman. They had approached Nikki and asked whether they could end the month of Mother Mary with a procession that would bring back her statue into the church. Nikki, declined that wish, saying that too many problems were sticking to that statue. He feared that they would be loaded on him – and he already struggled enough with completing the church and organising a church opening program.

At the same time, the KST chairman had an ongoing conflict with the pastoral worker Iven. There was no cooperation between the two men. Nikki had a difficult position against the older pastoral worker, who not only had a longer history in the mission work, but also a better network with the community leaders, the priest and other Chambri parish officials from other communities. The conflict escalated when the church opening ceremony that Nikki had tried to organise without the support from the community and leaders had received a cancellation from the national politician Joseph Jerry Yopiyopi whom Nikki wanted to attend. The chairman

suspected that someone had called the politician with the mobile phone, telling him not to come. And Nikki suspected Iven to be the one who had made that call.

When the parish priest came to the community on November 9th Iven approached him before the confessions and church service started. He told the priest about the march that had taken place unannounced. Iven asked the priest whether he thought it to have been all right what the women's group had done. The priest answered that since no one else had taken the lead to organise a procession and prayer meetings in the community, he perceived it to be all right that the women had taken the initiative on their own and started to pray on the school ground. Also a procession would have no wrong. The priest also asked whether the KST had been informed, which the pastoral worker answered with no. Nikki, however, who had listened to what Iven had said, answered that he, the KST chairman, had been informed and had given his permission. He said he had attended the prayer meetings some times and had found that there was nothing wrong with what the women were doing. With that Iven was exposed.

Noticing that Iven and Nikki had talked with the priest about the happenings, Briska, too, took her chance to speak to the priest in private, to tell him about the women's perspective and to ask him whether the Catholic women had been wrong in organising the prayer meetings and the procession. She told the group that the priest had said that the men could not stop them from praying and that they did nothing wrong.

As part of the church service, announcements were made. The KST chairman and the pastoral worker usually had separate announcements to make, often correcting each other with information that they had withheld from the other. This time, Nikki stood up and complained about the lacking support for the opening program of the new church building he had planned. He said that someone was blocking him – meaning Iven. Iven interrupted Nikki's complaints and shouted that there was no man in their community who had called the politician and told him not to attend. With that he rushed outside the church, swearing overwhelmed with anger. After the church service had ended, Nikki took his chance and addressed the priest telling him that the pastoral worker Iven had for a long time sabotaged his work and that this had to end.

Also the Catholic women group contacted the parish priest and asked him to do something about the situation – they felt thwarted by the Community Steering Team. The priest however, having been confronted with community disputes many times before, told them to straighten their disputes first before there could be a constructive discussion. He also said that the community had elected Nikki as their chairman and that it was in their hands to select someone else if they were dissatisfied with his work.

During the following weeks, the women's group drafted a letter in which they complained about the KST. They handed the letter to the councillor, who summoned a meeting

with the KST chairman and the clan leaders. However, the KST chairman, already struggling in his leadership for acceptance and authority, felt attacked by this move and said that the councillor had no business in the church's organisation. He would only talk to KST members and the parish priest. The assembled men were offended – with his move, Nikki had pushed them further away.

During the next months, Nikki started to strive for influence on the Friday night prayer group of the Mewang family – which centred on the spirit of David. Nikki had always claimed that it was part of his office to steer all the religious activities in the community. He, being the KST chairman, and with that representing the Catholic Church in Timbunmeli, announced several times in the Sunday Church Services that all the chapter groups (women's group, family prayer groups) in Timbunmeli had to be steered by the KST. Other leaders, and especially Leslie Kaiban, who himself was a leader of a spiritual group and who perceived himself as having started the spiritual movement in Timbunmeli, took these announcements as an affront against their leadership positions.

The Mewang family, guided in the prayer meetings by Nancy and Eddi Gawi (Possuko clan) however, started to work together with the KST chairman who had a great vision. He wanted them to become recognised by the Catholic Church so that the spirit of David, whom Nikki now called Sanctu David, could do his miracles not only in Timbunmeli but also in other places.

Whereas the Mewang prayer group had started as a private family prayer group in 2011, by October 2013 it had become a big group that almost everyone from Timbunmeli village (but not including its separate village part Wongiambu) had participated in.

The Mewang family had prayed with family members since 2011. Sandra had experienced her first spirit possession in 2011 after one of her sons had thrown the church's tabernacle into a creek and went to prison for burning down the elementary classroom after consuming marijuana. David, the spirit of a dead Possuko clan member, regularly possessed her body now.

Members of the Mewang family were also part of the TSM. In fact, in February and August 2013 Thomas had strengthened David and Sandra to do their work. While the prayer group around David was growing more and more during 2013, the TSM fell apart. Disunity among group members, underlying conflicts, and frustration with the non-appearance of promised money had led the prayer group members stop to meet for the time being (Chapter 6).

I started to attend the Friday night prayer meetings in March 2013 – soon TSM members also started to participate in the prayer meetings, except for Leslie and Iven, the male leaders

of the TSM. In the course of events it became clear that male leaders started to compete for influence and leadership in the group.

Since mid 2013 the Mewang family prayer group had attracted more and more participants. David was talking out on hidden truths, giving advice to villagers, and healing the sick. Since September 2013 David was further finding and removing sorcery bundles from different family houses. More and more villagers went to the prayer meetings to receive help and guidance from David. Soon the news about the spirit that was working in Timbunmeli reached other communities and people from Changriman, Korewui, Paliagwi, and Kandingei came to visit David.

On 20th of December 2013 the prayer group around the spirit of David was invited by a man from Kandingei, Alphons, to come to his house to remove a hidden sorcery item from his house that David had identified as making Alphons sick. David's medium Sandra, the KST chairman Nikki Tonagon, and other prayer group members travelled to Kandingei so that the spirit of David could find and remove the *jambia*.

Leslie Kaiban had meant to accompany the group – TSM members claimed that David had asked for Leslie's attendance. However, Leslie had expected the group to pick him up at his clan compound before the motor canoes would leave the village, which the group did not do. Leslie attributed this to the KST leader's order to leave without taking too many people with them – he took it as a personal offence. Nikki is a younger cousin of Leslie and the two men had been competing in spiritual leadership and authority for a long time. Leslie claims to have started the spiritual work in Timbunmeli by establishing a prayer group in his house in the 1990s. Later that group became part of a super-regional group called the Thomas Souls Ministry (TSM) in the 2000s. Leslie is known for being floated by the Archangel Michael and perceives himself as a powerful and spiritual man. Nikki however, a young man in his late twenties or early thirties who only came to stay in the village from a life in town in mid 2000s, claims to be floated by Johannes the Baptist and is also recognized as a spiritual man himself. His leadership claim was supported by his election to the KST chairman whereas Leslie had been the community's acolyte minister. Leslie however had stopped taking part in locally organised church services after a conflict had arisen concerning the practices of his prayer group in 2011.

On Saturday the group returned and on Sunday, December 22nd, a church service took place, in which Nikki Tonagon said that the KST chairman, representing the church, was the steersman of all the spiritual work in Timbunmeli. He also said that Satan was already working in Timbunmeli's church, which could be seen in the community split. He stated several times that any prayer group had to be steered by the KST. The Mewang family, among whom the spirit

of David was working, had already reunited with the Church. The Church, in his person, would now work with them, straighten them and grow them, so that they would produce miracles:

Brothers and sisters, I think I have a big announcement to make. The church or KST is the steersman in this community, of all church work that you are making. Do you understand me? [Answer: Yes.]. [...]. So, I ask you, you have to work together with the church, or KST. They are here to steer you. They are here to make you good. They are here to make that work of yours grow. So that change will come. So that you will have a good life! But you want to see that life, yes, it comes up to small groups who give themselves. But the big group [referring to the TSM], disunity came up and they are outside. When you do not hear the church, when you do not hear the KST, your steersman, listen brothers and sisters, Timbun's church, Satan is working in it already. Do you have eyes? It fulfils the talk of God. Do you have eyes? It is the sign and mark of Satan who works in your community. You broke into two groups. [...].

Also, I am still giving a steering talk: Any kind of chapter groups, any kind of family prayer, or prayers or whatever concerns the work of God, and it becomes big, the church will steer it. The KST will steer it. Like now, you see, the Mewang family. [...]. The church will work with them; the church will straighten them. Strengthen them, grow them. Their work will grow big with the strength and *power* and *glory* of God. And they bring about *miracles*.

So on top of this, I will make it clear to you, now concerning this Mewang family, their *organization*, their group, it is their family prayer. The church or chairman or KST, we make a *structure* for them. You cannot go inside and steer them. You cannot go inside and confuse (*faulim*) them and tell them they should go that way. No! [...] (see long version in appendix p.258).

Nikki, obvious for everyone who knew the village's past, told the members of the TSM to stay clear of the Mewang family's prayer group. He also insinuated that Satan had been working in their prayer group – they had separated from the church's influence and ended up falling apart. Nikki made it very clear, that it was him, representing the KST, who had the claim to lead the spiritual movement in Timbunmeli.

With that a conflict with Leslie was predestined. The conflict escalated when Nikki visited me in my house on the night of December 23rd. Leslie, whose house is next to mine, became aware of Nikki's visit and came to my house requesting me harshly to throw Nikki out of my house. I did not follow his order. I felt that Leslie had overstepped a boundary by commanding me to get rid of Nikki and with that taking influence on my access to visitors. We got into a dispute about it but reconciled the next day. However, Nikki and Leslie got into an argument that was not resolved. Nikki had claimed that he had not known of Leslie's intention to accompany the group that left for Kandingei – he said that Leslie could have walked over to the spot of departure himself as everyone else had done. Leslie flipped after hearing this, stating that he was too big of a man (*bikpela man tumas*) and that it was him who had started the spiritual movement in Timbunmeli. Leslie was not only an older (classificatory) brother of Nikki, but also the most senior man of their lineage who made up the largest part of the Yak clan (second largest clan in Timbunmeli). Only Mavak and Iven from a different lineage were more senior than Leslie among the Yaks. The confrontation ended with Nikki leaving my house, apologizing for having drawn me into his conflict with Leslie.

At the end of my fieldwork, Nikki had more or less isolated himself completely. Not only had he no support from the women group, also the male leaders had no interest to support his

efforts to finish the new church building and organise a re-opening program.¹²⁶ The only group that was still working together with him was the Mewang family. However, as we will see later (Chapter 8), the effort to receive an official recognition from the Catholic Church failed and ended in a community fight.

I would like to stress two aspects of the appropriation process of Christianity in Timbunmeli that the events surrounding the month of Mother Mary in 2013 reflected: Firstly, it is obvious that (senior) male leadership is challenged by the egalitarian process that Christianity, and specifically the Catholic charismatic movement, supports. However, clan membership and age grades remain strong – young ambitious leaders find it hard to receive support for their work when they proceed without taking the leadership claims of older men into account.

Secondly, we can identify a gendered appropriation of Christianity that is similar to that found on Vanuatu by Eriksen (2014). Men in Timbunmeli stress their individual agency while women rather build on the strength of their collective agency as members of the Catholic women's group. In this gendered appropriation of Christianity in Timbunmeli, I suggest, we can identify a reflection of what Gregory Bateson has called the male and female ethos of the Iatmul culture. Bateson has described the Iatmul female ethos in contrast to the male ethos as unostentatious, jolly, and submissive towards men, but at the same time strong and courageous. Women would know their own mind and would be prepared to assert themselves if necessary. They held a considerable power and authority in the family household and in fact the husband would depend on his wife for wealth (pig, fish) needed for activities in the men's house. While Bateson saw co-operation between males as difficult due to a continual emphasis on self-assertion, he described women as readily co-operative. The relationship between men and women was characterized by a complementary assertion-submission relationship (Bateson 1958[1936]: 123-151, 192-93, 198). However, in the next section I would like to suggest that this gendered relationship is currently changing.

5.4 Male Being and Schismogenesis

Although the Catholic Church does not support people in their practices containing spirit possessions, villagers nevertheless claim that they are pursuing the work of the mission when listening to and following the instructions of spirit mediums. I want to argue that this claim not only expresses a move towards a re-empowerment and spiritual self-government (see esp.

¹²⁶ In fact, the opening of the new church building took only place in November 2014, together with the inauguration of new school buildings.

Chapter 6), but also relates to what Gregory Bateson (1958[1936]: 235-237) has described as a theory of monism and pluralism in latmul thought and to what I have described in Chapter Two in reference to Mimica (1988) and Telban (1998) – the Nyaura Being as being-one, which at the same time is also being-many. Discussing the wagan [wagen], whom the West-latmul call Kibbinbange, Bateson (1958[1936]: 236) writes:

There are many wagan and many of them have multiple personalities, and yet all wagan are one and were descended from Kavambwangga who multiplied himself by means of boluses of chewed betel upon which he trod and which thereby became the other wagan; but which are all really Kavambwangga. Another instance of this mystical monism is to be seen in the theory that all things in the world are only the patterns of waves. [...] Everybody believes and insists on fundamental monism, but each group of clans has its own mythological theory according to which its own ancestors are given the key positions in the unitary origin of the world. Thus it has come about that there is not one monistic theory but a whole series of conflicting theories, each of which emphasises the fundamental unity of the world (underlining added to mark latmul term).

The latmul tradition contains the principle of the divisibility of a first primordial being and the ability of primordial beings to transform themselves into different forms. As Bateson noticed 'each moiety has its own phrasing of the origins of the world according to which that moiety's own importance is stressed at the expense of the other moiety' (ibid.: 127). Wassmann has documented the mythological repertoire of West latmul clans.¹²⁷ In his depictions the same principle that Bateson has described as being simultaneously monistic and pluralistic becomes obvious: A first spirit being divided itself and from it other beings started to emerge that could transform themselves into other beings (Wassmann 1988: 18-23). Thereby each clan claims its own primordial persona, usually containing a clan founder, a primordial woman, the son of the clan founder and sometimes an additional primordial figure belonging to the generation of the clan founder; all could take the form of other beings (Wassmann 1988: 15-25; see also 1990: 32, 1991: 168-169 for a short description in English; also Silverman 2001: 41). Stanek (1982: 40; 1983: 174, 196, 200-202), too, documented the same principle for the Central latmul in Palimbei. Each clan (pluralism) traces its origin back to one primordial being (monism): 'The genealogies of all clans in Palimbei lead directly to the primordial being [Urwesen]; so all members of the village community understand themselves as being related by descent' (Stanek 1983: 389, my translation).

Michael Scott (2007), while studying the dialectics of continuity and change in the context of land tenure and Christianity among the Arosi on Makira (Solomon Islands), has suggested that Arosi ontology would be a poly-ontology 'represented by diverse, not fully human, protolineages emerging in social and physical isolation as pure ontological types' (ibid.: 13). Trying to present themselves as the original landowners in a context of population decrease

¹²⁷ See appendix p.258f. for a translation of Wassmann's summary of the creation myth (1988: 12). Check also Wassmann 1982: 65, 134-143, 1991: 50, 89-97.

and replacement due to the influence of colonialism, Arosi matrilineages hold lineage narratives that proof their primary rights to land by emplacing their lineage's origin into it. While Scott argues that Arosi ontology has to be grasped as poly-ontology, he has also found creation myths that see one primordial being as the original ancestor of all Arosi matrilineages. However, he interprets this construction of a common descent as the outcome of mission attempts to imprint their theology into local cosmology as well as Arosi attempts to reconcile their poly-ontology with Christian mono-ontology.

I cannot eliminate that the Christian mission had already influenced latmul ontology in such a way that by the time of Bateson's fieldwork his interlocutors had 'the insistence that everything is really one' (Bateson 1958[1936]: 236, italics removed). However, as I have shown, the principle of monism (and pluralism), or being-one (and being-many) does not only relate to people's creation myth, but also to their clan system, and is further reflected in their understanding of personhood. Because of the embodiment of maternal and paternal bodily matter, names, and *kaik* a person is connected with past and present beings as well as with the Nyaura lifeworld and its creator. Depending on the context different identities and relationships can be activated. If before every clan and individual clan members representing ancestral beings via their names claimed to have a key position in the creation of the world, today individual persons and prayer groups claim to have a part in the ongoing creation process, the work of God.

As already described in Chapter 4, each clan held a secret mythological knowledge not only containing rights to names and land, but also containing spells that could activate spiritual agency – thus we can say that each clan had access to the spiritual sphere and a claim to represent aspects of it. However, although on a collective level every clan was entitled to represent and access its respective ancestral beings, only initiated male members of each clan had the right to the secret mythological sphere.¹²⁸ The secret knowledge formed the source of men's power and authority. As we know from other anthropologists working among latmul societies, men challenged each other concerning their knowledge and competed with each other for renown (e.g. Wassmann 1982: 102-109, 2001; also Bateson 1958[1936]: 123-141; Moutu 2013: 38; Silverman 2001: 43-45; Stanek 1982: 40-45, 1983; see also Errington and Gewertz 1987 for the Chambri).

¹²⁸ Note that latmul women have been described as knowing myths but as lacking secret names and details that made the knowledge of the mythological repertoire powerful (Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 167-169; Silverman 2001: 43). Women might have had knowledge of officially secret aspects of mythological repertoire. However, it was considered to be part of the male domain and only men had the right to contest others in public debates. Note also that Wassmann (1982: 103-109) states that the knowledge of individual men was only partial as the secret knowledge was distributed and held by different clan members.

In 1936 Gregory Bateson described the latmul male ethos as aggressive, self-assertive, proud, and obsessed with points of pride. But, latmul masculinity, as argued by Eric Silverman, is problematic – it builds on femininity, precisely on motherhood. In his monograph, in which he applies a psychoanalytic approach (see also Gregor and Tuzin 2001) to his material from the East latmul village Tambunum, Silverman shows how the topic of maternity runs through different spheres of latmul culture and especially male experience:

Images of motherhood both virtuous and carnivalesque appear, as we have seen, throughout the entire spectrum of men's experience – their achievements and disgraces, dreams, and fears, ritual prerogatives and mythological lessons. In sexuality, architecture, shame, initiation, myth, marriage, and of course, the naven ceremony, men define themselves in terms of moral and grotesque visions of mothering (Silverman 2001: 159, italics and underlining added).

Motherhood is an important aspect in latmul culture as Silverman has shown in detail. Even the primal sea from which everything evolved is conceptualised as being female, the cleft in the primeval ground being a vulva (Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 124, Silverman 2001: 31, Wassmann 1982: 240, 1991: 182). One of my interlocutors told me that the Nyaura creation myth was concealing the fact that the first beings were born by a woman – the hole in the ground was a vagina, the darkness they sat in before was the darkness that prevails in a mother's womb. In fact, along the Sepik myths prevail that stress the centrality of female ancestral beings as the bringers of culture and originators of important cultural items (Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 124, 161-166; Tuzin 1980: 34-35; Wassmann 1991: 180). Another interlocutor told me that furthermore it was women, not men, who discovered powerful spirits. A myth tells about an ancient time in which not men, but women had found wagen spirits (wagen nambu = wagen heads) that held the knowledge that later would inform the practices in the men's houses. By using violence, men appropriated those wagen and learned from them (appendix p.259).

Myths of a primal theft in which men stole flutes or bullroarers, items of spiritual power, from women are common in the East Sepik (e.g. Hauser-Schäublin 1977: 161-166, Silverman 2001: 34-35, Tuzin 1997: 159). The stolen items became central to the men's cult in Sepik societies. Silverman suggests that after the primal theft, masculinity 'was dramatically altered since men now defined themselves on the basis of purloined embodiments of female fertility. Men, in other words, could now be mothers, too' (Silverman 2001: 37). Men reproduced principles of motherhood in their totemic and ritual system, most obvious in the male initiation in which the novices, called crocodile children (nyang waak), are reborn as initiated men (see also Silverman 2001: 30, 37-39; Wassmann 1982: 41-43, 1991: 33-35).

According to Silverman the fear that women might regain their former powerful position is prevalent in Tambunum: 'In fact, the possibility that women might reclaim the flutes and reestablish an epoch of phallic motherhood and feminine ascendancy is a real concern of men'

(Silverman 2001: 36). If we look at the current happenings in Timbunmeli with Silverman's statement in mind (see also Gregor and Tuzin 2001; Tuzin 1997), we could say that a male nightmare has come true: The male cult has lost its significance and women have acquired a direct access to the most powerful spirits there are today – spirits of God. The different spheres from which men and women acquired their self-worth (see also Errington and Gewertz 1987) have started to change with women pushing into the male domain and acquiring leadership positions.

Since the abandonment of the *wagen kult* Christianity had become a new important field for men to play out their self-assertiveness and male Being that traditionally has been connected with the spiritual sphere. With the loss of their exclusive access to powerful spirit beings, men's roles are challenged. At this point I would like to stress that what could have been called the traditional religious domain was not separated from the economic, political, and social domain but was intertwined with other areas of life – male leadership was not clearly divided into political or religious domains like it is intended today by the introduced structures of the WDC and KST. Current conflicts, in which men like Nikki and Leslie boast with their spirituality and religiosity, have to be understood in the socio-political village context.

However, men, who formerly competed among themselves for influence, status and prestige by challenging each other concerning their secret knowledge, today not only compete with each other for leadership and authority, but also with women and uninitiated men. Thereby men are trying to solve their dilemma by claiming to have the entitlement to guide and steer all spiritual activity. They rebuild their claim to leadership on the patriarchal structure promoted by the Catholic Church. In Timbunmeli, the church offices are held by men and also family prayer groups have male leaders, who as the heads of Catholic families also have a claim to be the head of family prayer groups. However, in fact women outnumber men in actively pursuing the work of God in prayer groups and spirit possessions. Furthermore, women do not always agree with male leaders and thus challenge their self-perception. Thereby, they have the advantage to pursue their interest as a collective, stressing their social Being, while individual men, trying to push their interest of becoming and being recognized as powerful leaders, get tangled up in individual rivalries. This is especially obvious in the happenings that surrounded the month October 2013 in Timbunmeli.

In his monograph Bateson (1958[1936]: 176-197) developed a model of schismogenesis – the creation of division – defining interpersonal relations between groups and individuals. He defined schismogenesis as 'a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals' (ibid.: 175, italics removed) and differentiated between complementary schismogenesis and symmetrical schismogenesis. In

complementary schismogenic relationships a group/individual B behaves always submissive towards an assertive group/individual A and thus encourages further assertion. In symmetric relationships group/individual A boasts and group/individual B replies with boasting. Bateson assumes complementary schismogenesis for the relationship between initiators and novices in male initiation, between *laua* and *wau* in the *naven* rite and in the relationship between latmul men and women in everyday life – with the latter behaving submissive towards the first. Within the male domain usually symmetrical relationships prevail, as would be the case between rivalling moieties. In relation to men-women relationships Bateson noted: ‘Symmetrical schismogenesis is not evident between the sexes’ (ibid.: 178).

Bateson sees both schismogenic relationships drifting towards the creation of division. As an explanation for the fact that latmul society is not drifting into disintegration despite the aggressive assertion of male behaviour, Bateson suggested integrative mechanisms, such as the *naven* rite. The *naven* rite enabled men and women to transcend their respective ethos in a role reversal and take on the qualities of the other gender, relieving stress and friction. With that the *naven* rite functioned as a mechanism that ‘turns groups into integrated wholes’ (Houseman and Severi 1998: 11; Bateson 1958[1936]: 171-217, see also Lipset 2008: 221). Bateson (1958[1936]: 196) further suggested:

in latmul culture, it is probably, not only that the schismogenic relation between the men and the women contributes to controlling the symmetrical schismogenesis between the initiatory moieties, but also that the latter schismogenesis is to some extent controlled by the orientation of the men’s attention towards the secrets of initiation.

In Chapter One I have described that the contemporary Nyaura version of the *naven* rite (*sorak*) in Timbunmeli celebrates motherhood and is primarily performed by women. With that two integrative mechanisms that counteracted schismogenesis according to Bateson are missing in Timbunmeli today – male secrecy surrounding male initiation and the male role reversal in the *naven* rite. In Timbunmeli today, men do not dress as women and are rather marginal to the ritual. Only women dress as men, celebrating themselves.

Nowadays, in Timbunmeli we find a trend towards symmetrical schismogenesis not only between rivalling moieties/clans/family lines (Nyoui/Yak/Kaiban and Nyame/Nyaura/Wavi) and competing men (e.g. Nikki and Leslie), but also between women and men (mother group and church leaders). Women have pushed into a former male domain, and pursue in new rituals a role reversal, similar to that in *naven* rites: Women behave like men when they are pursuing the work of God, proclaiming His messages, and channelling His power through their bodies. The role reversal becomes especially obvious in those women who are possessed by male spirits guiding religious groups that include men also following their instructions. The legitimation for their actions stems from powerful spirit beings and the local interpretation of Christianity. Men

have little room to criticize the women's work, with the Church supporting the women's collective formation and integration into the mission work, and with spirit beings demonstrating their power through women's bodies and work.

Additionally, as I have described in the first Chapter, I want to point out that also in another area the role and influence of women has received support by new developments. I am referring to the commercialization of female fishing activities that has led to the fact that solely women earn the household income in Timbunmeli (Chapter 1.4.2). Although, as Bateson has stated, also in former times men were depending on their wife(ve)'s productive abilities, it is reasonable to suggest that with the new importance of money women's work assumed new importance which resulted in a power shift in gender relations. Whereas women have acquired important roles supported by economic and religious change, traditional men's roles are challenged (see also Knauff 2002, Tuzin 1997).

One could object that other spheres of influence have evolved offering new areas for men to demonstrate their malehood. However, I want to argue that those areas are very limited in Timbunmeli village. Silverman (2001: 25) has suggested that new institutions such as 'schooling and literacy, participatory democracy, vocational training, cash employment, capitalist prosperity, familiarity with Western norms, and the acquisition of prestige consumer goods' provide men in Tambunum with new niches to forge their manhood (also Knauff 2002: 28-29). In Timbunmeli men have to compete in those new areas increasingly with women, too. For those who stay in the village, income opportunities are rare – men rely on women for money. Although men currently still hold the most prestigious leadership positions in the political and religious domain (councillor, magistrate, court clerk; KST chairman and other church officials), women start to push into these domains, too – for the secretary of the village government a young woman had been elected in 2013; women representatives are envisaged for in the structure of the church and local government; the force of the women's group and female religious activity can outnumber the influence and power of individual male leaders. Also schooling and literacy, although still dominated by men, are more and more accessible for women – families not only send their sons but increasingly also daughters to schools in the Maprik area, Wewak, or Lae.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

In his monograph 'Dancing Through Time' Borut Telban identified 'kay' as a central concept for understanding the Ambonwari mode of Being. Telban suggests that 'kay' can be translated to

way, habit, manner, ritual, being (Telban 1998: 5), custom (ibid.: 39), or the body in its active, behavioural state (ibid.: 41). 'Kay' is existential for the Ambonwari Being. It is related to ancestral and traditional power maintained by men without which the whole village and the Ambonwari cosmology could be destroyed (ibid.: 39). The maintenance of the way of the village ('imínggan kay') is crucial. Thereby, the way of the village contained in habitual practice is only achieved 'through the totality and cooperativeness of male and female kay' (ibid.: 40, italics removed) – women and men feel comfortable with a division of labour in which men are responsible for handling ancestral power and spirit beings (ibid.). If the order was disturbed, severe consequences for people's village up to its destruction might be the result (ibid.: 169-170).

In Timbunmeli's past, men were responsible for ritual activities, handling spirits, and maintaining ancestral power that they also embodied with the initiation ritual. As I have described on the previous pages, not much has remained from this male way of being-in-the-world. It seems that currently a process is taking place that might lead to a shift in power relations on the village level. Furthermore, a possible destruction of the village, as envisioned by the Ambonwari if the way of the village gets disturbed, is perceived as being near in Timbunmeli with current End Time experiences and discourses surrounding the expected second coming of Jesus Christ. The strict order kept in place by the *wagen kult* has disappeared – excessive marijuana and alcohol consumption, violence, early and incestuous marriages are perceived as expressions of the End of Time. Young people do not listen to their elders anymore. Together with changes in people's environment these experiences feed into millenaristic expectations in Timbunmeli that I will present and discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: Calling the Dead - millenarism, cargoism and the talk of God



No 48: Thomas counselling Leslie (C.Falck 2013).

I have argued that the way people in Timbunmeli have appropriated Catholicism, and particularly charismatic Catholicism, has to be understood in relation to the Nyaura mode of Being. By showing that people's dividuality is reflected in their engagement with Christianity, I took a different stance to a string of ethnographic studies that argues for an 'individualization that is linked to Christian conversion' (Bialecki et al. 2008: 1147) and for a 'discontinuity with the pre-conversion self and society' (ibid.). As Michael Scott has pointed out, an 'ethnographic preference for charismatic and radical Reformation-type Christianities such as Pentecostalism, Puritanism, and Pietism' (Scott 2012: 3) has led to a promotion of a certain 'theoretical model of the Christian person as a virtually atomistic entity primarily oriented towards his or her "vertical" relationship to God' (ibid.). Nevertheless, Christianity is diverse, differences between Protestantism and Catholicism exist, and people make sense and appropriate Christianity in different ways (e.g. Cannell 2007 [2006]).

Although individual experiences of the spiritual other are part of the Christian experience in Timbunmeli and personal vocations allocated by God are called upon by individuals to legitimize their leadership claims, I would like to suggest that people's relationship to God and His spirits does not disembody people from their existing horizontal social relations. Rather God has been integrated into existing social relations that people have with the spiritual other; in fact, God has been identified as not only being present in the single person, but also as being one of their ancestors.

Furthermore, current interpretations of Christianity in Timbunmeli stress collective practices in which people try to bring about change by pursuing the work of God together. Also, people's appropriation of Christianity does not so much focus on the individual's salvation after death, since the dead live on at a place of happiness and peace, but on collective projects that aim at accessing God and His spirits for salvation already in life. Not only in divination rituals, spirit possessions, and prayers do people call on the dead to receive help, but also via the mobile phone they call the dead for support. People's relationship to God and His spirits are best understood in the framework of moral personhood.

Moreover, in this chapter I further develop my argument (Chapter 4, 5) that currently a re-empowerment process is taking place in the village. Not only do people re-interpret and re-appropriate local spirits, but they are also critical about messages of the church. Especially within the Thomas Souls Ministry (TSM), but also among other villagers, the Catholic Tradition is perceived as being a concealed version of the Nyaura tradition. I have already alluded to this suspicion in Chapter 4, and in this chapter it will become especially clear in the preaching of the spirit of Thomas (6.4), the leader of the TSM. But it is also stressed in the statements of a *spirit-*

man called Steven from Dreikikir district (East Sepik). Not only an upcoming resentment towards white church officials can be found in Thomas' and Steven's preaching, but also a return to what people identify as their former *faith*.

In the first section of this chapter, I present a spiritual re-empowerment process currently taking place in Timbunmeli discourses about the End of Time. Millenarian beliefs in Timbunmeli stress the possibility to receive salvation already in life.

From the second section on, I will specifically discuss the spiritual movement of the TSM in Timbunmeli that has millennial and cargoistic characteristics. It will further become clear that God and His spirits are put into a framework of moral personhood and kinship.

In the third section I will indicate continuities and differences between *wagen* possessions of the past and current spirit possessions in which the spirit of Thomas is acting through the body of a Nyaura woman.

In the fourth section, I will give detailed insights into the group's practices and underlying beliefs. By displaying and analysing one of Thomas' teachings in detail I aim at providing a more thorough insight into the re-empowerment process that I have argued to be going on in Timbunmeli.

With that this chapter provides more evidence for my argument that people's appropriation of Christianity in Timbunmeli has to be grasped as building on continuity and as relating to underlying principles that inform people's sense of Being.

6.1 The Time of all Times

'Brothers and sisters, we are in the time of which the bible is talking. We are in the time of all times [in Tok Pisin]. We are in the time of times [in English]', the KST chairman Nikki Tonagon said during a church service on August 25th 2013. During my fieldwork in Timbunmeli villagers often voiced that the Second Coming was close and that the End Time had already started: The church leaders would warn the parishioners that the Second Coming was about to take place; villagers bemoaned the changes in their environment with reference to the end of the world. Some people told me that the solar eclipse prophesied in the bible had already taken place in 1984; others said that discord, violence and immoral behaviour were signs of the Last Day to come.

On Sunday, 22nd of September 2013, Iven Mavak was leading the church service. He referred to the prophecies of Amos, whose book strongly focusses on God's punishment of people for sinful behaviour (see especially Amos chapter 4-8, The Holy Bible 2016). Iven

complained that villagers would follow their daily tasks and desires instead of going to church to pray and praise the Lord. Women would only think about *rabbamaus* fish and prefer to check their nets so that they could travel to the market. Men would be busy with getting firewood so that their wives could smoke-dry the fish. He complained that villagers would use *rabbamaus*, a blessing given by God, not in the right way: 'Why do you go to the markets and then play cards [with the money earned], produce homebrew? We do not use the *blessing* in the right way! Woe if one day a big *disaster* will hit Timbun!' Also, people would treat the needy poorly in Timbunmeli, something that is also addressed in Amos' writings. 'The talk already became true! The talk already became true! All the talk that the prophet proclaimed, it comes up at this time. God is about to move now!', Iven warned the parishioners.

While I listened to Iven's talk, I remembered that Briska and John Wavi had told me only on the previous day about their belief that the End of Time had started. They said: 'The ground is short now' and 'The ground is moving now'. I have heard these expressions on different occasions by different villagers. While the first sentence usually referred to the perception of population increase, the second one referred to God who was about to intervene. Among the Nyaura, *kavak* (primordial ground) refers also to God. The term refers back to the spirit being, Kavakmeli, a crocodile from whose body the Nyaura cosmos was created – its upper jaw became the sky, its lower jaw the ground. When an earthquake shakes their environment, people say that God is moving. If thunder and lightning strikes their sky – it is God who demonstrates his presence (see also 6.4, also Stanek 1983: 253 for identification of *kavak* with earthquake, storm, rain). Changes in people's environment therefore are perceived as being brought about by God. Because people do not use the things God provided them with in the right way, God was punishing them with unprecedented changes such as the vanishing of water-grass and -flowers, grass-islands, and diversity of bird and fish life (since 2000s) or with severe high-water (2013) and draught (2015).¹²⁹

In the Sunday church services parish workers and the KST leader constantly reminded the community to change their ways. If they failed to change, God would punish them. This perception is also reflected in a sermon held on the 2nd advent 2013 by the pastoral worker Stephen Saun:

It is the time to lose all our wrong behaviour and to follow the law and behaviour of Jesus. What if we are not ready? The first reading from last week's Sunday talked out that Noah's people did not think about God, they had all sorts of behaviour of this ground. They married two, three women, they followed a wrong God; they had all sorts of behaviour. They drank until they were drunk; they made all sorts of things. But Noah received a dream, an angel told him, he got ready, he built a ship.

¹²⁹ In 2015 people experienced a severe dry season. The Chambri Lake dried up and only small ponds of water remained at its outskirts (information derived from text messages from Timbunmeli).

When he had built the ship, he provided one room for everything of this ground. Animals, men and women from the bush or at what place they lived. When he finished it, God told him to go inside the ship. The people who followed the behaviour of this ground, they were not aware of what God had planned.

When he went inside and the big flood came, all people died. Woe if that happens to us! Woe if Jesus comes this Christmas and we will be surprised, while we have all sorts of behaviour. This is the mark of the Kingdom of God. Straight behaviour has to come up between us. [...].

As mentioned in Chapter 4.2 people identify a local myth about a destructive flooding as being hidden in the biblical Noah story. The flood that destroyed all life had already taken place as a punishment in ancestral times and may be repeated as a punishment again in the present. According to Wassmann (1990: 30-31) among the Nyaura: 'The distant past is on the one hand distinguished from the present but on the other not only brought up to it but brought into it. Mythological events are extended into the present.' The story of Cain and Abel is believed to be the Two Brother's Myth and is used to interpret current events (see 6.3). The Bible is perceived as containing concealed ancestral myths about events that have taken place in the past which were at the same time prophecies for things that were about to happen in the present and future. If we consider this interpretation of the bible, we better understand what Iven said on the 22nd of September.

In his church service Iven went on complaining that the youth were thinking about marrying at an early age, young men had two or three wives. The government had recently introduced the death sentence, Iven said, it was God's punishment for people's behaviour: 'God is using humans now to kill people!' He warned that people had to change their ways and the youth had to learn good behaviour. After he had complained about current behaviour in the village, Iven went on saying that everything that the prophets in the bible were talking about, already happened or was about to happen. 'Now, we live in [the time of the book of] Revelation! All the books [stories of the bible] already happened. Now we live in the time of the Revelation, brothers and sisters!'

In his sermon from the 2nd advent Stephen further referred to things that were currently happening in the community – spirit possessions by the Holy Spirit and other spirits of God who guided people to follow His work. But people were jealous of each other's role in the work of God and with that were hindering God to reveal everything. They 'blocked' the change that was expected to come:

Many things are happening. What more do we want to see and believe? Or hold in our hands and believe? [...]. When we have all sorts of behaviour, we will not be able to see the good. [...]. Many things are already happening. We do not know at what hour Jesus will come. [...].

Today, it is the time of the Holy Spirit now. The Holy Spirit works now. The Holy Spirit shows everything clearly now. [...]. Many things like to happen due to the work of the belief of each one of us in this community. Like in the case of the Christian mother's group or the chapter groups [Mewang family, TSM]. But because of our behaviour, being jealous of others, we block it.

Joel Robbins, who is probably the most prominent representative in Melanesian Anthropology to argue that Christianity promotes individualism as a paramount value, has found that the Urapmin have experienced moral torment as a result of adopting a charismatic form of Protestantism. Since they became convinced that ‘the individual is the key unit for salvation’ (Robbins 2015: 183), the Urapmin have been preoccupied with changing themselves and getting rid of their sins in cleaning rituals. However, the individualism promoted by their form of Christianity clashed with their relational being and pushed them into moral turmoil. During the time of Robbins’ fieldwork the Urapmin were ‘preoccupied with sinfulness’ (ibid.: 184), confessed regularly, and even kept lists of their sins. In Timbunmeli, the situation is different. It is true that a discourse about sinfulness is found in Timbunmeli, but the understanding of being sinners has not put the Nyaura into moral torment as in the Urapmin case, who ‘define themselves primarily as sinners’ (ibid.: 185). In Timbunmeli, predominantly a Catholic community, people consider every person to be a sinner since the fall of mankind has happened – sins are part of the life on the ground. Villagers are not so much occupied with cleansing themselves from sins but rather continue to perform techniques – if they feel that their relations to the divine/spiritual other has become unbalanced – that also in former times have appeased spirit beings that had been stirred up by human transgressions (Chapter 3).

Max Weber has pointed to a difference between Protestantism and Catholicism that he saw as constituting different approaches towards life. Anthony Giddens, summarizing Weber’s thesis, says: the ‘moral responsibility of the Protestant is cumulative’ and ‘the cycle of sin, repentance and forgiveness, renewed throughout the life of the Catholics, is absent in Protestantism’ (Giddens in Weber 2005[1930]: xii, see Weber in ibid.: 60-61). Weber says that the Protestant doctrine promoting an ‘extreme inhumanity’ of being left alone on one’s path to salvation has led to ‘a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual’ (ibid.: 60). In Timbunmeli, people feel a strong connection to God and His spirits – they are not alone, but, as I have shown in the previous chapter, intimately connected with the divine other. While people may forget about God in their everyday walkabout and commit sins, ‘God does not forget and He does not turn his back on [them]’. God is with them – He is part of their Being. Leslie Kaiban said during one of the TSM prayer meetings I attended:

You should not say that God is only in those men that God uses and talks [through], you should not believe that [he is with them] only. God is everywhere. [...]. It does not matter if we forget it, God does not forget and he does not turn his back on us.

Furthermore, the idea of salvation in Timbunmeli is not restricted to the afterlife nor is it depending on the individual alone. The project of change in Timbunmeli is primarily connected to the hope for a better worldly life – for a time in which people can ‘consume’ (*kaikai*). In their

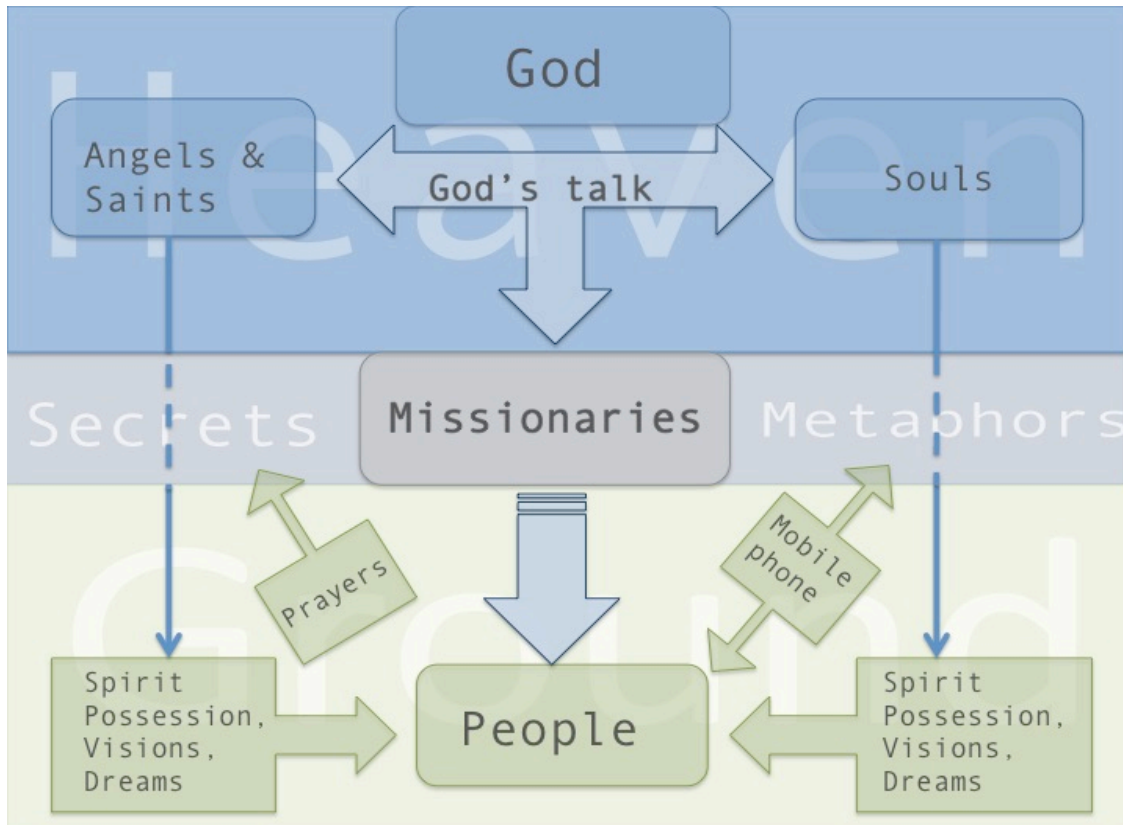
charismatic prayers and spirit possessions people pursue a collective project – accessing the dead and God as a source for change during life. The Western Christian definition of salvation that sees salvation referring to the afterlife cannot be applied to Timbunmeli's context without modification – salvation is of the world (see also e.g. Lattas 1998; Lawrence 1964; Smith 2002).

Furthermore, salvation or damnation does not concentrate on individual actions in Timbunmeli alone. While Bruce Knauft (2002: 158) has described how Christian ideology has cut 'across notions of collective reprisal and retribution' among the predominantly Catholic community of the Gebusi (Western Province) by promoting that there was 'no collective punishment or collective benefit in the eyes of God', in Timbunmeli Christianity has been appropriated differently. For example, people experience changes in their environment or failures in their attempts to receive help from the spiritual other as collective punishments for their misbehaviour. Also the faults of a few may fall back on social others with whom they are intimately connected (Chapter 3). On the other hand, the work and faith of a few can lead to benefits for the whole community. For example, the TSM and other groups promoted to pursue the work of God together as a collective to bring about change. Similar, they claimed my arrival to their village from which the whole community would benefit as a result of their hard work of praying and giving offerings.

While villagers saw different signs that they related to prophecies of the bible, spirits voicing the talk of God were impressive and powerful proofs for change. The barrier between people in Timbunmeli and God had started to open up and He started to reveal His knowledge. In the figure presented below (p. 178), I have tried to capture communication ways between God and people. Via visions and dreams, spirit possessions and the mobile phone villagers now received messages from the divine. Thereby especially spirit possessions and the mobile phone offered new possibilities for a direct communication with God via his angels, saints, and souls. Before missionaries brought the talk of God to Timbunmeli and only those who could read the bible had access to divine messages, albeit hidden in metaphors.

Private prayer group members (TSM, Mewang family prayer group) said that animals, in form of *gecko calls*¹³⁰, had started to talk just as the bible stated it, referring to the book of Revelation. Also, a leader of the Mewang family prayer group would say 'my God already came to my house's door', or 'my God already arrived' referring to a spirit of the dead that possessed the spirit medium Sandra during prayer meetings. Similarly, TSM group members would say 'the

¹³⁰ The barking of a gecko was then identified as transmitting messages from spirits of dead (Thomas, David, Barnabus), Mama Maria or Angel Michael.



No 49: Communication ways for the talk of God (C.Falck).

bible has already become a human person' (*'baibel ikamap man pinis'*), while looking or pointing at me and Thomas possessing Helen, or talking about white tourists that had come for a visit before, as a proof for their belief that the dead, as prophesied, would return when the End Time had arrived.

On different occasions different people attributed my coming to the village as sign for change to come, but not always referring to me as a proof for the return of the dead. In a church service on August 25th Iven stated:

Ok, brothers and sister, I think we already heard the reading that came from the book of the prophet Isaiah, he said that all people will unite. It does not matter what kind of skin colour, it does not matter what kind of person, if s/he has a paralysed leg, if s/he is blind. Everyone.

I think some sort of thing is about to happen to us at this place. We already recognized it. It is here. It walks around. When the priest comes, you see a number of white men and women that he brings to this place. And there is one white woman who lives among us. Assess this reading now! All sorts of skin colours will get together. She came, she got together with us.

On other occasions it was obvious that my coming to the community was placed into the context of the return of the dead, prefacing Jesus' Second Coming: In March 2013 I visited the island of Wondunumbuk and had a conversation with a TSM member, a man called John. Although it was the first time that I met him, he openly told me about his beliefs. John said:

I know why you came. I know about everything. You do not know. When you died, you were too small. If I died and came back as a white man, I would be alright [I would remember], but you were too small [when you died]. You are a student now; they have not told you yet. You have to learn it

yet. [...]. I already know; big change will come. You came to do good things. But they are blind and deaf! They [others] do not believe. [...] Change will come. It is 13 now [2013]. Number one, two already passed, how much time [is left] now? It will not be long, it is close. Number three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, it is over! I am waiting. [...]. The change will come! Our ancestors will come back!

When I asked him what would happen when the ancestors and the change would come, John explained: 'The good time will come. We will eat [consume, live in a better way].'

A similar understanding of my coming was also promoted by a man from the Dreikikir district (East Sepik), Steven, who came to stay in Timbunmeli in November 2013 to pursue the work of God by healing people. He came to stay with Clara, a woman living at the farthest end of Timbunmeli's village part Wongiambu. Soon his stay attracted more and more villagers and people went to see him, obtaining prophecies and healing. I went to two of the prayer meetings that took place during his stay in Wongiambu and one that took place on the school ground. I did not like him. I perceived him as taking advantage of people and, furthermore, he reassured villagers that I was a spirit of the dead who had returned in a white body. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes stems from November 16th 2013 when people met in Wongiambu:

Around twenty people had come to hear Stephen's announcements. Rumour had it that he was a *spiritman* – a man who died and resurrected from the dead. He welcomed everyone and thanked for our coming. We shook hands, and I introduced myself. Pointing at me he said: 'We all know on which road she came. Nice white skin. I, too, I like it.'

He started to introduce himself for those, like me, who had not met him yet. For thirty years he had been doing the mission work, he explained. He had visited all provinces and had certificates from the police and bishops. He said, he would be a *doctor* and that he could heal the sick.

Steven went on saying that he had died on a Thursday. The next Saturday at twelve o'clock he had resurrected from the dead: 'I died and I came back. I am a *soulsman*, too', pointing at me, 'I, too, I like white skin.' But because he already resurrected after only a few days, and his dead body was prevented from decaying in a cool morgue, he received his former black body back and was not given a white body. He went on: 'I am very happy to see you all. You already received a big *blessing*. The *souls* return now. I am very happy. You really received a big *blessing*!' He meant me. Rita exclaimed: 'Amen!'

When he resurrected from the dead, Mother Mary appeared to him: 'Mary came to my house – with her arms spread. She came as a white woman, similar to the one that sits down here [me]. She gave me a bible.' After that he had started the mission work.

Jumping to another topic, Steven said: 'The souls will come on which road? She [meaning me] is a white person? She already changed! The body will die; the spirit will stay. I, too, I went and came back. The bishop Leo Albert already gave me one blessing. He gave me already everything! I am not afraid to die. I already died and came back! When you die, you will be happy! Jesus died and resurrected. I am a spirit man, too. I will not hide it! I died and I resurrected. Sorry, I am not Jesus, I am not God.'

He went on: 'Jesus will come back. It won't be long. I already came back, what more? Soon the *souls* will come. Many already came.' Lina shouted: 'One already came!' and everyone looked at me. I was upset about the fact that Steven supported people's perception of me – and people could see my annoyance from my facial expression. Later, I learned that they attributed my facial expression to me being angry with Steven talking out on my secret – that I was a returning dead person.

Interestingly, Steven went on to criticize white people: 'We [Papua New Guineans] are full of the talk of God – not the white people. Their belief is a *cargo cult*! They like money too much! Something is not hiding; everything is in the open. I already removed one priest from a grave [where he went to get money from the dead]. The priest will not take you to heaven! He only received two sacraments. He studied and he received it. You yourself have to get *power*! We all know the talk of the bible. I am fed up with listening to the talk of the bible! We have to *praise* the name of God! We have to pray!'

Steven explained, he did not come to lead prayer groups, but to heal the sick. He would not demand a payment. But the sick should give an offering – they should tithe: ‘I am not a *cargo cult*. The white people believe in *cargo cult*. They like money too much. I do not want anyone to say that I am like a *cargo cult*. I am not a *cargo cult*! I do not take your money.’ It was the time to talk out – Jesus’ comeback was close. One should not waste one’s time, but get ready.

On our way back in the canoe Lina said to me tauntingly, ‘And you still want to lie to me? I will eat your small mouth with my teeth!’ When I protested, she started to laugh. I told Lina that I did not believe that Steven was saying the truth and that I feared that he had come to take money from people. But Lina believed him to be trustworthy and did not agree with me.

Apart from proclaiming millenaristic expectations and supporting the view that I was a returning dead person, Steven positioned himself in opposition to whites. The church had nothing left to offer people – he himself had already been given ‘everything’ by a bishop and people themselves had to get ‘power’. By openly proclaiming that he had died and resurrected from the dead, while I was denying it, Steven was sharing the ‘truth’ that the church and white people in general, including me, were trying to hide: the truth that the dead were returning. He was behaving morally, while white people liked money too much and were cargo cultists, secretly stealing money from the graves of people’s dead kin. What Steven’s talk reveals is a striving for spiritual self-government and re-empowerment that will also become clear in the preaching of Thomas (Chapter 6.4), the spirit that was guiding the TSM.

6.2 The Blessing Starts to Come Now

The TSM had started in Timbunmeli as an offspring of Leslie Kaiban family’s prayer meetings and had since then attracted more and more villagers. The Holy Spirit had touched Leslie during a charismatic seminar in the 1990s – Archangel Michael had started to use him. In an interview, Leslie told me how the touch of the Holy Spirit has changed him:

L: If God really has work and the need for your life, he will try to float you. You can even stay [floated] for a month. I stayed like it for a month. That happiness of the Holy Spirit, it caught me. And I floated, and I could talk out and preach around. [...] After that, God will settle you. When he settled you, God will say, this is your work now. [...]. Really, you will become a strong worker when God has changed your life and you have this *touch* of the Holy Spirit. [...].

I: And what changed or how did He change you?

L: Before, I became angry very quickly. Or I used to shout, that sort of thing. Or I did not go to church. Or I was not a leader who stood up in front of others to talk out or talk at all. Ok. God changed me on this road. Many ways, I can be brave and talk in the public. I can even talk out the talk of God in public. I can even go inside the church and do the work of God. God had a big need and that is why he changed me. [...]. He works in the people and he can mark me to become a leader, like I already told you, I am the treasurer of the school, I am an acolyte minister. God put this ministry out clearly. So I will make that kind of work. Before that work was hidden. It hid and was there. Ok when he floated me and he changed me, I became a strong man, I can do everything now, God put this leadership outside, and after that he said you will become that sort of man. [...]

After Leslie had received the touch of the Holy Spirit and God was working inside of him, he formed a private prayer group with his family members and his friend and clan brother Iven Mavak and his wife Maria. Around 2004, the widow Rita Kaiban, who was part of Leslie’s prayer

group, had learned that a woman from Wondunumbuk, Helen, had a special gift, too. She was used by a spirit called Thomas who could set people into contact with dead relatives. The prayer group started to follow Helen, who had already assembled followers from Wewak and other Sepik communities:

L: And I prayed, and those people who were interested came and joined me. And I prayed, prayed, and went on. [...] Now, Helen came inside. [...]. And now all the women were in that group and started to follow her again. Follow her, they moved out and went to that *movement*. And I, too, I went on top, I said: 'Whatever' [*maski*].

I: Thomas Souls *movement*?

L: Yes. This *movement*. And I wondered, how did they move out and go like that? But I did not want to make them angry [*bagarapim tingting bilong ol*]. God, one day, he will work, and he will provide and reveal. And I went to work, go, go, go, go, go, and now God is starting to reveal [*kamapim*]. What *movement*, is it a true *movement* or a nonsense *movement*? I only started it off in the middle and they themselves have to realize it. God starts to show it now. Is the thing that you do a true thing or? But I have to back them and support them. Because I am afraid of that talk, it says, you cannot judge the spirit of God. Whether it is bad or good, you have to experience it and you will know. That is why I have these big thoughts that are in me, I will not judge the Spirit. But I have to control them [the women] so that they won't go to something that is not good.

When I asked Leslie about his perception of women's spirit possessions within the prayer group that he had started, he avoided giving me a straight answer. He said that he would not know whether the spirits that were using the women were spirits of God, like the spirit that was using him, or not. He said that he did not want to judge it. He said that it was forbidden to judge the Spirit as there was no forgiveness for that sort of thing. Trying to get a more informative answer I asked:

I: But this Holy Spirit that is using you or that is touching you, and those spirits that use the bodies of Rita, or Helen, or Sandra – are they different sorts of spirits? Are they *undumbu* [spirits of the dead]?

L: That is it. They say they are *undumbu*. And I do not know. I do not want to guess (*Nogut bai mi tok nating*). Like I said, I cannot judge for nothing and say the *undumbu* or what kind is using them.

I: Rita says that it is Barnabus [Leslie's dead brother], who is using her body.

L: Ya. I won't say anything without being sure (*Mi no inap tok nating*). I already told you. [...]. But I see that the work that they are doing is fruitful [*igat kaikai bilong en*]. When a person is sick and that sort of thing and they go to pray and heal them.

In Leslie's statements, we can discover different topics, of which some have already been addressed in the previous chapter: Firstly, Leslie perceives himself as a powerful leader who has received his authority and the vocation to become a spiritual leader from God. God had chosen him to pursue His work. Now Leslie, as other male leaders, is confronted with the practices of women claiming to be possessed by spirits of God, too, and who therefore implicitly challenge his authority and leadership. Leslie makes it clear that he joined the movement to steer the activities of the women who had joined the TSM.

Secondly, it is interesting to see a parallel between Leslie's description of his father as a 'God of this ground' (Chapter 4.1) and the description of himself as a powerful leader, in whom God is working. Similar to his father, Leslie's leadership is based on spiritual power. While Leslie's

father was a 'God of this ground', God is working in and through Leslie now as Leslie states in proud self-assertion.

Thirdly, according to the Catholic faith, spirits of the dead are said not to possess people; the souls of the dead return to God, only evil spirits possess people. But Leslie's, and others', life-experiences are different: spirits of the dead do possess villagers and they pursue the work of God. Leslie perceives the outcomes of the practices carried out by possessed women as having positive results. But since he knows that they undertake them without the official recognition by the Catholic Church, Leslie is careful about any statements concerning a judgement about the spirits involved and tries to present himself as a leader who takes part in the movement to keep it on the right track.

Fourthly, as we will see in the following statement, Leslie tries to resolve the conflict between his Catholic and customary faith by ascribing the outcomes of the TSM practices to God, not to spirits of the dead. This ascription has to be seen in the context of the process that I have described in Chapter 4 – people re-interpret their own spirits as being spirits of God. In his statement it is obvious that Leslie struggles with what he should believe and what he experiences to be real. Since 2011 TSM members were convinced that they could talk to dead kin on the mobile phone and Leslie identified the man talking to him on the phone as his father – he spoke his language, called him at the time that Thomas had told him to wait for the call, and sent money to his account. But at the same time, Leslie tries to integrate his dead father's actions with God's actions:

L: I am in it [the group]. I received the phone number [of his dead father] and what else. But I do not believe. I have two thoughts. They [women] arranged and organised all of this. I did not believe it. I only participated [*mi stap taso*]. If something comes up, I will believe it. But all of this, I do not believe. I am only there.

I: But they say something already came up and that you received money?

L: That is from the side of God that I received all that! I am talking about the side of God. What I made, maybe the mercy of God, a hidden mercy starts to come. The blessing starts to come now. Do you see what I am saying? The blessing will come on all sorts of roads. Maybe a blessing will come, a hidden blessing will come up clearly and you see it. Do you see what I am saying? I am doing the work of God, God has his time for you afterwards, you will see. Maybe you will die and you will see it, maybe you are still on the ground and God will make something. Like how I saw it in my account, money comes. Something like that. God will release all these things. You see?

[...].

I: This phone number of your father or of that man who says that he is your father – He himself said that he is your father?

L: He himself said that he is my father. And when I wanted to talk with him, it was late at night, he started to call and I, too, I was surprised. They [Thomas Souls] gave a time to me, like at this time he will talk with you, you alone have to be there. He will recognize your movement. And the time that he gave [...] he rang me at that time. It was close to twelve and eleven. Between eleven, twelve.

I: At night.

L: At night. He rang me, and I, too, had anxious thoughts. 'Ey, what kind of man calls me at this night!' And I tried to follow all these things that he talked of, and I see, there are no results. From his mouth, he did not say 'I will put that sort of thing in your account, money'. But I saw that money came up from nowhere, it came inside my account and I say, 'It is this God that I believe in, or is it this God that I call my *papa*? No, no, this God that I believe in.' I say, the blessing will

come from this God that I believe in, it is not from this God that I call *papa*. That is how I judge it. If I see that this God of the ground, he says 'I will do something like that', and he makes it and I see it, yes, true, true. He is my *papa*. But this God, that is hidden from me, and he came inside me, he says 'I will make something, I have the strength and power, everything exists due to my life.' [...].

I: His voice, is it like the voice of your father or is it different?

L: It is different [It sounds like the voice of a white man]. But he can speak the local language. But I do not believe.

I: He can speak the local language?

L: Our language.

I: He knows your language?

L: It is a funny thing again. How he can say good afternoon, *abman grambu*, *abman gambi* [good morning]. How can he do it like this again?

The idea that the dead will help the living is an important aspect of current religious practices in Timbunmeli. People believe that if they, following the Catholic practice, pray for the dead, the dead, in return, will help the living. This reasoning is especially prominent in the practices and beliefs of the TSM. During charismatic prayer meetings the group prays for the souls of the dead following the prayer of the 'Divine Mercy Chaplet' of the Catholic mission, but interpreting it in an idiosyncratic way: In compliance with the Catholic faith the members of the TSM pray for their dead kin's salvation, but – following the local norm of reciprocity – they wait for their dead to return their help by sending money or material goods to the living. The idea that the dead will reciprocate their hard work – that is praying for them and giving a *special offer* (monetary offering, also together with intention letter) is in line with the local moral concept of personhood. People share and can expect others to share; reciprocity indicates their mutual support and regard for each other. The norm to share and give back is thus projected onto the spirits of the dead. The idea that this 'road' to change exists is shared by many people in Timbunmeli and beyond, they call it *rot bilong indaiman* (the road of the dead). The dead stay part of people's existential space – they are part of the living's social networks. However, not only the dead are part of the social ontology that I have described, but also God has been integrated in it. God's *blessing[s]* are also called *gift[s]* that people receive in return for their work of praying and of giving offerings. Similar to ancestral spirits, God can not only reward people with health, power, and material success, but also punish misbehaviour – he can bring sickness, death, and environmental change. As mentioned in Chapter 4, divine punishments relate to a local concept called *naglambi*, a baleful condition that appears when the spiritual other has been offended. However, nowadays the actions that offend God are also perceived in the moral framework of Christianity – they are called 'sins' or behaviour that is not 'straight'. As techniques to appease God and His spirits and to call for support, people have adopted prayers, and to a lesser extend also confessions to the priest,¹³¹ in addition to monetary and food offerings.

¹³¹ Only a few people go the priest during his visits in the village to confess.

Since 2011 TSM group members also believe that it is possible to communicate with dead family members via the mobile phone, a new technology in their lifeworld. During a penance that the group had held once a year since 2011 on Wondunumbuk Island, Thomas proclaimed that he could provide them with the secret phone numbers of their dead relatives (Chapter 7). The contact established via the mobile phone was called '*bridge*' and the establishment of the contact '*wokim bridge*' ('to build a bridge') – expressions that reflect nicely what I have argued in previous chapters, namely that people, when knowing the right technique, can bridge over into the sphere of spirits.

Following their supposed dead kin's instructions on the phone, the group sent offerings in form of mobile phone credit to the phone numbers of their *bridge*. Also they had to send group contributions – 500 Kina to a Post Box address in Port Moresby (PNG's capital) every time when they were instructed to do so. As a payoff for their hard work, the group in Timbun was promised an amount of 5.5 million Kina that should be released to them when the work was done.

While most group members I asked said that the money was meant to support the work of the *soulsman* (souls' men, spirits of the dead), Leslie told me that his phone contact had told him that the money they sent would be invested in some sort of business that would make profit. In anticipation that the dead would return the living's hard work of praying and sending money to them, TSM members had opened bank accounts in Maprik and Wewak town and hung up baskets over house altars, called *basket account[s]*, into which the spirits were supposed to put money. Furthermore, the group members gave a *special offer*, a monetary offering, to a priest so that he would clear the way for their dead family members to return to them, who, when returning, would be in a white body.

It was in this context that I met group members of the TSM in 2011 when I attended the parish feast day in Chambri (see 1.1). My appearance was immediately attributed to the group's work of praying and giving offerings (which I did not know then). When I contacted the community in 2012 on the mobile phone in regard to my research this was interpreted as a sign that the group members' hard work had paid off – Lina's *bridge* was established. And indeed, after my arrival in the village the supposedly dead men on the phone informed the group that their work was done – all other *soulsman* had acquired a body now and were situated in Port Moresby. All that the group now had to do was to wait and pray, send a further group contribution of 500 Kina and then at the end of 2012 it would be time for them to consume (*kaikai* or *taim bilong abus*); the money that was promised to them for their hard work would arrive soon.

The end of 2012 came and instead of receiving the promised money, the followers of the TSM were cut off from their dead kin. All the numbers were *put off* and when trying to call them only an automatic generated voice could be heard announcing that the number they had called could not be reached. The group members were bewildered, but already knew the reason for their '*cut off*'. The group was in a state of disharmony and sinful behaviour – some of the widows had sexual relations with married men of the community, other group members were quarrelling, and the group was not meeting for their prayer sessions as regularly as they had agreed upon before.

The belief that the dead can deliver money and goods to the living is not only found among TSM members. It is also found among members of the Mewang family prayer group and other villagers, including local church officials. However, some, like Leslie (see above), rephrase their belief and say in fact it is God, via spirits of the dead and other ways, who blesses people with money, goods, fish, or whatever they need and wish for. Likewise, people outside and inside of those two groups have the suspicion or belief that the dead can change the colour of their skin and return in a white body.

In official church services in Timbunmeli, the pastoral workers also state that one should pray for the souls of one's dead kin, they, too, would pray for the living. Stephen Saun said on November 2nd 2013: 'Those who died before or those who die now, they wait to receive our help. They, too, help us and pray all the time and that is why we have to pray to help the dead.' Also, the idea that after death the body of a person would change was expressed during the sermon held by Stephen:

You listen, I want to proclaim one talk in front of your eyes: We will all not die. But we will change and become different. We will die, but we will not die altogether with the spirit and body. When we die, and this body is ground, it will rot. But the life, it will still stay. And we will see God.

The bible will call and all the people who already died will resurrect. [...] At the last day God will resurrect all the dead. And those of us who did not die yet, we will change and become different. In case we did not die yet due to our sins. Only because of sins, we die. But our life, it is still there. On the last day, God will resurrect us all. [...]. Very true, brothers and sisters, at that day all that talk that is inside of the bible will become true. And we will witness it.

Furthermore, we can find the idea that God is present in people themselves in his statements – they themselves are God.

Do we see God, [...], when we are still with our bodies? Yes. We can say yes. We can see his *creation*. We can look at ourselves and we can say that we see God. [Amen!]. We ourselves are God. [...]. The body will rot. [...] when we die, our body will die, it is ground. It will disappear. But life, it will stay alive.

Although Stephen did not say that the dead would receive a white body, I know from conversations and interviews with different people that many believe this or at least do consider this to be a valid possibility. I was told by different interlocutors that when the current generation of leaders were children and went to school in Chambri the dead mother of a

Nambuk clan member came in the body of a white tourist for a visit – she delivered money to her living kin. Also, one of my aunts told me that long before, in the 1970s or 1980s, a Yak clan member was host to a member of the Mt Uru movement (see Gesch 1985) who claimed that he could obtain money from the dead by knocking on a table. Furthermore, there are stories that men have caught Catholic priests at night on graves fetching money from the dead. These beliefs and practices are clearly related to phenomena that have been described in the literature as cargo cults (e.g. Gesch 1985; Jebens 1990; Lattas 1998; Lawrence 1964; Worsley 1957). The expression ‘cargo cult’ has been criticised as being a derogatory term first employed by colonial powers to discriminate indigenous practices as irrational (see Lindstrom 1993). Since then anthropologists have argued for or against using the term in anthropological writings (e.g. Hermann 1992, 1997, Jebens 2004; Otto 1992, 1999, 2010). What is interesting though is that the discourse around cargo cults was appropriated not only by Steven (6.1), who disclaimed any association of what he did with a cargo cult and accusing white people of being cargo cultists who were only after money and took it from people’s dead kin. It was also appropriated by villagers in Timbunmeli when a dispute around the practices of the TSM broke out.

By 2011 the group that followed Helen in Timbunmeli had attracted many villagers and the councillor Benedict Wavi, being sceptical about their practices, had informed the police about his suspicion that a cargo cult was taking place in Timbunmeli village. Leslie Kaiban was still angered and offended by this move during the time of my fieldwork. He showed me a letter from the police station in Pagwi addressed to Timbunmeli’s leaders in 2011. In the letter the police had informed that they had heard that a movement under the leadership of Helen had started that was under suspicion to be a cargo cult movement. One would fear that a cargo cult movement from the Madang area had reached the Sepik. Therefore, all related activities had to be stopped.

Rumours had spread that there was indecent and illegitimate behaviour among the group members and that they were seen praying naked on graves at night and would knock on altar tables to obtain money. A hearing in front of the village took place in which group members were asked to explain their practices and beliefs. No one could prove that the rumours about naked prayer meetings, or praying on graves were true. The group members stated that they were praying to God, following the rosary of the Catholic mission.

Nothing followed from the accusations, except for a deepening of a community split that was already in place due to a long continuing political rivalry between the two largest clans in Timbunmeli – the Yak and the Nyaura clan, especially the Kaiban and Wavi family line (Chapter 1.5). Whereas most members of the TSM are related to the Yak clan (*nyoui* moiety), the accusers were members of the Nyaura clan (*nyame* moiety). As a result, the existing division in the

community deepened. The majority of Catholic believers, the KST chairman and the councillor told me, had become part of the spiritual movement in Timbunmeli that had started to follow Helen.

Part of the conflict involved the pregnancy of one of the group members. The widow Imelda (Nyaura clan) said that it was councillor Benedict Wavi, who was the father of her child. Benedict (Nyaura clan), who was married, however denied his fatherhood and his family accused the group members to have had illegitimate sex with each other and begotten the child themselves. It is difficult to reconstruct the events leading to the accusation of the TSM being a cargo cult as this happened before I started my fieldwork, but apparently the issue is complex and also intertwined with clan politics. The belief of being able to receive helping from God and souls by praying to them, seemed not to have caused the cargo cult allegations alone. What puzzled me was that when I asked people what they thought a cargo cult was, they usually would answer with 'We/I do not know', although they frequently used the expression themselves. Only when I persistently asked them to tell me their personal thoughts about cargo cults,¹³² they would say that it had to do with people praying naked, with *pamuk pasin* (illegitimate sex), and with people going to graves at night to pray there. All of these practices were perceived as being highly indecent and no one wanted to be related to them. The belief to be able to receive money from the dead was also mentioned by some as a characteristic of a cargo cult, but the other attributes seemed to be more present in people's minds. They infringed local norms and morals concerning nudity and sexual license, whereas the idea to receive help and support from the dead, also in material form, was in line with people's social ontology.

The group's medium, Helen, was banned from Timbunmeli's church and received the notice to leave the community within days after the hearing. Thereafter many group members stopped to take part in local church services and prayers. They said that the KST chairman had expelled them from church. After my arrival in the field Helen came to Timbunmeli for the first time after the incident in 2011. Helen became an important interview partner for me. On several occasions I spent time with her, interviewing her and also Thomas about the TSM.

¹³² People also used the expression 'whisky club'.

6.3 Thomas - a God from the Chambri Lake



No 50: Thomas (left) blessing and strengthening a group of children, assisted by Rita (right) (C.Falck 2013).

Thomas had started to use Helen's body after her violent husband had poured boiling water over her lower body and she was hospitalized. One day, Helen was taking a walk with one of the hospital's sisters when she fell down and turned into a delirium. She was unconscious and talked in tongues. She told me that someone must have had poisoned her with black magic, but somehow she had recovered due to the help of Thomas. He had appeared to her and strengthened her body. It was during this time that he also started to use her body to talk to others.

When Thomas is using Helen's body, he talks out on things that no one knows. Helen herself cannot remember a thing after a session is over and Thomas has left her body. She feels exhausted, dizzy, and is thirsty each time the spirit has gone. Helen could not tell me any details about her spirit possessions and so I asked Thomas during one of the prayer meetings whether I could interview him. He agreed and on the arranged day, August the 18th, Helen came to my house, saying that Thomas had already given two *gecko calls* [barks] as a sign that he was about to take possession of her body. When a third gecko barked in my house, she told me that it was

about time; Thomas wanted to talk with me. She started to pray and Thomas took possession of her body:

I: When you use the body of your *vessel* [medium], Helen, she says that she does not know what you say. And I want to ask you, when you enter her body, into which part do you go?
 T: You and I now [*Em yumi yet nau*], using that vessel like an *overall*. Do you know how to take off clothes? That is it, she [her spirit] stays outside. She stays outside [of her body]. It is my time now. We work in/with the body and spirit [*mipela wok long bodi na spirit*]. And this something of the body, it stays outside [the spirit that belongs to the body]. I come as a spirit.

Thomas had been born as a child of a family on the island of Wondunumbuk in the Chambri Lake, populated by Nyaura from Takengei:

T: Can you call my name?
 I: Yes – Thomas.
 T: Thomas Souls! Thomas Souls Wamenbange. And what name did they give to you?
 I: Savikakanambumange.
 T: Same with me. In the name of Jesus, Thomas Wamenbange.
 I: Wamenbange? Whose name is that?
 T: That is my name.
 I: Your name.
 T: Yes. My mother, who gave birth to me, she said that it was a name of my clan. [...]. I was two years old when I *transit*[ted] [died]. [...]

After Thomas had died, he returned to the Chambri Lake as a Polish, Catholic priest.¹³³

But, before he returned in a white body, he had started to possess Helen. From then on, Helen started to work the work of God – Thomas, when possessing her body, heals others, gives them advice and guidance, and prophesises, spreading the talk of God. Furthermore, he was helping people to receive access to their dead relatives – he opened the door for them to build a *bridge* to the place of the dead from where money would flow and from where the dead could return in a white body.

Helen acquired quite a name due to her work and found followers in different Sepik villages, among them my research site. Here, Helen's ability to open the road for the communication with the dead was welcomed especially by Kaiban family members and regular prayer meetings started approximately around 2007 and attracted more and more villagers. More and more women and men suffering from the loss of a loved one wanted to work with Helen after they had heard of and started to believe in Helen's work and Thomas' words. They wanted to see their lost husbands, brothers, children, fathers or mothers again and maybe receive some sort of helping from them. The TSM group members promised to meet each Tuesday and Saturday at 3 p.m. to pray for the souls of the dead. At its height around forty adults from Timbun were involved in the TSM, but its core group is made up of sixteen people, who are mainly women (of them six widows). As an offspring from the group two other women,

¹³³ There has been a Catholic seminarian called Thomas, who visited the Chambri Lake parish. When he came to the Chambri Lake the group members identified him as being the same being that was using Helen's body. However, Thomas never became a priest (pers. comm.).

Sandra and Lilien (Chapter 5), started to be possessed by spirits of the dead and new prayer groups evolved around their spirit possessions. Therefore, in fact almost everyone living in Timbunmeli village¹³⁴ has taken part in prayer groups that were connected to the TSM.

In February 2013, while Helen was visiting the Chambri Lake from Wewak where she usually lived with her husband, several group meetings took place in Timbunmeli – in all Thomas appeared and led the group. During this time the group members were very anxious to re-establish their connection with their *bridge* and finally to receive the money that was promised to them. However, discord had found its way into the group – some group members were on bad terms with each other and were reluctant to take part in the prayer meetings. The prayer meetings stopped eventually.

I witnessed all the TSM prayer meetings that took place during my fieldwork in Timbunmeli and attended also a few on Wondunumbuk island. All of them followed a certain structure. In Timbunmeli Anna and Leslie Kaiban would usually be the leading voice of the prayers, which usually followed the ‘Divine Mercy Chaplet’ but substituted ‘have mercy on us’ with ‘have mercy on the souls’ (an excerpt of a typical prayer meeting can be found in the appendix p.260f.).

After the group had finished praying, Thomas would take over to preach and talk out on the truth, to counsel and answer questions, to heal the sick and strengthen his followers. He always blessed water that he used to heal and strengthen people. Also, people used to place water in plastic bottles on the house altar before the prayer meeting started. Thomas would bless the water during the possession and people could drink it later to strengthen their bodies.

Within the sessions it was not Helen who was perceived to act but Thomas, and his audience behaved in a way towards him that reflected his authority. When Helen’s body was used by Thomas, she suddenly behaved like a man, even more, like a *yanonyang* and a Catholic priest at once – men with great authority and group members behaved accordingly. Thomas was always treated with great respect – group members called him *bossman*, did everything he demanded, and all other men sat on the floor of the house while Thomas sat on a stool (see photo no 48, p. 171). Only Nyaura men sit on stools, women sit on the floor.

Helen has a high but gentle voice, she often speaks in a soft tone and she can be described as polite and caring. Helen never went to school. She often giggles behind her hands when she states an idea of hers and appears to be quite shy in the presence of authorities. When Thomas used her body, however, she changed. Thomas then spoke in a loud voice and

¹³⁴ Only very few villagers living in the separate village part of Wongiambu are involved in the prayer groups taking place in Timbunmeli village itself.

pronounces the p as an f in words such as *pikinini* (child). Thomas did not care whether he offended someone when he was outing things that no one knew before and he gave instructions to others with the authority of a man and priest. While Helen is illiterate and only speaks Nyaura and Tok Pisin, Thomas can talk in tongues and also claims to understand other languages, such as English or German.

Catholic priests are perceived as delivering messages from God – and so is Thomas. When the parish priest visits the village he listens to people's concerns, reminds them to pray, performs blessings of people and houses, and prays over the sick. He provides comfort and support, but also reprimands – Thomas does the same.

When I first took part in a prayer session during which Thomas possessed Helen's body, I was distressed by the fact that I could not make sense of what he was saying while everyone else apparently immediately did. I was not only struck by the fact that he constantly jumped from one topic to the next, sometimes after only one sentence, but even more amazed by the language that he used.

I learned that Thomas spoke in pictures and used a special language – the language of spirits. He was not only talking in tongues, but also used Tok Pisin words that had acquired a different meaning. For example, he would refer to a child as '*present*' (present) and called 'to die' '*transit*'; he said '*hambak meri*' (jester, f.) when referring to the *rabbamaus* fish; he used the term '*vessel*' when meaning a person that was used by a spirit; he called betelnut '*pikinini diwai*' (fruit); '*sikirapim*' (to scrape or grate) to refer to 'paddling the canoe'; and he used '*surukim*' (to move something back) for 'to have sex'; '*wanbodi*' (one body) meant 'spouse'; and '*kantri*' '(country) could refer to a village or place in people's lifeworld. Thereby Timbunmeli was called Japan and Wondunumbuk Poland.

What also struck me was that he used a different time scheme – 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock in the morning in his country, Poland, was three o'clock in the afternoon in Timbun. The time of three o'clock is believed to be the time when Jesus died (Matthew 27:45-50, Mark 15:34-37, Luke 23:44-46 see The Holy Bible 2016) and according to the Divine Mercy Chaplet the hour of mercy.¹³⁵ It was the time when the group should meet for their prayers. However, none of the prayer sessions started at three o'clock as instructed by Thomas – a fact that caused discontent and complaints among group members as they took it as one expression of their inability to conform to the directives they were given and with that their failure to receive the blessing from God.

¹³⁵ The chaplet of the Divine Mercy is based on visions and conversations that Saint Faustina, then a Catholic sister with the name Faustyna Kowalska, had with Jesus, who had told her that three o'clock would be the hour of great mercy (see The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy n.A.).

Thomas not only used a different time scheme, but was also constantly asking for the time during the sessions. For example, when someone asked for an explanation of an event, he would ask when the event took place – day and time. Thomas' behaviour made sense to the group members – he was a white priest. People had heard that there was a time difference between Papua New Guinea and white people's countries. Also their priest, Father Piotrek, was always checking his watch and seemed, like other white people, to be in a hurry. They had observed that times and dates seemed to be important for white people – everything had to be exact and according to a time schedule.

Thomas, when talking in metaphors and his language, followed the practices of white people. People when encountering a white person often are confronted with her/his inability to talk in a language that they can understand. Also people suspect whites to withhold secrets from black people and therefore talk in metaphors that have to be decoded. The bible, too, is perceived as hiding the truth behind foreign names, places and metaphors. Local names of people and places were changed and stories twisted into allegories that needed to be interpreted.

My interlocutors identified similarities between Helen's spirit possessions and those of wagen possessions of the past. In former times, as my interlocutors told me and as Bateson (1932b: 417-419) has documented for Mindimbit, wagen possessing shamans used, similar to Thomas, a metaphorical language. Furthermore, I was told that wagen, when possessing the body of a man, would demand for huge amount of betelnuts and finished them in one go. Thomas, too, ate large amounts of betelnuts when possessing Helen. Like the yanonyang (shaman) who could talk out on hidden things when used by a wagen, Thomas, too, talked out the truth and he knew the secrets of group members. However, instead of feeling the truth in his body, Thomas was checking his rosary that connected him with the spirit world (Chapter 7) while he was using Helen's body.

If we compare the healing ritual performed by Gabriel Mossong in Chapter 2.4 with a healing session performed by Thomas (appendix p.261f.), we can see that while the ritual and performing authority were different, the cause of illness, namely the separation of the body from its life-spirit (kaik), was not. Interestingly, in a healing ceremony described by Bateson (1932b: 419-420, appendix p.262), similar elements as in the healing rituals that I witnessed can be found. In all three healing sessions we can identify practices that aim at pulling the kaik of a sick person back into the body and/or binding the kaik to the body with special ropes (kaikmanje). In the case of the healing session performed by Thomas, a rosary substituted the traditional kaikmanje. Mossong used leaves and plant material during the ritual and the shamanic ritual described by Bateson contained a washing with water in which plants bespelled

with magic had been placed. In the healing rituals that Thomas performed, water was bestowed with a blessing by Thomas who prayed over it and a rosary was used to strengthen the body-*kaik* connection. A striking difference between the rituals however are the persons involved. Whereas traditionally only certain men could be possessed by a *wagen* to perform a healing ritual, today also women, possessed by spirits of God, can do the same.

Thomas can not only heal the sick and strengthen people's body, but also prepare the bodies of other mediums for spirits to use. He strengthens those bodies so that spirits trying to use them can deliver divine messages (photo no 51, p.193). Thomas claims to be the boss of all other souls – they are *Thomas' Souls*. Therefore, he has the authority to instruct other spirits who are using the body of other villagers. For example, the spirit of David, a dead man from Timbun's community, uses a woman, called Sandra, during the meetings of a prayer group that used to meet every Sunday to pray and hold the sessions with David (Chapter 5). Thomas disliked the fact that they were meeting on Sundays and instructed David's spirit and the group to change the date of their meetings to Friday, which they did. Sunday was a holy day and all the spirits, too, should rest on that day.



No 51: Thomas about to strengthen the body of Lilien, possessed by the spirit of Adrian's (yellow shirt) dead daughter (C.Falck 2013).

At the beginning of 2013 the group was eager to overcome their own state of disunity. They had to reconcile and get back to their former order if they wanted to harvest the seeds they had sowed. The core group did not want to give up but wanted to pursue their work further and, if necessary, also send more money to support the work of the spirits despite my worried warnings. When I told group members about my concern that someone might rip them off with a money scam and play a trick on them, they would say that they nevertheless wanted to try it out again. Thereby, they took the risk of being criticised and laughed at by others if their practices did not work out, arguing that they were holding on strong to their belief even though others might throw sticks and stones at them.

Dorothy Counts, working in New Britain, has described people's general willingness in Melanesia 'to try the course of action which seems most promising of tangible result' (Counts 1971: 291). She identified a 'pragmatic attitude of experimentation and a willingness to test people and ideas' (ibid.). However, the TSM members relate the possibility of public shame to the sorrow and misery biblical figures had to endure before they were rewarded by God. With that they charged their willingness to experiment and their possible failure with a deeper meaning that held out the prospect of a later salvation or blessing by God.

In June 2013, I stayed for a few days with Simon and Matilda Kaiban in Wewak. We were sitting outside on their veranda in St Marys, and after having interviewed Simon, a primary school teacher, on kinship terms, I decided to take the chance to ask him and his wife about the TSM. I knew that both were Catholics and regularly attended prayer meetings in their Catholic community at St Marys. I was curious to know about their perception of the spiritual movement. Mathilda immediately answered that she knew about the Ministry and said that there would also be an Angel Michael Ministry in the Sepik area and in Wewak. Before she could say anything else, her husband Simon jumped in saying that the TSM would not be registered with the Catholic Church. Simon went on saying that he was not completely sure what the Thomas Souls were doing. They would pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, but spirits would use their bodies, too. The group members would believe that these were spirits of God, but they were not. He would fear that the group would follow something else: 'It is evil! It's sin!' It was not God's spirits that were guiding them, they would be guided by something else: 'I am afraid. He [Thomas] eats a lot of betelnuts. A bunge of betelnuts is finished in one go!' Simon was referring to wagen spirits, who in former times had used men to give guidance and who were now also called Lucifer. Having said this, he and his wife got into a dispute. Mathilda was part of the TSM. She said that Simon could not know what he just said. Simon, enraged, shouted back at her: 'You have to know it! You as a Catholic believer, you have to know evil! It is sin! It is a cargo cult!' Addressing me, he said in an aghast voice that the group had opened bank accounts and would wait for

spirits of the dead to send money: 'That is cargo cult!' He went on explaining that Mathilda was part of the group and that she had lost a lot of money. That would be the reason why she would be against him telling me what he told me. But since I had asked him, he would like to answer my question and not hide anything. I felt very uncomfortable for having started a dispute with my questions and apologized. But Simon went on telling me that Mathilda had bought a new mobile phone. The group believed that they would talk to spirits of the dead on the phone. 'Spirits of the dead are using the mobile phone! It's a cargo cult! They started off praying and now they are following a cargo cult!' Addressing his wife, he said: 'Everyone will laugh about you! You lost a lot of money!' Mathilda responded: 'And if! It is my business; it is my money. They can laugh! And what if it is cargo cult! It is none of your business!' It was only God's task to judge them.

By August 2013 the TSM group had fallen apart. Since Helen had left the community in February, most group members had not shown up for prayer meetings. Some were on bad terms with each other, others were disillusioned by the non-appearance of money and the cut off from their bridge.

6.4 You Have to Talk with God – the nature God

On 17.08.2013 a prayer session took place in Anna and Leslie Kaiban's house that reflects the group's underlying beliefs and their move towards distancing themselves from the church and returning to what they call the *faith* of their ancestors. Only a few were present at the meeting that is described in excerpts below – thirteen people and some children had come to receive the talk of God and Thomas' blessing.

After the prayers were over, Leslie announced that God wanted to talk with them – Thomas had already taken possession of Helen and was about to deliver divine messages. Thomas' talk is perceived as being the talk of God; Thomas strengthening followers is perceived as God strengthening them. Note that Leslie called Thomas 'brother' and 'son', stressing that he was one of them:

L: At this afternoon time, God likes to talk to us. True, if we respect God, if we respect his child, if we respect the mother of the child, God will talk to us. [...]. So, our brother [Thomas] already came on. We can shake our son's hand [*pikinini man*] and show him that we like him.

In Thomas' preaching of the day the critique of white priests and the bible becomes especially apparent:

T: We will say, you sit down on the belief of the bible. Is that true, you can say it like that, a? What does the bible do? What does the bible come up with? If you sit down on the belief of the bible, nothing will happen! [...] We will see that the talk of the bible is at its end [*em i go pinis*]. Now, in

the name of Jesus, we saw it like that. So, you can take your book and you can look back. This bible is what?

Ok, I will ask you, if you know a story, a bible story, I forgot now, I did not sit with a bible and I came. Ok, I will tell it to you like this. I will give you a *parable*. And each one of you can sit down and you can assess it. There were two brothers – what are their name? You yourself sit down and assess it. The two started this *mystery* ya. Do you know about this, too? Say – in the bible, it is which *chapter*? I am not sure. I did not sit down with a bible and came. I did a different work before I came.

Rita [R] whispers ‘Cain and Abel.’ Katharina joins in whispering: ‘It is Cain and Abel.’

T: [...]. Who is the bible? Is it our *warranga* [ancestor], or? No! It is not your *warranga*. It is the lie [*giaman*] of the missionaries! Is that true, a?

The group laughs and some say ‘yes.’ Anna [A] exclaims: ‘Yay, *bossman*!’

T: Ok, my talk goes like this. Now, we do not worship the bible anymore. The bible came inside and it tricked us in many ways and we do not know the truth now.

The *parable* of Abel and Cain was a recurrent topic in Thomas’ preaching of the day – everyone knew it and everyone knew what Thomas was referring to (see below). He requested his followers to stop reading the bible – the book was not written by their ancestors (*warranga*) – but would only contain the lies of missionaries aiming at concealing the truth from them. The truth had to be found in one’s own ancestral past:

T: Two brothers. Do you know the meaning of the two brothers? Do you know the name of the two brothers? Ok. The two had how many sisters? Yes, they had two sisters. Ok the big brother [Cain], he took this one sister, they had sex. And the other brother he knew that this thing had happened [that his brother slept with their sister]. That thing happened like that – he [Abel] was not a man who fought, he ran away. He ran away like that, in the name of Jesus. He went and he became – now you see this [pointing at me].

A: *Aua* [Yes.]

T: Yes! Understand it now and God bless you. Do not confuse it with *Tok Pisin*! He became like this body [my white body]. And that brother did not know your name [forgot his family].

Cain and Abel. We come from them. That is the name in *Tok Pisin*, a? We go to the *Tok Ples* [local language] now! Who are the two brothers and sisters? They had two sisters. Ha? You say it! He had two sisters, and he started to do this to one of his sisters. Now he [the other brother] found out and he found it hard. He said: ‘We came up from one mother and why did this something happen?’ Then he ran away! He ran away and he lives good and sleeps good [has everything]. Is that true, a? [Thomas starts to speak in tongues.]

As I have already mentioned in the introduction of my thesis, the story of Cain and Abel is interpreted to be a version of two brother’s myth that is widely spread along the Sepik. Abel left because his brother had sinned. According to the bible Abel was the first human to die – his brother killed him. Note that here is a parallel to the story of Kibbinbange, who was the first being to go to the land of the dead. Now, in the End of Time, people’s white relatives were about to return to share with their black kin the secrets their ancestor had taken with him when he left his brother behind. Thomas asks for the local names of Cain and Abel, inferring that they were Nyaura men whose names have been changed in the bible to conceal the truth.

T: You can see, these two brothers, you can assess it. What is the meaning? Are you [pl.] *bodyman* or are you spirits? You [sg.] answer, do you know this? Why did you come to this country and this city and now you are here [He looks at me, but before I can answer, he goes on]. That Cain and Abel, are what to you [pl.]? Cain and Abel? [...]. Is it something of the bible? [He gets annoyed and screams at the group:] Answer!!!

L: *Warranga* [ancestor].

T: [Then in a low voice:] You [pl.] answer. [...]. The two were born and who made this thing to your sister now? She was worried: 'Why does he do that to me?', his sister. Now he went away, this white skin ya! And now he [the white skin = me] came to stay with you.

The group laughs loudly. Anna: 'Ah, Thomas!' Katharina: 'Thomas!' Rita looks at me and smiles: 'He is some sort of man, ya!'

My coming to the village was put in the context of a prophesised return of people's ancestors – the prophecies of the bible already had become true, the End Time had started.

T: Now we come back to the Old Testament. God bless you. Thank you for listening and God bless. We come to the Old Testament now. You cannot go back to the New Testament, it confused many of our things and now we are stupid. And we do not see one of God's things. If there is some more talk, you can talk, it is not good if only I talk.

Rita says something in the local language.

T: Bible, the bible already became a human. You should not waste time and go to church. You will go to church, church and you will jump and dance, dance. True, a?

L: Yes.

T: The bible already became a human!

A: Amen!

T: It [me] will come to your house. It will eat with you. It will rest with you. It will walk around with you. Do you believe this?

All: Yes, Amen!

T: Many will come and they will say, this sort – they went and came back. That is it. You say it like that. Cain made it, they had sex, he made this bad behaviour to his sister, and he [Abel] ran away. The runaway man, he sits down with us now [points at me]. He came back and sits down [laughter]! She works to get this lifestory. She came and tricked us. The missionaries came and tricked us. They [others] worship according to the bible and God is with you in your house!

A: Amen!

'The bible already became a human' referred to me being in the village – my coming to the community was a proof for the truth of their belief. Thomas also requested the group to go back to their own tradition, here called the Old Testament, and emancipate themselves from the teachings of the church that were lies and concealed the truth contained in ancestral stories.

L: Ah, Thomas. You leave it like this and I will give a small addition. We say, at the time that Jesus was born

T [addressed to me]: Put your machine [audio recorder] and get this talk, and God bless you!

L: When Jesus came to the ground, he came up from his mother's womb. [To me:] Listen well to this talk! It is about searching God, where he is while everyone goes to church. The Old Testament says that the prophets and these men saw God; that they talked with God. Afterwards, [...] new leaders came now, we started to search God – where was He? God was where? He has what kind of skin colour? Is He a black man or a white man? We are looking for him.

When Jesus was born, when he came up from his mother's womb, they recognized: 'The God that we were looking for, that is Him, God, ya! It is Jesus, ya! There is no other God. It is Jesus, he is God. Ok at the time of the Old Testament, the prophets and all the others they said, 'We speak with God. We see God, God is there.'

But they did not see God [as in a person, he was invisible]. When a thunder came, they said that God was there. Or when they had some sort of talk when they wanted to talk with God and they made it, an earthquake came. Like we say, they receive a gecko call. This *nature*, it says: 'I am here ya! And I make some work.' It talks about this something, it is *nature*, it talks. When a thunder strikes, we say: 'Oh, God is there. He talks about something.' When rain falls down, we say 'It is God. It is the rain that comes this afternoon.'

Leslie, talking to me, explained that the prophets of the Old Testament – people's forefathers – were in contact with God and could talk with him – they saw Him in the *nature*, within their daily lifeworld. Via magical words they could communicate with the godly and

receive support, for example ask for rain to come. But when new leaders came – with the new order introduced by whites – God, with whom they have had a close connection, was suddenly distant. People started to search for God. But then they realized that the story about Jesus contained their own *faith* – that the spirit of a person outlived death and could return to the living. Jesus embodied three persons: The Father (the matter of one's forefathers contained in one's body = *bange*), the Son (one's self = *mauk*), and the Holy Spirit (the lifespirt = *kaik*). Therefore, it was easy for the group to see that I might be their family member. God had sent me to them – I did not come following my own free will. God had a plan – He sent me to do my studies, collect people's stories and belief, and publish them afterwards, revealing the truth. Leslie went on:

When Jesus came to this ground, the people saw the God that they searched for, it was this man. God came. God said himself: 'When you see Jesus, it is me. Me, God.' So there are three *persons* that are in Jesus. Godtrinty. Godtrinity! The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The father is in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is in Jesus. Do you see it now?

So now, we do not *wonder*. When someone dies, this something of her/his [*kaik*], it is not over. It will come back. We have this, we believe. That bible ya, New Testament, it hid our *faith*. The missionaries, the white people, they came and hid our *faith*. Something like that. If someone dies, s/he does not die and leave! S/he will come back! [...].

Something like, you came and you came to stay in this community. You did not come for no reason and stayed. God! It was God's wish and you came. Maybe tomorrow [in the future] you will take this talk, take how we live, take it with you and publish it [*publishim*]. Do you see it now? You did not come of your own free will. God brought you. It does not matter that you are in Cairns at a university; God brought you so that you will see our *style* and way of life [*sindaun*]. Maybe you are one of our family members. God sent you. Something like that. You were born in Germany, but God sent you to come here. Something like that. The talk of the bible goes like that.

Thomas stressed that people should refrain from reading the bible now – it was useless, because people themselves were God:

T: Ok, the bible is over now. You cannot worship after the bible. You have to tell your priest, there is no more time to worship following the bible! Ok. We ourselves are God's souls and we ourselves are God. The bible will become human. And it will come. [...].

Because of your belief you will get money. Because of your belief you will receive money at your home. Your God will give *cargo* at your home. The bible already became human. Do you stand on your belief or do you stand on the belief of the bible? The belief of the bible, you will see nothing [*draipela eye bilong yu bai kamdaun*]. You close all your bibles now. And you stand on this Old Testament now. Is that true? You will come back to the Old Testament now. We went with the New Testament, and it was a lie. Humans made it with their hand. [...].

R: *Laikim yu, kavak* [the first ground = God].

A: *Laikim yu, spirit*.

R: God and the Holy Spirit, *laikim yu. Kavak*.

As I have argued before, and now shown in detail in this chapter, people's current religious practices not only re-interpret and re-appropriate local spirit beings as powerful, but also move towards a spiritual re-empowerment. Thomas stressed that the bible only contained lies of the missionaries – it was written by men and was concealing the truth. To receive access to money and cargo that the dead as spirits of God would deliver, people had to return to the 'Old Testament', their former beliefs and practices.



No 52: Thomas (left) holding money that suddenly appeared in his hands during a prayer meeting (C.Falck 2013).

Note that Rita addressed Thomas as God, Holy Spirit and *kavak*. As I have mentioned, *kavak* is a term for God in the local language. God was not an alien power, He was their God, He came from Papua New Guinea, and He had a plan for them:

T: You find your God. Our God of Papua New Guinea. They stole him and carried him away. You are a descendant [*tumbuna*] of whom? You talk! We already said it. I will leave you with God's blessing.

R: *Laikim*.

[...].

Thomas shakes the hand of everyone and repeats 'God bless, God is with you', for everyone.

T: You did not come up from a rich family, you came up from a poor family. God has a plan with you.

This God did not originate in a city. Do you believe this?

Rita and Leslie: Yes!

T: God did not originate from a church. God did not originate from a big country. God came up in this sort of family, from this sort of life.

Especially in Thomas' talk that I have presented in excerpts in this last section, the move to a spiritual re-empowerment becomes obvious. On the day after the represented meeting of the TSM, I interviewed Thomas in the privacy of my house. He repeated what he had preached the other day:

During the time of our ancestors, they did not pray to God. They did not worship the bible! Do you understand!? They did not do it, like the white man came and gave the church. [...]. This time, you think it is the time of the bible? It is the time of the bible? It is not the time of the bible! You have to talk with God – The *nature God*.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have given detailed insights into the re-empowerment process that I argue to be going on in Timbunmeli. Part of this process is that God is not only perceived as the Christian God – the Trinity Himself – but also called '*kavak*', the source of the Nyaura cosmos. God is one, but he is also many (Chapter 2, 5). Following this reasoning, *wagen*, spirits of the dead, the ground, and specifically the spirits of David and Thomas are referred to as Gods. God is also called '*nature*' or '*nature God*' – He has created people's living environment and is present in it. This understanding of God supports people's former practices that aimed at influencing '*nature*' with magical words (now prayers), rituals, and offerings.

Current religious movements do not only preach a return to one's former faith, but also see it necessary to pursue the work of God together as a group. This becomes especially apparent in the history of the TSM in Timbunmeli. But as I have described before (Chapter 3), Being is intimately connected with others so that negative actions may fall back on someone who did not wrong her/himself. If individuals offend the spiritual other with her/his behaviour, social others and the community at large may bear the consequences; divine punishments are diverse and ascribed for example to environmental change, to sickness, or to non-appearance of expected blessings. I argue that the practices described in this chapter should be understood in the framework of the social ontology I have argued for in previous chapters. People's relationship to God and His spirits are best understood in the framework of moral personhood, guided by the principle of reciprocity. By drawing on the principle of reciprocity, villagers try to access the money of the dead; for praying for the dead and giving offerings (also in forms of mobile phone credit and money sent to post box addresses), villagers expect something in return. The dead – and white people – who are part of this moral framework, are expected to share with their less fortunate living (black) kin. That the dead – and white people – have not shared their wealth and secret knowledge is not only attributed to people's transgressions (disputes, sexual affairs, jealousy), but is sometimes also understood as a breach of the principles of moral personhood (Rita (p.11) Lina (p.180) and Thomas (p.197) accusing me of lying; and generally the 'white brother' not sharing his secrets with his 'black brother').

As we will see in the next chapter millenarian and cargoistic expectations not only transformed people's and my Being, but also that of certain things in Timbunmeli. Next, I will turn my attention to the changing lives that things currently receive in religious but also everyday practices in Timbunmeli. I will discuss how ordinary things could quickly receive different meanings and become highly desired items due to a hidden truth they were said to contain are to be able to reveal.

CHAPTER 7: Technologies of the Other and the Changing Lives of Things



No 53: Thomas checking his mobile phone (C.Falck 2013).

In the previous chapters I have concerned myself with the Nyaura mode of Being, relations between the living and the dead, Nyaura cosmology and ontology, and religious change. In this chapter I discuss how certain things are integrated into people's spiritual but also everyday practices. Specifically, I will discuss the appropriation of the mobile phone, a rosary, and a book.

As we will see all of these things have, in certain contexts, acquired a different meaning in people's intersubjective experiences and interactions from the ones intended by their designers or producers. It is now widely recognized that the way people appropriate new things and technologies is characterised by a dialectical relationship between the respective things and the cultural contexts they are incorporated into (e.g. Castells et al. 2007; Horst and Miller 2006; Ihde 2010). For example, although product designs and functions inform the ways a mobile phone can be used, people in different cultural contexts appropriate this device differently; they make it their own by ascribing meaning to it, using it accordingly and thus shaping it through their actions and imaginations (e.g. de Bruijn et al. 2009; Hand and Kibora 2008; Horst and Miller 2006; Tenhunen 2008). Thereby, people are influenced by socio-cultural premises that inform how they relate to and interact with each other, their artefacts and their environment.

Heidegger, one of the first philosophers who theorized technology, aimed to discover the essence of technology in its relationship with Being (1993[1977]: 311, 328; see also Ihde 2010: 29). For Heidegger, common definitions of technology as a 'means to an end' or in the sense of 'human activity' did not capture the essence of technology, which Heidegger understands as revealing or bringing-forth something that was concealed or hidden.¹³⁶ His approach has inspired others interested in the relationship between humans and technologies (e.g. Ihde 2010; Jackson 2002; Lattas 1998, 2000, 2006). The post-phenomenological philosopher Don Ihde (2010: 34) sees the essence of technology connected to an existential intentionality that characterizes humans' relation to their world:

Technological revealing takes its particular shape from its field of possibilities, its framework. And its framework is a particular form of the human taking up a relation to a world through some existential intentionality. There is thus some particular presumed shape to world and some particular activity that responds to that shape of the world.

Also Jackson (2002: 334), referring to Heidegger, says: 'Technology is an aspect of our human existence; indeed, it brings forth and makes apparent the very essence of our Being.' Inspired by these approaches, I aim to analyse the way people in Timbunmeli engage with things

¹³⁶ For example, a silver chalice is revealed through a craftsman combining material, form, concept, and technique; the technology of a hydroelectric plant reveals electric energy. Note that Heidegger sees the essence of modern technology, which is also a form of revealing, as being different from the essence of earlier technology. He understands modern technology as transforming the world into a standing-reserve ('Bestand'), a resource at the disposal of humans for exploitation.

in their lifeworld and by that provide further insights into their worlds' characteristics, their mode of Being, and the process of worlding.

In the previous chapters I have established that the Nyaura lifeworld is made up of visible and invisible parts that are closely connected. I have shown that the communication with spirits is an important part of people's lives and that the invisible sphere is considered to be a source of power and prosperity. To enhance the relationship to the invisible and get access to its secrets is not only an existential intentionality that many Nyaura in Timbunmeli have, but has been described as a characteristic for other groups in Papua New Guinea. Telban and Vávrová (2014: 224), for example, write that Ambonwari people had 'cosmologically well-established desires to deepen the contacts with the usually invisible (external) world, their deceased relatives in particular, and bring all the advantages to the latter into their living presence.' The same has been described by Andrew Lattas (1998, 2000, 2006) for the Bush Kaliai on New Britain who experimented with technologies formerly alien to their lifeworld to reveal the invisible space of the dead and its hidden powers. Lattas (2000: 326) writes that modern technology's ability to bridge the spheres of the visible world with that of concealed physical powers and to reveal those invisible powers, has been appropriated by the Kaliai in a way that relates to their own familiar 'customary practices of secrecy and disclosure through dreams, visions, rituals and possession.' Other anthropologists, too, have described the interpretation and appropriation of western things in a similar way. In many cases foreign things are interpreted as the key to an assumed hidden knowledge of Westerners that enables white people to live a life in wealth, health, and in control of power. Deborah Gewertz (1983: 218), for example, describes the interpretation of a book by a Chambri man as containing 'the power of white men'. Fr. Patrick Gesch (1985: 27-28) in his account on a cargo cult in the Sepik region describes the interpretation of a key found by a man as the key to heaven. Behind this mode of engagement with and interpretation of foreign things stands the widespread assumptions that white people hold a secret powerful knowledge and that the basis of their power and wealth is secret communication with the dead (e.g. Gesch 1985; Lattas 1998; Lawrence 1964; Leavitt 1995a, b; Smith 2002; Telban and Vávrová 2010).

In this chapter I will show that in Timbunmeli people's engagements with things and technologies new to their lifeworld is often guided by the desire to reveal the power of the invisible and 'bridge' the sphere of the living with that of the dead. However, while the particular shape of the Nyaura lifeworld has influenced the development and appropriation of techniques and technologies that people employ to connect with the invisible and access its hidden powers, people also shape their lifeworld when employing those skills and things in their practices.

In section one I will briefly outline the history and sociology of the mobile phone in Timbunmeli village. Ambivalent perceptions of mobile phone technology are prevalent in the village. In this context I would like to refer to Michael Jackson's approach to the study of technology. He suggested that humans' intersubjective relations with others (humans and non-humans) are characterised by ambiguity: 'in all human relationships the other is potentially a source of fulfilment and frustration, of being and non-Being' (Jackson 2002: 335).

Our relationships with other people and things depend 'upon the degree to which we feel in control of these relationships, as well as the degree to which these relationships are felt to augment rather than diminish our own sense of well-being' (ibid.: 336). This points to how people's appropriation of technology may be characterized by a struggle with the social and technological other, a topic that I will address in section two.

Furthermore, it will become clear in this chapter, that a thing, such as a phone, can acquire different meanings within one cultural setting. Depending on the context in which a thing is used, it may acquire a different identity (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Gell 1998: 5; Kopytoff 1986; Miller 2005: 7). In section three I discuss the appropriation of the mobile phone by the Thomas Souls Ministry and analyse how group members have started to use and make sense of the new technology. In this context I outline interpretations of the rosary and a book that in the beliefs and practices of TSM members had acquired profound meaning.

7.1 The Mobile Phone – a new technology in Timbunmeli

In Papua New Guinea mobile telephony has been available since Telikom PNG, the national telecommunication company owned by the PNG government, introduced the service under the name 'B Mobile' in 1997. However, only after Digicel, a privately owned Irish mobile telephony operator, entered the market in mid-2007 has mobile telephony spread noticeably, also into rural areas.¹³⁷ Digicel provided a broader net coverage, offered cheaper prices and promoted its service in big campaigns (Bmobile-Vodafone 2015; Watson 2011: 46-52).

Timbunmeli village received access to Digicel's network in 2010. Before, around 2008, villagers were able to connect to the Bmobile network in some spots on the Chambri Lake when paddling out with the canoe. Only after Digicel built a tower in Pagwi and Yentchan (see map p.2), did the mobile phone net coverage reach Timbunmeli island in 2010 and more and more

¹³⁷ Digicel also operates service in other Pacific Islands nations: Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Fiji, Nauru. In the Pacific region Digicel started to operate in November 2006 in Samoa. Telikom PNG's mobile phone service was first called 'B Mobile', now 'bmobile'. In 2014 'bmobile' partnered with Vodafone.



No 54: Timothy Thomas (left) and Peter Kaiban (right) charging their mobile phone batteries with their son's solar panel during high-water (C.Falck 2013).

villagers acquired a mobile phone. In 2013, 116 people had mobile phones – 38 women, 76 men. 68 households were with one (or more) mobile phone(s) and 32 households were without a mobile phone. All mobile phone users in Timbunmeli were Digicel customers.

Before the mobile phone arrived in Timbun, communication with people in other places was only possible by personal travel or by passing one's message on to someone who travelled into the area where the intended addressee lived. Next to writing letters (by someone literate) also the recording of voice messages on cassettes seemed to have been ways to send messages to other places.

Within the immediate surrounding of the village, the beating of the slit-drum (*simi*) was also a means to communicate over distance with others via drum signals – different drum rhythms conveyed different messages. Signals for example could contain the request to gather for a meeting, the call to prepare for a fight, or the request conveyed via an individual drum rhythm that a specific person who was working in the bush, garden, or lake should return to the village (e.g. Aitken 1990, Moutu 2013: 58-59). Today, people in Timbunmeli compare the *garamut* with mobile phones and call it 'the mobile phone of before'. But the meaning of slit-drums is much more complex than a mere function as a communication device – they were part

of men house's regalia, were used during rituals, and were connected to powerful spirits (Telban 1998: 189-193; Telban and Vávrová 2014: 226). While the sound of mobile phones is heard on many occasions in Timbunmeli nowadays, the sound of the slit-drum fell silent. It is rarely beaten. During my 14 months of fieldwork I heard the *garamut* only twice. In 2013 during the celebration of the arrival of fermentaries in the village two slit-drums were beaten (photo no 38, p.107). In 2014, after I voiced the wish to hear the sound again, the leaders of the village met with me and my partner to demonstrate different rhythms that were formerly used. However, what became obvious was that most men did not master the technique to beat the drum and those that had learned it, were out of practice, they said.

Today the mobile phone is the main means for communication with people in other places but can also be used within the village to send hidden messages or to bridge the distance to places in the village where net-coverage is found. Network reception is not available throughout the village, but people have discovered certain spots, such as a mountain or a curve in the island's shoreline, where the network is usually available. However, there are days when net-coverage is lost; people ascribe it to Digicel's mobile phone towers having run out of fuel.

If people do not own a mobile phone, but want to use a phone they can ask relatives or peers to borrow their phones. Hereby it is customary to bring a prepaid card and not to use the phone units of the mobile phone's owner. If people own a SIM card, they use that one to make the call.

For customers who do not have money at their disposal, Digicel has introduced a service called 'CallMe' (Digicel Pacific 2007a), which in the village context was usually referred to as 'please call' (*plis kol*). With a certain key combination users are able to send a free message to someone and ask him/her to call. People in Timbunmeli used the service especially with town relatives and peers who were known to have money. Another cost efficient way to ask someone to call was to send a 'missed call' (*mis kol*) by calling the respective number and hanging up before someone answers the call. Similar as in other countries (see Hahn and Kibora 2008 for Burkina Faso; Pelckmans 2009 for Mali) this practice of 'flashing' someone could be used to transport the message that one wants to be called. But by sending a *mis kol* also other messages could be transferred. For example, sometimes people arranged that a relative who was about to travel to/from the market or town sent a missed call to convey the message that s/he had arrived somewhere or was about to leave.

Furthermore, it was also common in Timbunmeli to ask employed relatives or friends with a free message for credit; this service is called 'CreditMe' by Digicel (Digicel Pacific 2007b). To use the 'Credit Me' and 'Call Me' services, specific codes or key combinations have to be known. To ask someone to call, the Digicel customer has to type '*126*' plus 'the number of the

person s/he likes to ask to call' and '#'. To send credit to someone one has to type '*128*' plus the 'number of the person one wants to contact' plus 'the amount of money one wants to send' followed by '#'. If one wanted to ask someone to send phone credit to one's mobile phone one has to enter '*127*', followed by 'the number one wants to contact', plus the 'amount of money one is asking for' and '#'. After the 'hash-key' one has to press the 'call button' and the free message is sent off.

Like in other places in Papua New Guinea, also in Timbunmeli people have appropriated the 'CreditMe' function to send free messages to friends and relatives (Temple et al. 2009). To do so, one types a number functioning as a code in the space where usually the amount asked for is entered. '60' means 'come quick' ('*kam hariap*'), or '99' means 'good night' ('*naitnait*'). If one entered '24' in the spot where one is supposed to enter the amount of money one is asking for, one lets the other user know that one had a '*kredit bump*', i.e. ran out of credit.

The creative compositions of short message systems (SMS) among university students (Temple et al. 2009) and the influence of text messages on local languages (Temple 2011) have been the subject of socio-linguistic projects at the University of PNG. Olga Temple and students documented the impact of mobile telephony on language use amongst UPNG students and examined how students adapted their SMS language to their needs by employing codes in their messages and with that creating a new language: 'Un-user-friendly keypads & limited number of characters per message prompted users to code complex messages into a mixture of acronyms and numbers corresponding to particular sounds or letters on the keypad; i.e., b4, 2nite, l8, r8, m8, d8, etc.' (Temple et al. 2009:5).

In Timbunmeli terms and expressions that were introduced with the mobile phone, have found entrance into people's everyday vocabulary. See for example Iven's usage of the term *gespaia* in his sermon (p.156). The term 'guess firing' (*gespaia*) is part of the mobile phone jargon and refers to the practice to call random numbers, usually with the intention to establish a phone friendship (see below, also Andersen 2013).¹³⁸ Also, the expression 'ID24', meaning to have no credit (*kredit bump*), was often heard during the time of the campaign for the local Gawi government election in 2013. For example, a woman supporting the candidate Joe Yanj often exclaimed 'ID24, you already topped up! Joe Yanj! 20 toea top up', with which she wanted to convince others that they should invest their vote in her candidate if they wanted to see improvement. When it looked like a candidate belonging to the same clan (Possuko, here called

¹³⁸ While Andersen (2013: 320n4) writes that she had never heard of women making *gespaia* calls, people in Timbunmeli said they are rung by both men and women who have dialled random numbers.

Possiks) would win, another woman stated 'The Possiks win! Ayo! ID24, there is no place to top up – I already topped up!'

Particularly desirable are phones with big screens, SD card slots, Internet and Bluetooth connectivity, camera, and speakers – they are nearly exclusively owned by men. Women usually own less expensive mobile handsets – without SD card, Internet connectivity, and camera.

The phones' cameras are used to take photos of different motifs, such as of one's children, or celebrations in the village, but also of the corpses of dead family members to keep a visual memory. Photos of me, and my partner Sven, were taken frequently, too. Usually photo data is deleted after a while when the internal storage or SD card of a phone is full.

Popular, especially among men and boys, is to use the phone to listen to music, play games, and watch video clips. SD cards filled with audio but also visual data are sold on town markets. Once clips, images, and music have reached the village, it is common for men to share files via SD cards or the Bluetooth function on the phone. A few men who own phones with Internet access also download data from websites.

Pornography is apparently very popular among adult men. During November 2013, when I studied the mobile phone usage by twelve villagers, one man was quite busy downloading pornographic clips from the Internet. He knew a website from where the clips could be downloaded and also knew how to operate his phone to do so – knowledge that other men lacked. In November 2013, he was frequently approached by men handing him a prepaid card together with a SD card or a phone with the request to download pornographic clips for them.

Music videos, funny clips (e.g. Tom and Jerry), action clips (e.g. American Ninja) or short clips about peculiarities villagers had not seen before, are often watched and enjoyed collectively by a group of people and children gathering around a mobile phone. For example, especially popular were for a while the video of a white woman with a birth defect who used her legs to dress and feed her child or drive a car; a snake biting a baby; or a figure with a human-like head, hair, and arms but a snake-like tail identified by people to be a spirit that was said to have crawled from a hole in the ground near Madang. Here, Timbun's cosmology comes into the picture: spirits are part of their life-world.

The perception of mobile phones in Timbunmeli is characterised by ambivalence – 'it is good but it is not too good' (*'em i gutpela tasol em i no gut tumas'*) or 'it is good and bad' (*'em i gutpela na em i nogut'*) people would usually answer when I asked them about their opinion of mobile phones. Also in other work on mobile phones in PNG this ambivalent perception of mobile phones and the existence of a moral discourse is found (Andersen 2013; Lipset 2013; Sullivan 2010; Watson 2011).

In Timbunmeli, people especially value the phone for social communication purposes. Also the ability to organise transport in case of medical emergencies was mentioned by some of my interlocutors as an advantage of the device. The employment of the mobile phone for business purposes was sometimes a factor when women checked with relatives or friends in Maprik whether or not there was a high demand for their products. They could then make a decision as to whether it would be worth travelling to that market.

Negative perceptions of the mobile phone by people at Timbunmeli included the costs of calls; the increased chance of adultery and sex between young unmarried people; difficulties in recharging phone batteries with no electricity; the overcharging of batteries with solar panels or generators, or self-made battery chargers (photo no 55, p.209); and the possible employment of mobile phones by criminals to facilitate crime.



No 55: Self made phone battery charger (C.Falck 2013).



No 56: Solar panel used to charge phone battery (C.Falck 2013).

7.2 Trickery, Secrecy, and Mobile Phones

You should not think that the mobile phone is a trifle that we [white people] made and sent to Papua New Guinea. We [Papua New Guineans] too also have *power*!

– Erika Kaiban –

As mentioned in previous chapters, during my fieldwork different people came to see me with the intention to ask me to facilitate their contact with a dead relative and to provide them with a phone number. Some people, especially the members of the Thomas Souls Ministry, claim that they communicate with dead family members via phones. Also, different people approached me who claimed that somehow a number, such as ‘99999’, had appeared on their phone. They suspected that a dead relative had tried to call them, but when they called the number that had appeared on their display, no one picked up. One man called the Digicel customer service about

a number that had appeared on his screen and was told that the number did not exist. How then, did it appear on his phone?

Unfamiliar numbers are further suspicious because they carry the danger of a sorcery or magic threat. Shamans and sorcerers have appropriated the mobile phone to extend their agency to other places. The mobile phone network is perceived as being able transport the magical spells through space to take effect on the victim's life once the call is answered. The magical spell can be sung over the *flex kard* (prepaid card) accompanied with blowing over it. Through this act the spell gets connected to the prepaid card's number, which has to be entered into the phone to upload the phone credit. The phone credit used to call the addressee then carries the spell into the invisible sphere of the mobile phone network. Answering the call activates the spell on the victim.

The mobile phone extends the *sibbunyang's* agency not only through space but also through time. The ensorcelled prepaid card may be kept folded as long as one wants before it is used (photo no 58, p.210). So the spell enacted on the card on what we can call day 1 may be kept until day 21 or so when the prepaid card gets activated and is used to call the victim, who, on answering, will be bewitched. With the same procedure and the right spell, a sorcerer can also remove the *kaik* from the body of a person via the phone. In the case of healing the patient



No 57: Benny demonstrating a love-spell sung over a prepaid card (C.Falck 2013).



No 58: Benny folding the bespelled prepaid card to preserve the spell for later usage (C.Falck 2013).

just has to listen to the spell on the phone, or the phone is put close to a bottle of water that, once infused with the spell, can be drunk by the sick person.

Erika Kaiban had first heard from her brother in Lae (Morobe Province) that people used mobile phones to send out magic and sorcery – one should be cautious when being rung by an unfamiliar number:

Ok, first, we did not know about these things. Ok, my little brother [in Lae]– this is how it all started, how I became aware of it – my little brother called me. When I tried to call him before and he saw the number [that he did not know], he did not answer his mobile. [Then he called her.] And I said: ‘Ey!’, I said his name. And he said: ‘Ya, you used a different number, I won’t answer the phone [when you do that].’[...] He said ‘Nowadays, people kill others via the mobile phone at my wife’s place and I am afraid to answer a phone when I see an unknown number.’

Jackson, Erika’s son, feared a sorcery attack via the mobile phone after he had married a woman from outside Timbun. This had offended his previous girlfriend from Timbunmeli village. He had already agreed to pay a bride price for this girlfriend. Jayson changed his SIM card after he heard that his former girlfriend had contacted a well-known sorcerer from Kandingei. Jayson and his family feared that he would become the victim of sorcery. Erika (E) told me the story in his presence:

E: She, Natalie [his village girlfriend], took a mobile [phone] and gave it to Koma, a man from Kandingei, to destroy or to twist the mind of Jayson. [...]. One man, his name is Samuel, he went and saw it. He saw it and said, ‘*Wau* [maternal uncle], mobile? You have two mobile phones. Are these two mobile phones yours?’ And he answered: ‘No, one belongs to Natalie. She gave it to me so that I do a magical spell on her husband [man].’ [...]. And he [Samuel] went straight to Jayson and told Jayson. He told him: ‘This girlfriend of yours, she gave a mobile phone to Koma to destroy you.’ [...]. Now, after that, my child, he called me and said ‘Mum, you all should not worry. I will not hold Natalie’s number anymore [he will not contact her on the phone].’ He said it like that, and we brought the issue in front of the court. And we talked about what Natalie did to him [Jayson]. We made it like that.

I: And what did Natalie say to all of this?

E: Natalie said ‘I did not take it [the mobile phone] to destroy him. I went to twist his head so that he would not think of another woman.’ She said this, ‘He only has to think of me.’ She said that. [...]. But we do not know. Did she say the truth? Or did she want to destroy Jayson? Did she only want to put a love spell on him so that he would only think of her, or? We do not know.

Furthermore, mobile phones provide opportunities to trick others on the phone. Men told me how they played tricks on other men from the village by calling them pretending to be someone they did not know. One man from Timbun tricked an unknown man from a different place into believing that he would be his girlfriend after receiving a text message from him. He asked him for phone credit, which the man sent. After the man did not receive a desired call from his girlfriend, he called my interlocutor’s number only to find out that he had been tricked.

Also, what is called the ‘*phone friend business*’ is widespread – almost everyone I asked has had a call from someone who wanted to start a phone friendship. Phone friends create the interesting possibility of getting to know people from faraway places and an opportunity to receive phone credits from them, but they also contain the danger to pull young people away from their home communities or married couples apart. Also phone friendships can result in

falling for someone unknown who turns out to be very different from what one thought. The sister of Bridgit Kaiban from Paliagwi, a different Chambri Lake community, had experienced herself how married men could play a trick on women via the phone. She had travelled to the highlands to meet her phone friend. However, he already had a wife, who was not amused to meet her.

A young man called Collin, had married a young woman from Madang, whom he had met via the phone friend system. She came to stay with him in the village. However, when I returned to the field at the end of 2014, Collin was disillusioned. He had followed his wife to Madang after she wanted to see her family again. But when it was time to go back to the Sepik, she did not want to follow him. During my last visit to the field, Collin was taking care of their child without her in his village – their *characters* were no match, he said.

However, there are successful stories, too. Benny, an older man who has spent many years in towns, has found his third wife via the mobile phone. Both of their former spouses had died. By talking on the phone to each other, they found out that they liked each other and decided to meet. When it was time for him to go back to the village, she followed him. They are still happily married.

Although the phone friend business is a welcome distraction for some, it seems to have lost its attractiveness for many phone users in Timbunmeli. Strangers asking them for phone credit and lying about where and who they are, as well as the waste of money for nonsense talk, were reasons mentioned why villagers ended phone friendships or why they were unwilling to start them. During November 2013 when I asked twelve villagers about their incoming and outgoing phone calls and texts it became clear that people mainly communicate with kin or friends in other places. No participant of my mobile phone network study said that s/he randomly called unknown numbers. Villagers are conscious of the costs of mobile phone communication and consider talking to random strangers without purpose as a waste of resources. Many stated that phone friends would make one's spouse or girlfriend jealous and only lead to conflicts. A few women and men said their spouses had destroyed their mobile phone in arguments and fights about phone friends. Some women also stated that her husband's did not allow them to have a mobile phone; a few men told me that they did not want their wife (or wives) to own a phone. One of my Nyaura family members who became a good friend of mine, especially suffered from her husband facilitating his affairs via the mobile phone. She had tried to stop him from contacting his girlfriend via the phone – but the mobile phone, of which he had several, offered too many secret ways to communicate with others.

Disputes, in which the new technology plays a role, are common (see also Chapter 5.3). For example, a young married woman, Emma, was accused of contacting a young single man,

Beno, from Timbun who was going to school in Wewak town, via the mobile phone and to have an affair with him. Noteworthy in this context is that Emma's husband, Israel, had left the village some years ago and moved to Madang where he took two other wives. While it is acceptable for Nyaura men to have more than one wife, women are expected to stay faithful to one husband. Emma was still considered to be Israel's wife and lived on his family compound. One day her sister-in-law, Olivia, borrowed her phone for her travel to the Maprik market. On the market, Olivia had noticed a missed call and called the number back – Beno answered the phone. Confronted with Olivia's suspicion, Emma denied having any contact with Beno over the phone, let alone having an affair with him. Beno, who was called while in town was offended, too, by the allegations and claimed that he had received a missed call from what turned out to be Emma's number. When he called back he found Olivia insulting him to have called a married woman. While both Beno and Emma denied having an affair and denied contacting each other via the mobile phone, the opposing side insisted that Beno and Emma had had an affair before Emma and Israel had gotten married. The dispute ended with Emma leaving her husband's family compound and moving back to her parents' house.

When I returned to the field at the end of 2014 a court mediation was organised to straighten a family affair within the Kaiban family. One of my paternal uncles had contacted the wife of an adopted son of his sister via the phone, trying to press her into meeting him. The women did not want to have an affair with him and told her husband's family what had happened to her. The uncle denied everything, but had to admit his wrongdoings in front of a court mediation in which text messages were taken as a proof for his guilt.

While mobile phone technology may promise to connect people with faraway places as well as with the world of wealth and money, these promises seldom materialize. Text messages informing villagers that they had won in the lottery or had won money, a car, or house were frequent but never led to the acquisition of the promised prize. Mobile phone scams were so common that Digicel warned about fraud on their customer service line, but also on its homepage and Facebook page (see Digicel Papua New Guinea 2013b; Digicel Papua New Guinea Facebook 2013).

The husband of one of my Nyaura sisters living in Wewak had received the message that he was selected by Digicel to win a brand new house. But when he was requested to transfer money to receive his prize, he got suspicious and called the company's customer service. In fact, at that time, August 2013, Digicel had a promotion running that gave new homes to customers (Digicel Papua New Guinea 2013a), but he was not among the winners. While the husband of my sister realized that he was tricked before he lost money, other villagers may cling to their hope that they found easy access to money. One of the teachers from Timbun sent around 7000

Kina in total to a man called John Brown who called him one day and informed him that he had won eight million Kina in a lottery. The number of John Brown was from Nigeria – a country known for being a starting point for scams, also called ‘Nigerian scams’ (see Australian Competition & Consumer Commission n.A.).

To facilitate the payout of his prize the teacher was told to cover fees for procedures necessary to set the payment into motion. To win the teacher’s trust, John Brown had transferred some money to the teacher’s bank account. The teacher was asked to send the money back to reconfirm that his bank account was existing and working. Later, he received a call from a woman using a PNG mobile phone number. She claimed to work for the delivery service TNT and informed him that a parcel with a check had arrived for him at the TNT office in Port Moresby, but that a white man had come to pick it up. The man was said to be from a group called *Money Finance* and the teacher was told that the group would convert his check into Kina. When I asked him what *Money Finance* was, he answered:

It is a group, an organised group. In Mosbi. She [the TNT woman] said: ‘People from *Money Finance* came and *picked up* your check.’ So I monitored [*monitarim*] and rang up, but John called me and said, ‘You cannot monitor. Do not monitor and call. They [*Money Finance*] got it to convert [*convertim*] it into the *currency* of Papua New Guinea. Then they will *deposit* [it] *directly* into your account.’ But I assess it like this – it is taking almost a year. I went and applied for a *loan*. I applied for a *loan*, got the loan – to send money so that they will release it [*releasim*]. They said that I will [have to] pay for the *bank fee*, *transaction fee* – those kind of names that I cannot think of, I had to pay for [the fees]. [...].

Believing John Brown who talked to him on the phone and encouraged him to keep waiting for his prize, the teacher followed his instructions and sent money off to the bank account details he received. After a while his financial resources were exhausted and the teacher stopped transferring the requested money. Then, John Brown contacted him again, telling him not to give up. He sent 700 Kina to the teacher’s bank account to see if the connection was still working. When the teacher did not transfer the money back to John’s account as he had been told but used it instead, the contact broke off:

Lately, he [John Brown] tried to put some money into my account, ‘I will try out your account. I will try out your account and deposit [*depositim*] money.’ Ok, he deposited 700 Kina. And *from there now*, when I like to contact him, his phone goes to *voice mail*. When I tried to contact him, I heard his phone ring. His phone rings. But think of these 700 Kina that he put into my account and he told me ‘You have to send it back.’ [...]. So, you see, [...], I tried to contact him, because of this problem. You know that I *move from here and there now*, and I started to use that money now. The 700 Kina. [...]. I used it. [...].

The teacher suspected that he was cut off, because he had not followed Brown’s instruction to send the 700 Kina that Brown had put into his bank account at the beginning of 2013 back to him. He had started to use the money instead. The teacher had spent a lot of money trying to follow the instructions that John Brown gave him via the phone. Hoping that his payments of fees would release his prize, the teacher took a loan from his bank and also

borrowed money from kin. He calculated that the total sum – including fees for international calls, costs for transport, and food in town – he had spent trying to get access to his eight million Kina prize were around 10000 Kina. Although his contact had been disrupted for a few months when the interview took place, the teacher was still hoping for John Brown to contact him again so that he could pay the money back and with that facilitate the payout of his prize.

The teacher (t) told me that he had documented the names and bank account details of the people he had sent money too. After listening to his story, I told him about my assessment of the situation and said that I feared that he had become a victim of a money scam. I suggested that he could contact the police. He answered:

t: Yes, but I see it like this. I am only waiting. I am expecting that they ring and say something. But I do not call them anymore. Because, when I ring that number, it is not easy [it is expensive]. At one day, I can spend 50 Kina to buy *flex* cards [phone units]. [...].

I: So what are your thoughts, what will you do now?

t: I would say, I will leave it like that. It is not like that man is close by and I could talk with him *face to face*. When I want to apply [*applyim*] for that thing again [the payout of his prize], it will cost money again. It will cost me money. So I will leave it. I have these *ideas*.

I: And you do not want to go to the police?

t: Ya. [...]. Contacting the police? I am telling you, the way in Papua New Guinea, if we want to contact the police or what, and they like to do something for one man, they need money. [...]. So I feel like, maybe he tricked me, that man tricked me. I thought it would be *true* that my phone number won the *lottery* and that is why I did this. If he tricked me, go, afterwards, at the Judgement Day [he will get what he deserves]. I say it like that.

Also, the Thomas Souls Ministry members cling to their hope that their supposedly dead relatives on the phone will at some point reciprocate their hard work of praying, giving offerings and sending money to a post box address, and send them money in return. They call their work ‘*wokim bridge*’ (to build a bridge) – they try to bridge their world with that of the world of spirits and whites, which is considered to be a world of wealth. In many ways the mobile phone can be considered as a bridge to other worlds – that of pornography, trickery, money, spirits of the dead, and of places far away.

The compression of space and time (Harvey 1989) made possible by new communication technologies has been described as transforming the human experience of space and time (e.g. Castells et al. 2007: 171ff.), but people at the Sepik experienced the compression of space and time before the mobile phone reached their area – through magic, dreams and visions, spirit possessions and séances. A *yanonyang* (shaman) was able to find out about happenings in other places while being possessed by a *wagen* spirit.

The compression of space via the mobile phone is also relevant in another context. When people told me how they talked to dead relatives on the phone they would often describe that the voice of the person they talked to sounded as if the person was not far away but very close – this experience served as a proof for the truth of their experience. Timbunmeli’s

cosmology situates the dead in a parallel invisible realm within people's immediate surroundings.

What has changed though is that nowadays not only a certain type of men with the necessary skills but everyone with a mobile phone can bridge distance and that the bridge built via the phone may involve villagers more and more with the globalized world. Thereby, the expansion of one's agency to other places can lead to possible conflicts within the village as described above.

Although being perceived ambivalently in Timbunmeli the mobile phone radiates a fascination for villagers. It is perceived as a foreign technology with many hidden functions that have to be discovered – and then may possibly provide the knowledgeable user with access to hidden things. But the ability to control the functions of the mobile phone was very limited among most users in Timbunmeli in 2013. Many, especially illiterate users, did not use other functions and buttons other than the 'call' and 'end call' button. Being asked why they did not own a mobile phone, many non-users, and especially women usually stated that they are reluctant to own or handle a mobile phone as they did not know how to use it. Other people said that they had a mobile phone but that they would only be able to use it in limited ways. Iven Mavak for example told me how he encountered the mobile phone by watching others using the phone. When he tried to operate the mobile phone for the first time himself, he proceeded with the attitude of trial and error. Until today he feels like he has not fully mastered the mobile phone yet. As a result of such experiences the dominant perception of the mobile phone is that it was an alien technology of white people.

One afternoon I was talking to Sambang about mobile phones. He said that it was a 'new technology'; a 'technology of white people'. He stated that, 'the whites give us new technology and knowledge and that is why we have to learn how to fully operate the mobile phone.' He noted that before the mobile phone was introduced, people used *spiritual communication* – a yanonyang was able to receive information from distant places. Nowadays the mobile phone could do the same thing. During our conversation Sambang further told me about an event that had taken place at his home community, Korogo, during colonial times. He said that white people had come with a technology that was connected via wires to the ground. Villagers were then able to hear the voices of their dead relatives.

I witnessed it, the dead talk to the people on the ground. A German priest, his name was Father Gottfried [, came to Korogo]. [...]. They buried a body and put a long bamboo down into the mouth [of the dead man]. So when he talked, his voice would go into the *mike* [microphone] and go to the top. [...]. When he talked, it would go into the speaker and we could hear it. [...]. I think in other places like Kandingei, they did it too. Priests came and made it; they said they talked with the dead and that they wanted to hear the dead and this sort of thing (appendix, p.262f.).

Sambang's story shows how communication with spirits of the dead influenced people's approach to new technologies. In Korogo a foreign technology enhanced people's ability to establish a bridge into the sphere of spirits with technology.

While some people might feel like they do not fully master the new technology of mobile phones yet, others had the understanding that Papua New Guineans have turned the intended usage of the manufactures around and made it their own in a powerful way – as a technology for magic and sorcery. After Erika Kaiban had told me the story of how her family had feared a sorcery attack via the mobile phone she said:

And you should not think that the mobile would not work. It does not matter that it is something that the white men produce; now Papua New Guinea, too, can turn it and use it in its way to kill people or do love magic or... It is this kind! That is it; we have that kind of style now to kill people and to do love magic via the mobile phone. You should not think that the mobile phone is a trifle that we [white people] made and sent to Papua New Guinea. We [Papua New Guineans], too, have already *power*!

7.3 Heaven and Ground Phones, a Rosary, and a Book



No 59: Heaven (left) and ground (right) phone of a Thomas Souls Ministry member (C.Falck 2013).

At different times and different places new technologies were initially perceived as means that could connect the living with the dead. Jeffrey Sconce (2000) follows this phenomenon in his

book 'Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television' by investigating how Americans recurrently associated new electronic media with paranormal or spiritual phenomena. The fascination of modern technology and its relation to the spiritual in the imaginaries of Americans is reflected in discourses found in stories, magazines, and movies that Sconce analysed. Sconce begins his first chapter with the story of the family Fox in Hydesville, New York, who, four years after the introduction of the electromagnetic telegraph line in 1844, experienced encounters with spirits. Their story started to circulate via articles, books and pamphlets and spread the message that family Fox 'opened a "telegraph line" to another world' and was able to communicate with spirits (Sconce 2000: 22). Influenced by encounters with spirits via new technologies, 'Modern Spiritualism', a religious and political movement, developed and soon attracted thousands of followers spreading nationally and internationally. While Spiritualists believe that the dead can communicate with the living via mediums channelling the spirit world (ibid.: 24), the modern version of Spiritualism explained the ability to communicate with the dead via electricity, a 'spiritual telegraph' (ibid.: 23). In her book review Helen Wilson raises the question, 'However, the perspective is exclusively American and one cannot help but wonder what other ways might exist for electronic media to connect with mystical traditions, or break with them' (Wilson 2002: 157).

A Melanesian perspective on this matter has been provided by the social anthropologist Andrew Lattas (1998, 2000, 2006) in his ethnography of the bush Kaliai in West New Britain and their interaction with modern technologies in relation to 'cargo cult beliefs'. Lattas describes how the Kaliai produced replica of modern technologies and things from bush material, tins, jars, and holes in the ground and used them to contact the dead. Referring to Heidegger's theorisation of technology as revealing truth (Heidegger 1993[1977]: esp. 319), Lattas (2000: 326) states:

I want to argue that modern technology's bridging of the distance between the seen and the unseen was transformed by cargo cults into their own familiar forms of revelation and truth. In cargo cults, the white man's mechanisms for revealing and tapping into concealed scientific forces was assimilated to Melanesian magical practices for revealing and tapping into the concealed forces belonging to the secluded world of the dead. A space of death came to inhabit European technology, animating it in ways that revealed to the Kaliai the secret presence of their ancestors.

Similar to the Kaliai's approach to foreign technologies, the Nyaura in Timbunmeli perceive the mobile phone as a technology that has the ability to reveal the hidden presence of spirits by connecting the visible sphere of humans with their invisible sphere. The ability of the mobile phone to connect people is attributed to invisible *wires* or *signs* that the phone is sending when being activated with the correct phone numbers. To be able to connect to the invisible realm of spirits, secret phone numbers have to be obtained.

Also among the Ambonwari the mobile phone is perceived as a technology that enables people to talk to the spiritual other (Telban and Vávrová 2014). However, while the Ambonwari and the Kaliai's engagement with the mobile phone network and respectively phones is characterised by the absence of the actual technology, Timbunmeli mobile phones and the mobile phone network are present.¹³⁹

As mentioned in the previous chapters, especially the members of the Thomas Souls Ministry (TSM) in Timbunmeli were convinced that they could communicate with dead relatives on the mobile phone. The spirit leading their group, Thomas, had announced that he could provide them with secret mobile phone numbers necessary to establish their *bridge* to the dead. To acquire a *bridge* number, certain instructions had to be followed: The group members were told to buy new mobile phones especially for the purpose of communicating with their *soulsman*. This phone was called *bridge phone* or *heaven phone*. People were instructed that they could not use this phone to call people on the ground, meaning living people – for that they should hold a separate *graun phone* (ground phone). If they used their *bridge phone* to call someone else than the dead, the contact would be put off. Although the handsets termed *graun* or *heaven* phone were principally the same – the meanings the phones were ascribed with were different. The *heaven phone* was only to be used to connect to the invisible part of the world. The idea behind the necessity of a new mobile phone is the contamination of the *graun phone* by common usage with other humans – because humans are sinful people. Due to the influence of the Christian mission, the visible world of humans, the ground (*graun*), has become associated with sinfulness that could repel and anger spirits.

To acquire the number of the dead kin they wanted to contact as a *bridge*, group members had to give their names and that of the dead relative together with the day and time of her/his death, as well as the phone number of the new Sim card, to Thomas. After they had acquired the numbers of their dead kin from Thomas, they were not allowed to call him/her, but were instructed to wait until they received a missed call (*mis kol*) as a sign that their *bridgeman* wanted to be called back. Not everyone who received a mobile phone number for their *bridge* actually ever talked to her/his dead family member on the phone. However, five of them did – Rita, Imelda and Augusta talked to their dead husbands on the phone and Leslie and Helen communicated with their dead fathers. While I did not witness the widows communicating with their dead husbands on the phone, I did listen to Leslie and Helen talking

¹³⁹ In Indonesia and the Philippines, too, mobile phones are interpreted as means to communicate with the dead (Barendregt and Pertierra 2008).

to their *bridge*. Leslie addressed his *bridge* with the English term 'father' and was called 'son' by him. Helen called her *bridge* 'daddy' while he called her 'daughter'.

Rita told me that she only once talked to her dead husband Barnabus over the phone. He called her to inform her that he did not want their daughter Osila to go to a school in a different community than Timbunmeli as Rita had planned. Augusta and Imelda were talking to their dead husbands on the phone, but their contact broke off in 2013. Imelda attributed her husband not calling her anymore to the fact that she had conceived a child from a different man. Augusta, too, had an affair with a married man that everyone knew about since they had a child together. But Augusta never mentioned her affair as a reason for her dead husband not talking with her anymore. She went to consult the spirit of David to find out about the reason for the cut off and was told that someone had caught her dead husband's spirit and was hindering him to call her. She was told to pray for his release, what she did, but until I left the village their contact was not re-established. He did not pick up the phone when she tried to call him.

Lina, who lost a baby girl in stillbirth, tried to get in contact with her daughter over the phone. As she did not receive the desired missed call, she once tried to call the number she had been given. The result was that a man's voice answered the phone and she quickly put the phone off fearing that her contact would be cut off – as Thomas had warned group members if they would try to contact their *bridge* on their own behalf. Another woman, Katharina, was still waiting for the call of her dead husband in 2013. And the SIM-card of the phone of a couple waiting for the missed call of their dead son was locked by the mobile phone operator Digicel after their account had not been used for too long.

The expressions '*kisim kol*' ('to receive a call') or '*em i givim kol*' ('s/he gives a call') is heard not only in relation to people receiving calls from other people or spirits on the phone, but refers also to gecko or bird sounds, and to statues of Mother Mary that people sometimes hear ring. When a gecko or bird called out TSM or Mewang family prayer group members would often exclaim something like 'Thank you!', or 'Yes, we are talking' – explaining that Thomas or David had given a 'call'.

One afternoon I was chatting with Rita when her dead husband Barnabus gave her a call. I was sitting in the doorframe of my house and Rita was leaning out of the window of her sister's house that was only a few meters away from mine. A black cockatoo flew loudly cawing over her house when Rita suddenly started to talk in tongues, shouting 'Boss! Boss!', in-between. After the totem of her dead husband's clan had vanished into the nearby bush, she shook her head and looked at me. She explained that she could not remember what had happened. Her dead husband – who, among TSM members, was called 'Boss of Japan (Timbunmeli)' – would sometimes use animals if he wanted to show himself. Rita said that he must have been happy

about Helen who had arrived back to the Chambri Lake from town and about the fermentaries that the village was about to receive.

Statues of Mother Mary are said to be connected with other statues via an invisible wire. When the spirit of Mother Mary enlivens them they may ring and thus give a call to each other and to people. Also Altar tables are perceived as having a number with which, by knocking on the table, spirits can be rung to let them know that they are needed for a prayer session.

Literature concerned with people's engagement with technology and things sometimes states that humans often speak of their relations with things in an anthropomorphised way (e.g. Jackson 2002: 336; Gell 1998: 121ff.). I noticed this also in Timbunmeli. When I went to interview Mavak, an old man who had never been in contact with a digital voice recorder before, and explained that I intended to record his stories, he asked to reaffirm whether he had understood right: 'I will talk and this *man* [pointing to the digital voice recorder] will get [what I say]?' On another occasion I was interviewing Helen, the medium for the spirit Thomas, when my voice recorder ran out of battery. To my embarrassment three times – I had mixed up empty with new batteries in my storage container. Helen commented on the fact that the voice recorder was not working with laughter and the words: '*Em mas les* – It must be unwilling.' However, these comments do not mean that people actually attribute a similar Being to technologies as they attribute to persons. Persons are people and spirits. Things only acquire personhood and human like agency when a spirit is residing in them (Chapter 4). However, things can acquire a different meaning and beingness when used by spirits and people in certain contexts.

In the context of the TSM not only the mobile phone has acquired a different meaning. Interesting is also Thomas' usage of new technologies during his presence in Helen's body. During each TSM meeting in which Thomas possessed Helen's body, he held a rosary in his right hand, letting the pearls of the rosary run through his thumb and pointer, pressing every pearl with his thumb. The rosary is a most prevalent thing in Timbunmeli – most people have one, many own more than one. They are used during prayer meetings within the Catholic community, but they are also carried around in string bags and baskets, or are worn around the neck not only as an expression of one's faith but also as jewellery, a colourful decoration. In the religious context the rosary is not only perceived as a mnemonic device – guiding one praying through the prayer texts and rounds – but also considered to be the *key* to heaven and a thing that helps to transport one's prayers to God. Each Catholic believer should hold a rosary to be easily identified when the time comes as only those who believe in God will be allowed to enter His kingdom – the rosary as a symbol of faith will open the door to heaven. Another meaning attributed to the rosary relates to another thing that has been, and conceptually still is, part of people's material culture – the *kirugu*, a knotted cord. Whereas the knotted cord was formerly

produced from tree fibres and contained smaller and bigger knots referring to places and events of ancestral agency, the small and big beads of the rosary that resemble the small and large knots of the *kirugu* are mostly made of plastic. However, the material itself does not concern people too much, it is rather the materiality of the things – both are conceptually related to a communication device that puts its users in contact with the spiritual sphere.

Thomas' rosary was indeed understood as a communication device. Usually he would let his sight rest on the rosary when asking questions such as asking for the time. During one of the sessions I asked Thomas, why he was holding his rosary the way he did and what he was doing with it. I learned that the rosary was his mobile phone and that he was checking the *skrin* (screen) or putting information into it by pressing its buttons that for our eyes were the pearls of his rosary (photo no 53, p.201). In this specific context we might employ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's theory of perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1996, 1998) – the rosary was for the spirit being what the mobile phone was for the human. It allowed the spirit being, that for the moment of the spirit possession had materialized by taken possession of a human body, to access a screen that was situated in the invisible spirit world and on which all the information of people's doings, thoughts and sayings was stored and observed. When I asked Thomas during a TSM meeting what he meant when referring to the *skrin* I did not receive a response – at least not one that I could understand as he was talking in tongues and after that jumped to a different topic.

The following ethnographic vignette stems from a TSM group meeting that took place in Anna and Leslie Kaiban's house on 8th of February 2013. It illustrates how Thomas' mobile phone and the screen are integrated into the TSM practices and routines. At the time of the described meeting the group was divided, but still anxious to reconcile and pursue their work to receive the promised blessing:

After the prayers were over, everyone shook hands and sat down on the floor, Thomas asked whether people had talked to their *bridge*. For a while now the contact was disrupted. 'No, *bossman*', someone answered quickly.

Thomas, as always, held his rosary in his hand, sliding the beads between his thumb and pointer, pressing one or the other bead with his thumb and resting his eyes on the rosary. Only for short instants he would take up his sight to look at his audience.

'The other district is still talking to their *bridge*', Thomas proclaimed and asked why the group here did not meet as regularly as they had promised to do. Silence. He checked his mobile phone and said the group had no *wanbel pasin*, that they were not united. If they went on like this someone else would receive their money.

Then he looked at me and asked 'What is wrong with her?' Rita took up his question before I could answer and explained that I had been sick for a while and that I was not recovering. He looked at his mobile phone and said 'She has Malaria'.

After a while Thomas sat down on a stool, close to the altar, with his legs spread. Only Nyaura men sit on stools like this, women and children sit on the floor. Monika hurried to give a branch full of betel nuts to Thomas, who started to open and peel at least a dozen nuts with his mouth quickly, discarding them carelessly. He was angry. He then started to chew three nuts at once, mixing their mush with betel pepper and lime so that their colour turned into a bloody red, colouring his lips and teeth. During all the time he held his mobile phone in his hand and let the

beads glide through his fingers. Monika whispered to me 'He is checking the screen now'. Thomas asked on which days the group would meet to pray. 'Tuesdays and Saturdays', Anna answered, but they had not been too good this time. Thomas complained about the slackness. The money would not arrive now in 2013. They brought up disturb and delay came up. They had to wait now, pray and reunite.

The *skrin* and *switchboard* were two things that initially made no sense to me. However, from asking group members and Thomas, I learned that the *skrin* is conceptualised as a place where all the information about events and doings of people is stored. It is situated in *heaven* and everyday a *soul* is sitting in front of the *switchboard* and observes on the *skrin* everything that people are doing, saying, and thinking – they are God's souls and God knows and sees everything.

On the day of our interview in August 2013 Thomas (T) explained:

T: I do it like this [he pressed the beads of his rosary] and put it into the *skrin*. All our stories. When I make this [pressing the beads], I can put it into the *skrin*. And the people who sit in front of this *skrin*, they sit in front of the *switchboard* and they will see what we do in Papua New Guinea.

I: Who sits down in front of the switchboard?

T: Would you know the *soulsman*? *Soulsman*.

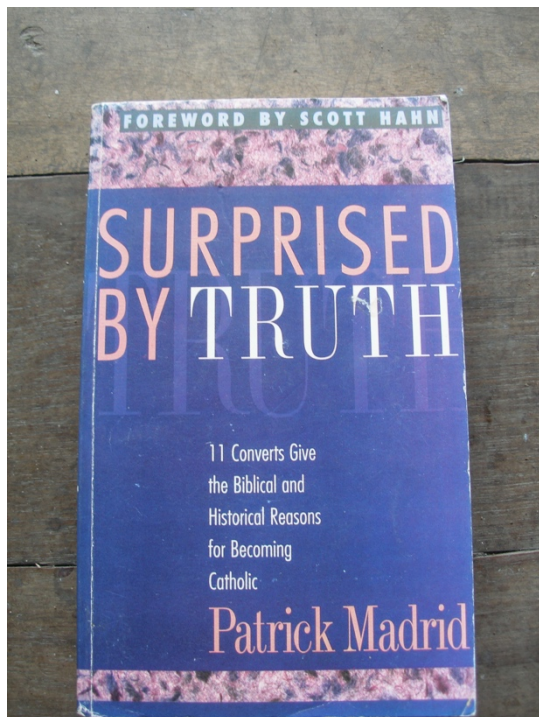
The 'screen' bears similarities to villagers' understanding of the Internet. The Internet, similar to the 'screen', is perceived as a technology with which one can know (and possibly see) everything. With those ideas about what the Internet is and can do, people's understanding of it comes close to their experiences of spirits, and especially God, who also hear and see everything. One TSM member answered after I asked her what the 'screen' would be that she was not sure but thought that it would be connected to the Internet. She believed that 'Thomas uses the Internet to check us. He sees what we think, eat, work, or say.' Another member told me that satellites, connected to the Internet, recorded everything.

People in Timbunmeli have heard stories that you could find everything on the Internet – one could even see villages and the people living there. The Internet could be used to check all sorts of information – all existing information is stored there, one only needed to find out how the Internet could be accessed and used. In fact, Internet usage was very limited during my fieldwork in 2013 – only a few men connected to the Internet via their phones and those who did used preinstalled links, or web addresses which details they had received from others, to download music, pictures, or clips. To search for information via a search engine was not undertaken by villagers in 2013.

Not only foreign technologies have sometimes been appropriated as instruments that could connect the living with the dead, but also letters were tried out as means to communicate with the dead (see Kulick and Stroud 1990). In Timbunmeli, too, villagers connected to the TSM wrote letters addressed to the dead and handed them to the Catholic priest for transfer. In their letters villagers talked about their shortcomings and provided their mobile phone numbers in

case the intended addressee wanted to contact them. Don Kulick and Christopher Stroud report a similar practice for Gapun, a village at the lower Sepik, where young village men send letters to 'mysterious addresses in America' (ibid.: 289). Letters were believed to be a way to communicate with God, ancestors, or the dead and used to ask them to send material goods.

Furthermore, already shortly after we had met for the first time Helen showed me a book that she kept wrapped in cloth hidden from the sight of others in her bag. She had received it as a present from a Catholic seminarian with whom she had become close and whom she had identified as being her returning dead son. She called the book 'Trust by truth', although the title stated 'Surprised by Truth'. Knowing that she could not read, I did not say anything to correct her, but decided to listen to what she wanted to tell me about it. She said it contained secret addresses of a *club* that if addressed in a letter, would pass on one's wishes to the dead and send desired cargo and money to the living. In fact, during my fieldwork several people approached me asking about this book and the possibility to receive help from that mysterious club; two persons asked me to write a letter for them, dictating me the words they wanted to



No 60: The Book that came to be known among TSM members as 'Trust by truth' (C.Falck 2013).

express. The items that people asked for were as diverse as an outboard motor, a second hand belt, a generator, a TV screen, a radio, or a new church building. A young man told me that the address of the ominous club had come directly from God ('*em kam long rot bilong God stret*'). He, a member of the TMS, had received it written on a piece of paper in a yellow envelope in his basket account.

When I had a closer look at Helen's book, I saw that it contained stories of eleven people who converted to Catholicism. The secret addresses of the club that people had found in it were part of the contributor's list. Although I was outspoken about my understanding of the 'club', the people who approached me were convinced that it existed, but that it was a secret.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

In the introductory part of my thesis (Chapter 1.1) I have mentioned the two brother's myth that tells how, in primordial time, people's ancestor had come up from a hole in the ground and had been equipped with the right techniques and things to rule (*bossim*) the ground (*graun*), meaning their living environment. Part of this ability were also secret techniques to access and make use of invisible powers. However, their ancestor was not the first to crawl from the hole – his brother had left it first. He, who became the ancestor of white people, had acquired access to 'all the good things' (*'ol gutpela samting'*) that his black brother became to desire once he learned of their existence. When I talked with Mavak about the origin of things, he said:

All the knowledge [*save*], all the conduct [*pasin*], the white man carried it away. I, the black man, I received the spear, *kawawal*, and black paint. That is what I hold. [...]. Ok, the white man not, he received different things. [...]. When he got it, he went away. And we received *sibbukundi*, [lists names of *wagen*], we called upon them, the *wagen*. All these *wagen* we carried them around. If there was a fight, we activated [*kirapim*] the *wagen* and he shot and cut that man. [...]. And then the white man came and ended our wars. [...]. And now we do not know anything [*nau yumi stap, yumi nogat wanpela save*]. Knowledge [*save*] is something – now we turn to you [white people].

What I have mentioned in previous chapters and what also becomes obvious in Mavak's statement, is that the source of people's power – magical spells and the knowledge to activate spirit beings – got lost under western influence. Being cut off from their source of power due to cultural loss, people try to find new ways to access the invisible sphere of spirits. As I have argued the way that people in Timbunmeli have appropriated Christianity has to be seen in this context as a struggle to regain control over an important part of their Being. Therefore, it may not come as a surprise to find that people also appropriate other things, such as a book, the rosary, or the mobile phone, as possible means to reveal spiritual powers and to communicate with the dead. However, people's engagement with those things also reveals their mode of Being which is intimately connected with others – peers and kin, spirits, and increasingly also others from different places and countries.

Interestingly, although women are the ones earning money in Timbunmeli, it is men who predominantly have appropriated the mobile phone. I suggest that the fact that women are occupied with the fish work and household duties most of their time (Chapter 1.4), while men have more free time on their hands, is one of the reasons for a gendered appropriation. Also, it appears to be less appropriate for women than men to play around with phones and talk to possible strangers on the phone. Young girls hardly ever own a phone, while their brothers may. However, fact is also that most women (especially in their thirties and older) have a lack in formal education and many cannot read or write – two skills important for being able to handle a phone.

Although the appropriation of the mobile phone may lead to tensions – between husbands and wives, between young people and their families, between competing individuals and groups –, it is not the mobile phone itself that causes those tensions. And although the mobile phone certainly changes people's lives in ways that they evaluate ambivalently, its appropriation has not changed people's lifeworld dramatically. For example, magic and sorcery was practiced before, sexual affairs are part of people's lives, women and young people started to extend their agency to other places when they began to travel to markets in other regions, and people have always communicated with spirits. Therefore, I would argue that the appropriation of the mobile phone has not led to radical transformations, but rather supports practices and transformation processes that were already in place before the mobile phone was introduced. Cultural premises that inform Timbunmeli's lifeworld have not changed, but have informed the way the new technology was appropriated.

With that my findings correspond with Telban's and Vávrová's (2014) and Lipset's (2013) findings, which also showed for other Sepik groups (Ambonwari and respectively the Murik) that the introduction of the new technology has not set radical transformation processes into motion. Rather the mobile phone has been interpreted and appropriated in a way that relates to cultural premises. As with the Murik, among the Nyaura mobile phones are viewed as 'machines that increase their [people's] capacities to achieve culturally defined, local ends' (Lipset 2013: 347) – in Timbunmeli the communication with and access to the invisible other is one of them.

However, what has become especially clear from the involvement of a man from Timbunmeli with Nigerian scams is that the mobile phone is a technology that connects villagers not only with other places within Papua New Guinea, but also with the globalized world. It not only offers villagers the possibility to engage with the other via images, clips, and phone conversations, but also leaves villagers vulnerable for exploitation.

Chapter 8: Concluding Remarks and Final Reflections

In May 2014 I received a text message from my Nyaura father Leslie asking me what kind of 'oil' it was that I had given to Sandra, the spirit medium of David. I immediately knew what he was referring to. Already towards the end of my stay in the village in 2013 a rumour had started to spread among some villagers that a small bottle of body lotion I had given to Sandra was a 'holy oil' that would help her to pursue the work of God. If one put it on the eyes, they would 'turn' and one could see the dead. Although I had tried to counteract this rumour by telling people where I had acquired the body lotion and why I had given it to Sandra, the rumour was persistent. I had taken the body lotion with me when I checked out from a hotel in Port Moresby in 2012 where the airline Air Niugini had put me after my flight to Wewak had been cancelled. I gave it to Sandra as a small present because she had often presented me with gifts of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The rumour was still around after I had left the village and in fact it had by then influenced events in ways that I had not anticipated. I learned what had happened during my absence in conversations with different villagers when I returned to the field in November 2014. The Mewang family together with the KST chairman had planned for the parish priest to bless Sandra and the spirit of David possessing her during prayer meetings. With that they had hoped that their work of God would become officially recognized by the parish priest and the Catholic Church. In preparation for the event that was awaited to take place after a Sunday mass, the family had killed a pig and prepared a big meal. However, the night before the event was supposed to happen, the Mewang family had met to pray and David, possessing Sandra, instructed two young men to go to my house in Timbunmeli and ask my spirit to follow them and attend the prayer meeting. My Nyaura father Leslie became aware of what he felt to be an intrusion into his parcel of land, where my house was situated, and complained the next day, also giving a report to the Court Clark.

When the priest arrived, a dispute was already on its way. In the church the conflict escalated after male leaders had asked about the supposedly 'holy oil' the Mewang prayer group had acquired and demanded to receive it. The councillor, trying to mediate in the escalating situation, was attacked by drunken young men and severely hurt on his head. A fight broke out in the village. The councillor left to receive treatment in a hospital and returned to the village with some policemen to prosecute those who had attacked him. However, the police men were

unsuccessful – half of the village had escaped to the bush where people camped for two days until the police had left the village again.

The Mewang family was utterly disappointed about what they felt had been an undermining of their efforts to become recognized by the Catholic Church. The priest, who did not know that a blessing ceremony had been planned during which he was expected to bless the spirit a dead person, had left the village after a discussion with the conflicting parties had proven to be impossible.

Upon my return to Timbunmeli in November 2014, different people and parties told me about what had happened during my absence – in the depictions of some the body lotion that once was mine was identified as having been an issue; in the accounts of others, it was not mentioned at all. However, I was horrified about the idea that the body lotion I had given away and the perception of me as being a returning dead person had contributed to the outbreak of a fight. Although the people I talked with told me that I had nothing to do with the fight and that the groups and leaders had already an ongoing conflict that escalated for different reasons, I was appalled. I had not only lost control of the transformation of me into a returning dead person in people's perceptions, but also of the events set in motion by this perception and the consequences of my actions in this context.

In the 1990s John Barker has criticized anthropologists for having ignored studying Melanesian Christianity in its own right. He called for the study of 'the ways Melanesians have interpreted, modified, and incorporated Christian forms and ideas in local communities' (Barker 1992: 145). Barker was dissatisfied with the way Melanesians were often portrayed as passive receptors of missionary initiatives in anthropologists' writings. He criticized the reduction of 'complex and often ambiguous situations of change' and the distortion of religious forms that emerged from them (ibid.: 154). Since then several anthropologists have written about how Christianity interacts with social structures, concepts, values, and concerns in Papua New Guinea (e.g. Eriksen 2014; Gewertz and Errington 1993; Hermkens 2008; Jebens 2005; Knauff 2002; Mosko 2010; Robbins 2004a; Smith 2002; Stewart and Strathern 1997).

In my thesis I have discussed how Christianity, and especially charismatic Catholicism, in Timbunmeli relates to and interacts with ontological premises that characterize people's lifeworld. I have shown that people's engagements with Christianity, myself, and things that only recently have become part of their lifeworld have been influenced by basic assumptions about Being and beings.

As I have discussed in the last chapter of my thesis (Chapter 7), different things have changed their meaning in people's practices and beliefs in Timbunmeli. Like the body lotion became a holy oil, a rosary was the mobile phone of a spirit, and a book with stories of converts

became a book containing information about a hidden truth. Similarly, I became a returning dead person and messenger for bigger change to come. This perception that many had of me has strongly influenced my relationships with people, individual research situations, and my general fieldwork experience.

‘Our existence as humans is temporally structured in such a way that our past experience is always retained in a present moment that is feeding forward to anticipate future horizons of experience’ (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 88). Anthropologists, too, are shaped by their socio-cultural upbringing in a historical context and experience the world from this background, but the aim of anthropological work is trying to understand phenomena from the perspective of the people we work with. As I have described in my introductory pages, I have sometimes struggled with this task because in my case it involved overcoming the desire to hold on to my identity and instead accept that a person in Timbunmeli is one but can also be many (Chapter 2, 5).

I have suggested that a desire to communicate with the invisible other has influenced the way people in Timbunmeli engage with and ascribe meaning to things that only recently have become part of their lives. The source of this intentionality can be found in premises that characterize people’s lifeworld and their assumptions about Being.

A close relationship between the visible and invisible is not only reflected in people’s understanding of the world, but is also existential for their Being. In its basic premises it is reflected in the local concept of personhood (Chapter 2). A person is made up of bodily matter and an invisible spirit (*kaik*) that mutually depend on each other. If the spirit has lost connection with its body, after a few days it will turn into a spirit of the dead (*undumbu*) and the body will die. The close relationship between the visible and the invisible is also reflected in millenarian expectations currently found in the village (Chapter 1, 4, 6). People fear that they have disturbed their good relationship with God and that He, as a punishment, is changing their environment and general living conditions. Part of millenarian expectations are further experiences that people collect in interactions with spirits of the dead possessing community members and talking to them on the phone (Chapter 5, 6, 7).

For the Nyaura in Timbunmeli Being involves a continuous being-with. The dead remain part of people’s social networks and can influence their lives from an invisible realm that is part of people’s lifeworld (Chapter 3). Today the ‘place of the dead’ is not only called ‘*undumbunge*’, but also ‘heaven’ or ‘paradise’. From there life comes and goes. This understanding of life and death sees bodies as ephemeral and changeable and the invisible spirit as continuous. Spirits can slip into different bodies of the visible world, and a person’s *kaik* can enter the invisible

realm during a dream. Also, the dead can return to the living from the invisible part of the world in a different body, which usually is a white body.

The place of spirits of the dead has become identified with whiteness – it is a place of happiness, peace, and amenities. Since it is experienced as an invisible place that is immanent in their lifeworld, people have developed different techniques to bridge over into this invisible realm and materialize its invisible powers. Formerly *sibbukundi* (magical language) and rituals, but also dreams and séances were technologies to access the spiritual realm. But during the process of missionisation, people distanced themselves from practices of the past and lost secret knowledge necessary to activate the invisible. The spiritual other, in the form of the Christian God, became a distant one that people had to search for (see e.g. Interview excerpts p.113, 197). Currently, people appropriate new things, technologies, and practices as means to reconnect with the spiritual other.

The major conversion to Christianity took place in Timbunmeli in the 1980s and was accompanied by the abandonment of ritual regalia and rites that have been part of the male domain. I have suggested (Chapter 4) that the conversion to Christianity can be understood in a context of changing power relationships at the Sepik (Gewertz 1983). The encounters with Westerners engendered processes that led Iatmul societies lose their superiority in relations with other Sepik societies. Because power is connected to spirits in the Nyaura's lifeworld, I have suggested that the conversion to Christianity can be understood as an attempt to gain access to God, the most powerful spirit there is nowadays. However, as I have shown, the people in Timbunmeli have become disillusioned with the preaching of missionaries and biblical stories – they have come to perceive whites as hiding the truth.

While Joel Robbins (1995, 2004a) and Borut Telban (2009) have described how the charismatic movement among respectively the Urapmin (Sandaun) and the Ambonwari (East Sepik) has demonised local spirits as evil and led people to abandon them, I argue that in Timbunmeli the charismatic movement has led villagers to re-value their own spirit beings, and especially the spirits of the dead, as powerful sources for well-being and power. Furthermore, while Knaft has suggested that the difference between Gebusi's (Western Province) local spirits and God was one of ontology, in Timbunmeli this difference is not so clear-cut. Knaft (2002: 134) writes:

The difference between 'to di' spirits and God is not just one of content but of ontology – it signals and commands a different way of being. God isn't just an unseen being, but the Creator of Everything. [...]. By contrast to God, the 'to di spirits' lived in a kind of mirror world that reflected Gebusi's own and interacted with it (*italics removed, inverted commas added*).

Like the Gebusi (*ibid.*: 134-135) also people in Timbunmeli perceive the Christian God as having absolute power and authority. However, while the Gebusi have abandoned local spirits

that lived in a 'mirror world' and interacted with them on the basis of exchange and reciprocity, the Nyaura have not. Furthermore, while the Gebusi have discarded spirit mediumship through which they communicated with local spirits and now need Catholic pastors to mediate the talk of God, in Timbunmeli spirit mediums are still an important part of religious practices; the Nyaura have found ways to channel God's power and authority through their bodies. In fact, He and His spirits are perceived as belonging to the Nyaura. Villagers have interpreted God and His spirits as being their own and therefore as being present in their immediate lifeworld, interacting with them in the framework of moral personhood (Chapter 5-7).

I have suggested that this re-interpretation process of local spirits as spirits of God can be understood as part of a re-empowerment process and a re-valuation process of former practices and beliefs. The merging of local ontology with Christian theology is most clearly expressed in the practices and beliefs of a spiritual group called the Thomas Souls Ministry (Chapter 6, 7). During charismatic prayer meetings the group prays for the dead following the prayers of the Catholic mission, but interpreting it in their own way: They pray for the souls so that they, in return, will reciprocate their work and help their families by sending money and goods or return to them in the body of a white person. Salvation is believed to be of this world. When the dead return to the living or send money and goods, people will live their lives equally to whites surrounded by amenities they currently miss. Heaven is considered to be an invisible part of people's lifeworld but is also associated with the place of white people. Thus similar to the Pairundu (Southern Highlands), as Holger Jebens has described (2005), Christianity cannot only be understood as a 'pathway to heaven' but also as a 'pathway to equality'. To achieve a change of their living conditions the group pursues their spiritual work and prays to God and the souls of their dead relatives so that change will come.

To materialize what is hidden has been part of people's religious practices in the past and still is today: spirits slip into material forms to become visible for humans, sorcerers' invisible spells can materialize when harming others, healers remove stones or spikes from sick bodies, mediums find hidden sorcery bundles, and spiritual women and men are successful in their pursuits because of the invisible powers supporting them. Similarly, money can appear as a result of prayer meetings, or can be unexpectedly delivered by dead relatives in white bodies. Like the mobile phone technology can bridge over to the dead, a 'holy oil' might reveal the invisible presence of the dead. Fermentaries may arrive because Timbunmeli community pursues the work of God, and an anthropologist might have come to stay because spiritual people have prayed for change to come. One of my Nyaura aunts told me:

R: It is because of the work of the Spirit that you came and that you are doing all your work. It is the work of us all, our prayers. All the people that are in our group, we all prayed. And then God said:

'You want change? What kind of change?' Then He sent you to this community to make this work. That is change. Before, they did not see any change. White people did not come to stay [sit down] with us. [...]. And now a full year you are staying with us. Eat with us, share with us, be happy with us and all this. White people did not come and stayed. That is the work of the Spirit. We [*yumi*, inclusive plural, including the person addressed] worked and we [*yumi*] brought it about. God gave it. It was not us. We prayed and God gave goodwill and strength to us because this Spirit talked. Then you came. You, a white woman, came to stay in our community. That is change. The Spirit talked and you came to this community and do this work. And they all think: 'Oh, she is studying, that is why she came and is doing all this work.' But it is not like that. Not at all. They will talk like that. But it is because of our prayers. We wanted change. Now there is change and you came. It is because of the work of the Spirit. We prayed and gave our time to God. Do you have some questions about what I said?

I: Yes, [...] what kind of change are you talking about?

R: Change? Change, this ya! [*em ya!* she points at me]. You changed [*Nau yu senis ya*]. That is change! [...]. You brought change here.

For Rita, and others, I was the proof for a change that people themselves brought about through their work of praying. Thereby, the change that Rita was talking about was twofold: First, it referred to her belief that I, being perceived as Lina's dead daughter, had changed into a white body. The prayer group that Rita was part of had prayed for their dead kin to return. Rita and others believed that their work of praying and giving offerings had made it possible for me to receive a white body and come to the village. Second, change in Rita's statement also referred to her hope that with my arrival change would come the village. Before I came to stay in Timbunmeli, no white person had come to the community for a longer stay and showed deep interest in people's lives. My arrival had proven to Rita and others that their communication with God via their prayers and His spirits had been fruitful. God opened the 'road of the dead' so that they could return to their living kin. However, not only TSM members perceived my coming to the village as change; others too hoped that my arrival and my study would bring change to their place. Before I left the village I organized a feast during which the leaders of the community stressed in speeches that my coming to the village was the onset of change. Others might read how people in Timbunmeli lived and with what their worries were and maybe they would take an interest in helping them to change their living conditions.

I have further argued that the local concept of personhood has been crucial for the way people in Timbunmeli have made Christianity their own (Chapter 2, 5, 6). The person in Timbunmeli is a composite being that embodies maternal and paternal substances as well as a life spirit (*kaik*), and carries totemic names that connect a person with the visible and invisible others that the person identifies with. Each person is further born into kin and descent networks and identifies via paternal and maternal ties with clan and kin groups, ancestral beings, things and other entities. Depending on the context people find themselves in, they might act according to different identities they embody. Therefore, I have suggested that the Timbunmeli person can be grasped as being-one and being-many (Mimica 1988, Telban 1998).

Similar to the Iqwaye's creation story (Mimica 1988), at the beginning of the Nyaura cosmos a primordial being, the crocodile Kavakmeli, split in two. From its body heaven and ground came into existence. Kavak, today, is not only used in reference to the first ground that evolved from the ancestral body, but also as a term for God. God is perceived as being present in people's environment, also via bush- and water-spirits nowadays called 'nature' that was created by God. Similar as in the Christian tradition where God is perceived as being a Trinity (God–Holy Spirit–Jesus), in Timbunmeli God is understood as being-one who can also be-many. He is not only part of people's immediate lifeworld, but is also part of each person. Whereas formerly the Nyaura said a person's lifespirit (*kaik*) came from the land of the dead, today they believe that God gives the *kaik* to each person, exemplified in the biblical story when He gives a breath of wind to Adam. With that God is embodied in each person – a perception expressed in the sayings 'God is each one of us', 'God is in each one of us', or 'You yourself are God' (Chapter 5).

The idea of 'being-one' and 'being-many' that I have identified as being one characteristic of the Nyaura Being in Timbunmeli, relates to what Gregory Bateson (1958[1936]) has described as a theory of monism and pluralism (Chapter 5). Iatmul clans trace their origin back to one primordial being from which their ancestors emerged. If before every clan and individual clan members representing ancestral beings via their names claimed to have had a key position in the creation of the world, today individual persons and prayer groups claim to have a part in the work of God. However, although on a collective level every clan was entitled to represent and access its respective ancestral beings, only initiated men were entitled to do so in public debates and their knowledge was guarded by secrecy (e.g. Wassmann 1982).

The decline of male ritual life and the influence of the Catholic mission that changed the previously male domain to a public one has led to an inclusion of women, children and uninitiated men in religious activities. Currently male leaders struggle for leadership and influence in Timbunmeli's community not only with each other but also with women who, organised in groups, represent and access powerful spirits and pursue the work of God themselves. Men try to take control over religious events and groups, but struggle not only with leadership claims among themselves but also with spirits that nowadays predominantly communicate through female bodies. Members of Timbunmeli's Catholic women's group told me that the male leaders, who got into a dispute with each other and the Mewang prayer group over the supposedly 'holy oil', had wanted to acquire the 'oil' I had given to Sandra and with that access to hidden powers.

Although ontological premises characteristic for the Nyaura's lifeworld and Being have shown to be resistant to change, persisting underlying assumptions that influence people's

actions and perceptions of the world can lead to different outcomes when encountering changing contexts. The fishing net for example (Chapter 1) was appropriated as a way for women to catch more fish in less time, and has, together with the introduction of new fish species, spurred the marketing of smoke-dried fish products that today is the main source of income in Timbunmeli. Interestingly, because the Nyaura perceive fish work to be women's work, men are only marginally involved in this economy via their supply of canoes and paddles for their wife/ves, their help with finding firewood, or the provision of transport with motorized canoes by a few men. Thus they remain to be largely dependent on their female relatives for food and items of wealth (see Bateson 1958[1936]: 147) and today also for money. Because of the increasing importance of money in villager's lifeworld, I have suggested that a shift in power relations has occurred that goes together with another process that seems to be changing gender relationships: women's inclusion in religious activities and even more so their access to God's spirits. The way the Catholic charismatic movement has been appropriated relates to ontological premises but at the same time it affects other principles connected to gender relationships.

In his model of cultural change Sahlins (1981, 1985) suggested that people act according to shared presuppositions (ibid. 1981: 67), but what might have started as the reproduction of cultural categories under novel circumstances might end in their transformation. This might happen in 'the structure of the conjuncture', which he defines as 'a set of historical relationships that at once reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context' (Sahlins 1985: 125). When encountering others and the world, humans do so according to shared understandings of the world (ibid.: 34). If new circumstances do not conform to people's take on them and respond unexpectedly to people's actions, the result may be a re-valuation of cultural schemes. Cultural categories may be expanded and also the relations between them may change. Thus culture may be changing while being re-produced in people's actions.

In addition to 'culture, the intelligent subject, and the intransigent world' that are considered by Sahlins' model, Ton Otto (1986: 77) has suggested to consider the role of power – between groups, but also as outgoing from individuals – as a factor in processes of change:

Within the structure of the conjuncture the power structure is important in the determination of the outcome of cultural change: generally the most powerful group is able to impose upon others its definition of the situation. [...] A subject, who finds himself or herself in an "objective" position of power may develop means to change the power structure.

The importance of power relations became also obvious in my findings. Not only did a feeling of being overpowered by others (Chapter 4) motivate people in Timbunmeli initially to refrain from former practices and beliefs, but also the presentation of God's power through female bodies

has to be considered as a factor for change. Because women, visible for everyone in Timbunmeli during their spirit possessions, are supported in their pursuits by the most powerful spirits there are, namely spirits of God, men have little possibility to critique women's practices with which their leadership positions are challenged.

While my findings stress continuity within in change, Joel Robbins (2004a) has found a different outcome in the Urapmin's engagement with Christianity that lead to radical cultural change. While much is framed in Christian terms in Timbunmeli today, I have shown that we cannot assume radical cultural change. In Timbunmeli people built on their dividual being while appropriating Christianity. By analysing people's perception of and interaction with Christianity, their engagement with each other, things and myself, as well as by studying their stories, and listening to their thoughts, I have found basic assumptions about Being that underlie people's take on the world. These have to be considered as rather stable factors in what I have called the worlding process – the dialectical process between that what is given (and that we are thrown into) and that what humans actualise, or bring-forth by engaging with others and things in that space that constitutes their lifeworld.

I have drawn on Heidegger's phenomenological study of Being, Jackson's existential phenomenological anthropology, and Marshall Sahlin's structure of the conjuncture to analyse cultural change in Timbunmeli. Heidegger's (2001[1962]) philosophy describes human Being as being intimately connected with its world. Human beings embody a pre-reflexive understanding of Being and world that they share with social others inhabiting the same lifeworld. Humans encounter others and things through their practical engagement with their surrounding. Michael Jackson (2002) has stressed that (inter)subjective experiences derived from people's encounters with human and non-human others is characterised by struggle and ambiguity. If the encountered entities do not correspond to people's historically derived expectations, space for change opens up – the structure of the conjuncture (Sahlins 1981, 1985).

I have used the term worlding to refer to this complex process. In my opinion the term elegantly grasps the dynamics between world and action. On the one hand structures of a specific lifeworld exert influence on people's actions. The world is constantly changing and impacting on people's lives. On the other hand, people's practical engagements with others, things, and the world, which also contain power relations embedded in structures and arising from practice (Otto 1986), can impact on people's lifeworld. Because world and Being are closely related, the worlding process has to be understood as being intertwined with an understanding of Being that underlies both practices and structures and thus influences processes of continuity and change.

Appendix

Chapter 1

A sorak celebration

In December 2013 I witnessed a sorak celebration for Markus Ivut, a Nyaura clan member. He was the first man in the village, who managed, without the help of others, to buy a new 40 horse outboard motor from the money he had earned from selling crocodiles he had raised over a period of seven years (photo no 16, p.38). Markus' mother was a Yak clan member before she married his father, and since the achievements of children are considered to be the result of the hard work and nurture of mothers, the celebrators dressed in the totems of his mother's clan (bambu da) – the clothes of waitman (whites) and leaves of the Yak clan's totemic plants – to celebrate his and with that his mother's achievement. The celebrating women and men were part of his mother's clan members, called *lain kandere* – the line of his uncles (mother's brothers, wau).

While Markus was standing in front of his house, his maternal relatives drove a canoe motorized with his new outboard motor up and down in front of the village before they landed at the shoreline in front of Markus' house. They were standing in the canoe, dancing to music played from a radio. Margaret and Judy were throwing ash (bau) into the air, a totem of the Yak clan [gwaak da]. Rita, too, was standing in the canoe, dressed as a tourist with long trousers, a jacket, sneakers, a backpack, a hat and sunglasses. She represented a waitman [white man], also a gwaak da of the Yak clan. The rest of the celebrating crowd stood at the shoreline, throwing comments, like: 'There is a man', which was followed by 'It is a white man!' and 'The spirit of the dead' [both belonging to the gwaak da of the Yak clan]. Maria scolded me for not being in the canoe: 'You [the Yak clan members] will celebrate him. You are stupid for staying here [at the shore with the paternal relatives].'

When the canoe landed at the shore, the celebrating maternal relatives were welcomed by villagers, among them members of Markus' paternal clan [Nyaura]. Were they dancing before at the shoreline, they ran now with yells and equipped with sticks and branches that belonged to the Nyaura clan's totems towards the arrivals and started to hit them on their backs. My brother Kenneth, who had driven the motor, turned his back towards the hitting crowd, and was thrown into the water where more whipping waited for him. Finally, he managed to escape by jumping over the canoe to the other side. Our cousin Tino, who had not been in the boat before, but who was also a Yak, tried to come for his help and with that volunteered to receive hits when he walked into the water.

A conglomerate of sounds filled the air – laughter, screams, swishes of whipping branches, and music that was played from a ghetto blaster. Then, Markus' maternal relatives danced towards his house, where he was standing – weeping and sobbing. Children were carrying the offerings from the wau to Markus house – eight kilogram of rice, four chicken and some money. The women danced in front of Markus, who shed tears of emotions because so many people had come to celebrate him. An older woman, married to a nephew of Markus' mother, walked up to Markus and hit the ground with leaves shouting 'Yamangtagu' – the name that his maternal relatives gave to his new outboard motor. Justina shook Markus' hand, stating: 'You received a blessing from God!' Others exclaimed that he alone bought the motor, no one helped him. Women, dressed in clothes like white men were dancing in front of Markus. My aunt Rita explained that the Yak clan was attached with the white man and therefore they celebrated Markus, also a white man in this sense, in the clothes of white people. Then the sorak celebration ended with Markus compensating his maternal relatives with a pig, a duck, and 40kg of rice. Everyone went back to their houses.

Fish study

Background information fish study January 2013 Timbunmeli village

During the high-water 2013 grass islands were drifting on the lake and destroyed or carried away the nets of Timbunmeli's women. In fear of losing their nets some women removed their nets from the lake when a grass island was seen close to their fishing grounds. If it had drifted to a different area after some time, they put up their nets again. Some, however, complaining about the relative small amount of fish they caught during January 2013, stopped to fish for a while. They either received fish from relatives and friends or lived from garden products, sago, rice and tinned fish or meat for a while. *Titpis* was often caught in big numbers with fishing rods during the high-water.

Legend:

RM: <i>rabbamaus</i>	M: <i>makau</i>
NP: <i>nilpis</i>	GP: <i>goldpis</i>
BM: <i>bigmaus</i>	JK: <i>javakap</i>
LN: <i>long nose</i>	B: <i>barramundi</i>
TP: <i>titpis</i> (also called <i>paku</i> , <i>bolkatta</i>)	RP: <i>red pis</i>

Research Assistants:

Teenagers from Timbunmeli village helped me with asking women about their daily catch and counting the fish. My research assistants were: Georgina (Possuko clan), Manasah (Yak clan), Osila (Yak clan), Maxson (Yak clan), Cedrik (Yak clan), Nasi (Nyaura clan), Jayson (Nambuk clan).

Fishstudy - Amount and Kind of Fish Caught By Timbunmeli Women in January 2013

Date	Thea	Scola	Lilien	Brenice	Grace	Anita
Sat. 07.01.	16 nets: 131 RM , 4 NP, 1BM, 17 M	8 nets: 150 RM, 1 NP, 2 M	10 nets: 6 RB, 3 M	9 nets: 25 RM, 2 M fishing rod: 9 NP	10 nets: 320 RM, 7 M	8 nets: 64 RM, 1 NP, 3 M
Sun. 08.01.	15 nets: 58 RM, 1 NP, 1M fishing rod: 30 NP	8 nets: 55 RM	8 nets: 45 RM	9 nets: 6 RM, 1 NP	10 nets: 112 RM, 2 NP, 6 M	8 nets: 24 RM
Mon. 09.01	15 nets: 150 RM, 2 NP fishing rod: 8 NP	8 nets: 87 RM, 1 NP, 1 TP	8 nets:, 37 RM, 1 NP, 1 BM	/	10 nets: 84 RM, 6 NP, 3 M, 2 BM	11 nets: 112 RM
Tues. 10.01.	15 nets: 77 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 1 BM; fishing rod: 19 NP, 18 TP	8 nets: 35 RM, 2 NP	8 nets:, 11 RM, 1 NP	/	18 nets: 110 RM, 2 NP	11 nets: 95 RM, 2 NP
Wedn. 11.01.	15 nets: 200 RM, 3 NP, 4 M, 1 BM; fishing rod: 2 NP, 1 TP	8 nets: 47 RM, 1 BM, 1 TP	8 nets:, 48 RM, 1 NP	/	10 nets: 64 RM, 5 M	11 nets: 73 RM, 4 BM
Thurs. 12.01.	15 nets: 130 RM, 2 NP, 2 M	10 nets: 15 RM, 1 NP	15 nets:, 15 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 1 GP	/	fishing rod: 11 NP	/
Fri. 13.01.	15 nets: 56 RM, 2 NP, 1 M, 5 TP	10 nets: 45 RM	8 nets:, 26 RM, 1 NP	10 nets: 60 RM fishing rod: 3 NP	/	/
Sat. 14.01.	15 nets: 64 RM, 2 NP, 5 M, 4 TP; fishing rod: 7 NP	8 nets: 2 RM, 2 NP	6 nets:18 RM	/	/	/
Sun. 15.01.	15 nets: 163 RM, 5 TP, 1 NP, 1 M, 1 BM	8 nets: 40 RM, 2 M	6 nets:, 54 RM, 1 NP	quit study due to family problems	11 nets: 151 RM fishing rod: 4 NP, 4 TP	/
Mon 16.01.	/	/	6 nets: 46 RM, 3 NP		10 nets: 133 RM, 1 NP,1 GP, 1 TP; fishing rod: 21 NP	/
Tues. 17.01.	/	/	6 nets: 40 RM, 2 GP, 4 JK		10 nets: 37 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP; fishing rod: 41 TP	/

Date	Thea	Scola	Lilien	Brenice	Grace	Anita
Wedn. 18.01.	/	/	6 nets: 16 RM, 2 NP fishing rod: 2 NP		10 nets: 12 RM fishing rod: 13 TP	10 nets: 62 RM fishing rod: 7 TP
Thurs. 19.01.	/	/	6 nets: 42 RM, 1 NP, 3 JK		10 nets: 93 RM, 2 NP, 5 TP fishing rod: 27 TP	11 nets: 62 RM, 3 NP
Fri. 20.01.	/	/	8 nets: 49 RM		10 nets: 80 RM, 2 NP, 3 GP fishing rod: 1 NP, 2 TP	11 nets: 54 RM, 3 NP, 1 M; fishing rod: 2 NP
Sat. 21.01.	/	12 nets: 45 RM, 3 NP, 4 TP	6 nets: 21 RM, 1 M, 4 JK, 1 TP		10 nets: 64 RM, 2 GP fishing rod: 29 TP	11 nets: 32 RM
Sun. 22.01.	/	not asked	8 nets: 50 RM, 1 NP, 7 JK		10 nets: 54 RM, 1 NP, 2 KP fishing rod: 20 NP	10 nets: 52 RM, 7 NP, 3 M; fishing rod: 9 TP
Mon. 23.01.	13 nets: 58 RM, 1 TP fishing rod: 12 NP, 6 TP	11 nets: 24 RM, 1 NP, 9 TP	8 nets: 1 RM, 1 GP, 9 JK, 3 TP		10 nets: 86 RM fishing rod: 33 TP	11 nets: 62 RM, 4 NP, 2 M, 1 BM; fishing rod: 2 NP
Tues. 24.01.	13 nets : 43 RN, 1 NP, 2 GP, 4 TP; fishing rod: 3 NP, 5 TP	11 nets: 16 RM. 1 NP, 2 TP, 3 GP	8 nets: 40 RM fishing rod: 2 RM, 4 NP		10 nets: 87 RM, 1 BM, 2 GP fishing rod: 52 TP	5 nets: 31 RM, 1 M, 1 BM fishing rod: 3 NP
Wedn. 25.01.	17 nets: 67 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP	11 nets: 29 RM, 3 NP, 2 GP	8 nets: 56 RM, 3 NP, 2 JK fishing rod: 2 NP		10 nets: 96 RM, 1 NP fishing rod: 6 TP	9 nets: 188 RM, 2 M
Thurs. 26.01	13 nets: 180 RM, 2 NP, 3 TP	11 nets: 29 RM, 2 NP, 1 M	/		10 nets: 174 RM, 1 GP, 1 TP	11 nets: 29 RM, 2 NP, 1 M; fishing rod: 5 NP
Fri. 27.01.	13 nets: 48 RM, 1 NP, 3 TP	4 RM	/		10 nets: 38 RM, 1 BM, 2 GP	5 nets: 25 RM
Sat. 28.01.	13 nets: 62 RM. 2 TP	/	8 nets: 30 RM, 3 NP, 1 BM, 1 TP		10 nets: 235 RM, 2 GP, 1 TP	5 nets: 25 RM, 1 BM, 7 B
Sun. 29.01.	/	/	/		fishing rod: 11 NP, 13 TP	/
Mon. 30.01.	/	11 nets: 40 RM, 1 NP, 4 TP	8 nets: 36 RM, 1 NP, 1 TP, 1 B		10 nets: 146 RM, 2 GP fishing rod: 13 TP	/
Tues. 31.01.	7 nets: 33 RM, 1 M fishing rod: 12 NP	11 nets: 58 RM, 1 NP, 4 ?	8 nets: 78 RM, 1 NP		10 nets: 116 RM, 2 NP, 1 BM, 1 JK; fishing rod: 4 TP	/

Information about participants:

- 1) **Thea Saun, Yak clan, 16 nets:** Thea is from Kandingei. She finished grade 9 in Wewak. She is a young industrious woman. Every day she is one of the last women who returns from the lake. She appeared to be very motivated to be part of the study. Often she has already counted the fish she caught. Thea said she travelled twice a month to a market if she had a lot of fish, otherwise once. During the time of my study, she went once to the market in Maprik.
- 2) **Scola Ivut, Nyaura clan, 11 nets:** Scola is the first wife of Markus Ivut. She is from Yamanambu. She is herself childless but has adopted a son of a sister. Scola is a strong and talkative woman who is always informed about news in the village. From my arrival in the village Scola was very hospitable towards me, inviting me to share meals with her and her family during which she was eager to learn about my home country. In January 2013 Scola went to the Maprik market twice.
- 3) **Lilien Ivut, Nyaura clan, 15 nets:** Lilien is Markus Ivut's second wife. They have children together. Scola and Lilien share their cooked meals with each other. Whereas Scola appears cheeky, Lilien is calm and quiet. During the study Lilien instructed her daughter Wilma to sell her fish at Maprik market.
- 4) **Brenice Esrom, Yak clan, 8 nets:** Brenice is a young woman who grew up in Pagwi. She has not completed grade 10 because she fell pregnant. She appeared to be unhappy about her life in the village. She and her husband had marriage problems during my fieldwork that resulted in Brenice leaving the village to stay with kin in Pagwi. She quit my study because she stopped her fishing activities when the conflict between her and her husband widened.
- 5) **Grance Rodney, Possuko clan, 10 nets:** Grace is an industrious, jolly woman. Everyday she provides Jane, the wife of her married son, with fish. Jane herself did not go fishing because she had a small baby to care for. Grace said she travelled once or twice per month to the market to sell her fish. Grace travelled once to Maprik market in January.
- 6) **Anita Daniel, Nyaura clan, 11 nets:** Anita is a friendly woman. She was born in Korogo but married a Kandingei man with whom she came to settle in Timbunmeli. They have no children of their own but adopted a little girl. Anita or her husband travel to the market once per month. Anita did not travel to the market during the duration of the study.

Fishstudy - Amount and Kind of Fish Caught By Timbunmeli Women in January 2013

Date	Margaret	Kerowina	Victoria	Augusta	Olivia	Eunice
Sat. 07.01.	24 nets: 128 RM, 2 NP, 10 M	7 nets:, 134 RM, 2 NP, 2 M, 2 GP	9 nets: 52 RM fishing rod: 2 NP	9 nets: 39 RM, 3 NP, 4 BM; fishing rod: 72 M	13 nets: 225 RM, 1 M	/
Sun. 08.01.	12 nets: 96 RM, 2 NP, 5 M, 2 BM	7 nets:, 81 RM, 1 NP, 1 M	9 nets: 29 RM, 1 NP, 6 M	9 nets: 58 RM, 6 M, 3 BM	/	/
Mon. 09.01.	24 nets: 95 RM	/	9 nets: 97 RM, 1 NP, 2 M, 1 GP	61 RM, 5 NP, 1 GP, 2 TP, 10 JK; fishing rod: 30 M	7 nets: 107 RM, 1 NP, 2 M, 1 BM	9 nets: 83 RM
Tues. 10.01.	24 nets: 62 RM	/	/	/	/	/
Wedn. 11.01.	24 nets: 59 RM, 3 NP fishing rod: 16 NP	/	/	13 nets: 176 RM, 2 NP, 16 M, 3 JK	/	/
Thurs. 12.01.	12 nets:, 104 RM, 11 NP fishing rod: 3 NP	/	7 nets: 44 RM fishing rod: 18 TP	13 nets: 98 RM, 2 NP, 2 M, 3 JK	/	/
Fri. 13.01.	12 nets: 62 RM	7 nets: 73 RM, 1 NP, 2 M, 3 JK	9 nets: 77 RM, 1 NP, 3 M, 2 TP	/	/	/
Sat. 14.01.	/	8 nets: 119 RM	9 nets: 54 RM, 1 NP 5 M; fishing rod: 17 TP, 2 NP	13 nets: 130 RM, 3 M fishing rod: 8 NP	8 nets: 72 RM, 2 GP fishing rod: 5 NP	/
Sun. 15.01.	12 nets: 120 RM, 1 NP, 2 M, 2 BM	8 nets: 135 RM, 2 NP	9 nets: 198 RM	13 nets: 44 RM, 2 NP, 1 M	7 nets: 44 RM	9 nets: 131 RM, 2 M, 1 BM, 1 GP; fishing rod: 6 B
Mon. 16.01.	12 nets: 84 RM, 1 NP, 4 M	8 nets: 32 RM, 1 GP, 4 TP	9 nets: 42 RM, 2 NP, 1 M; fishing rod: 13 TP	18 nets: 210 RM, 4 NP, 1 M, 1 JK	7 nets: 17 RM	/
Tues. 17.01.	12 nets: 85 RM, 3 NP	8 nets: 76 RM fishing rod: 1 TP	9 nets: 61 RM, 2 M fishing rod: 19 TP	13 nets: 76 RM fishing rod: 5 NP	8 nets: 94 RM	13 nets: 78 RM, 5 NP, 4 BM, 6 JK

Date	Margaret	Kerowina	Victoria	Augusta	Olivia	Eunice
Wedn. 18.01.	15 nets: 75 RM, 2 NP, 4 M fishing rod: 1 NP	9 nets: 32 RM, 1 NP fishing rod: 11 TP	9 nets: 98 RM	13 nets: 152 RM, 4 NP, 3 BM, 12 JK, 1 TP	7 nets: 37 RM	9 nets: 63 RM, 2 M
Thurs. 19.01.	15 nets: 81 RM, 3 M	8 nets: 95 RM fishing rod: 10 TP, 3 NP	9 nets: 70 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 1 GP, 1 TP fishing rod: 4 NP, 1 TP	13 nets: 76 RM, 5 NP, 3 M, 1 BM, 5 JK	/	9 nets: 90 RM, 1 NP, 3 M, 2 GP
Fri. 20.01.	15 nets: 105 RM, 7 NP fishing rod: 2 NP	8 nets: 80 RM	9 nets: 168 RM fishing rod: 98 TP	13 nets: 77 RM, 2 NP, 1 M, 6 JK	/	8 nets: 35 RM, 1 JK
Sat. 21.01.	15 nets: 86 RM, 2 NP	8 nets: 38 RM, 1 NP fishing rod: 6 TP	9 nets: 48 RM fishing rod: 3 TP	12 nets: 51 RM, 3 M, 1 JK, 2 TP fishing rod: 6 TP	/	9 nets: 30 RM
Sun. 22.01.	15 nets: 86 RM, 7 NP, 1 M	8 nets: 20 RM	20 nets: 20 RM fishing rod: 25 TP	13 nets: 75 RM	/	/
Mon. 23.01.	/	not asked	/	/	not asked	9 nets: 58 RM, 2 NP, 6 M, 1 BM, 1 KP
Tues. 24.01.	/	/	9 nets: 23 RM, 1 NP, 2 TP	/	7 nets: 53 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 1 BM, 1 JK	/
Wedn. 25.01.	2 nets: 16 RM fishing rod: 2 NP	9 nets: 75 RM, 2 KP	/	12 nets: 68 RM, 4 TP, 5 JK	/	/
Thurs. 26.01.	2 nets: 10 RM, 2 NP	9 nets: 19 RM, 1 M	9 nets: 68 RM	12 nets: 59 RM, 10 JK	/	/
Fri. 27.01.	2 nets: 5 RM, 2 BM	9 nets: 75 RM	/	12 nets: 52 RM, 5 NP, 15 JK fishing rod: 8 NP	7 nets: 68 RM, 1 NP, 2 JK fishing rod: 6 NP	/
Sat. 28.01.	2 nets: 17 RM fishing rod: 5 NP	50 RM	/	12 nets: 60 RM, 5 NP, 8 JK fishing rod: 16 NP	7 nets: 35 RM, 3 NP, 2 GP, 2 B	10 nets: 46 RM, 2 NP, 3 TP
Sun. 29.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 38 RM, 4 NP, 1 GP, 12 JK	not asked	8 nets: 33 RM, 3 NP, 4 M, 1 TP, 3 JK fishing rod: 7 NP
Mon. 30.01.	12 nets: 88 RM, 2 NP fishing rod: 13 TP	/	10 nets: 31 RM, 2 NP fishing rod: 3 TP	13 nets: 93 RM, 15 JK	4 nets: 23 RM fishing rod: 10 NP	8 nets: 43 RM, 2 NP, 2 TP, 5 JK
Tues. 31.01.	/	/	10 nets: 37 RM, 2 NP, 3 TP; fishing rod: 15 NP, 10 JK	15 nets: 55 RM, 4 NP, 4 BM, 10 JK	7 nets: 15 RM fishing rod: 7 NP	8 nets: 24 RM, 1 M, 4 JK

Information about participants:

- 7) **Margaret Freddy, Nyaura clan, 24 nets:** Margaret has many children. She shares her workload of checking her nets with a sister. Margaret's husband Freddy often travels to the market to sell her fish there. During the time of my study Margaret travelled to Maprik market once.
- 8) **Kerowina Pippi, Nambuk clan, 10 nets:** Kerowina is the first wife of John Pippi. Her children are grown up and she tries to save money to cover their school fees. During January Kerowina only travelled once to the market in Maprik, but twice gave fish bags (1 bag, 2 bags) to a befriended woman to sell.
- 9) **Victoria Gawi, Yagun clan, 17 nets:** Victoria is a jolly woman who enjoys to joke around. She is the first wife of Jerry Gawi. Victoria did not travel to the market during January, but send her daughter twice to sell her fish in Maprik. Once she gave one bag of fish to another woman to sell.
- 10) **Augusta Jimmy, Yak clan, 11 nets:** Augusta is a quite and friendly woman. She was married to a Yak but is widowed. She lived in town for a while but moved back to the village to her clan compound (Possuko) after her husband had harassed their daughter. She travels once or twice per month to the market. During the time of my study, she once gave one bag to someone else and once send the husband of her daughter with seven bags of fish to the Maprik market.
- 11) **Olivia Gawi, Possuko clan, 13 nets:** Olivia is married to Max Gawi. The couple owns a well run trade store in the village. Olivia often sends a sister or daughter to check her nets. Usually her husband travels to the market to sell her fish products there and buy store goods. During the time of my study Olivia travelled once to the market to sell her fish.
- 12) **Eunice Felix, Nyaura clan, 13 nets:** Eunice is a quiet young woman. She travels to the market twice per month. Eunice did not go to market her fish in January.

Fishstudy - Amount and Kind of Fish Caught By Timbunmeli Women in January 2013

Date	Nancy	Rita	Rosa	Monica	Anna	Margaret A.
Sat. 07.01.	9 nets: 54 RM, 1 BM, 1 TP fishing rod: 50 M	8 nets: 96 RM, 3 NP, 1 TP; fishing rod: 5 TP	9 nets: 16 RM fishing rod: 4 TP	/	/	10 nets: 88 RM, 2 GP
Sun. 08.01.	/	8 nets: 55 RM, 1 M	/	/	/	10 nets: 51 RM, 1 BM, 1 TP
Mon. 09.01.	/	1 net: 5 RM, 1 NP, 4 BM	3 nets: 6 RM fishing rod: 6 NP, 24 TP	/	/	10 nets: 51 RM, 1 BM, 1 TP
Tues. 10.01.	/	/	3 nets: 26 RM	/	5 nets: 50 RM, 1 M, 1 BM, 2 GP, 2 TP, 1 JK fishing rod: 8 TP	10 nets: 34 RM, 1 NP, 9 JK
Wedn. 11.01.	/	1 net: 4 RM, 2 BM, 24 JK	2 nets: 28 RM fishing rod: 1 NP, 3 TP	/	5 nets: 101 RM fishing rod: 3 TP	10 nets: 33 RM, 1 NP, 5 JK
Thurs. 12.01.	/	/	/	/	5 nets: 66 RM fishing rod: 1 NP, 31 TP	10 nets: 26 RM, 2 NP, 2 JK, 1 bird
Fri. 13.01.	/	/	2 nets: 10 RM, 1 TP, 5 JK	/	/	10 nets: 57 RM, 2 NP, 1 BM; 1 JK, 1 bird fishing rod: 2 NP
Sat. 14.01.	5 nets: 105 RM fishing rod: many NP&B	/	/	/	5 nets: 67 RM, 2 M fishing rod: 6 TP	/
Sun. 15.01.	5 nets: 102 RM, 1 NP	/	3 nets: 51 RM, 1 TP, 3 JK	12 nets: 105 RM, 1 TP	5 nets: 80 RM, 2 NP, 1 M	10 nets: 227 RM, 2 NP
Mon. 16.01.	5 nets: 34 RM, 1 BM	7 nets: 86 RM, 1 M, 6 TP; fishing rod: 3 TP	3 nets: 25 RM fishing rod: 2 NP, 14 TP	9 nets: 113 RM, 3 NP, 4 GP; fishing rod: 4 NP, 14 TP	5 nets: 20 RM, 2 NP, 4 GP fishing rod: 21 TP	6 nets: 45 RM, 2 NP, 1 TP, 2 JK; fishing rod: 7 NP
Tues. 17.01.	/	8 nets: 68 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 3 TP fishing rod: 7 TP	3 nets: 34 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 3 TP fishing rod: 7 NP, 5 JK	9 nets: 42 RM, 3 NP, 1 BM, 1 TP fishing rod: 10 TP	5 nets: 19 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 2 TP fishing rod: 13 TP	6 nets: 39 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP, 4 JK
Wedn. 18.01.	8 nets: 101 RM, 1 NP, 2 JK	/	3 nets: 23 RM, 6 JK, 2 TP fishing rod: 11 NP, 3 JK	/	fishing rod: 12 NP	13 nets: 162 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP, 2 JK
Thurs. 19.01.	/	8 nets: 54 RM, 1 NP, 3 TP; fishing rod: 25 TP	/	9 nets: 63 RM, 2 NP fishing rod: 35 TP	3 nets: 5 RM fishing rod: 22 TP	/
Fri. 20.01.	/	8 nets: 55 RM, 1 NP, 1 BM, 1 JK	4 nets: 77 RM, 2 BM, 2 JK	9 nets: 48 RM, 2 NP, 25 RM	5 nets: 19 RM, 1 NP, 2 TP	19 nets: 101 RM, 1 NP, 1 JK, 1 TP

Date	Nancy	Rita	Rosa	Monica	Anna	Margaret A.
Sat. 21.01.	/	8 nets: 27 RM, 1 TP fishing rod: 10 TP	4 nets: 62 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 2 BM, 1 GP, 7 JK fishing rod: 4 TP	9 nets: 44 RM, 1 NP, 1 BM, 1 GP fishing rod: 38 TP	5 nets: 16 RM fishing rod: 39 TP	/
Sun. 22.01.	/	8 nets: 55 RM, 3 TP, 6 JK	4 nets: 49 RM, 2 BM, 1 GP, 1 TP, 5 JK	9 nets: 97 RM, 3 NP, 3 TP; fishing rod: 4 NP	5 nets: 33 RM, 3 TP	/
Mon. 23.01.	not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked	5 nets: 18 RM, 1 KP fishing rod: 9 TP	not asked
Tues. 24.01.	/	/	/	/	/	/
Wedn. 25.01.	/	/	/	/	5 nets: 22 RM fishing rod: 16 TP	/
Thurs. 26.01.	/	/	/	/	/	/
Fri. 27.01.	/	1 net: 2 RM, 4 JK	/	2 nets: 5 NP, 4 BM, 22 B	/	/
Sat. 28.01.	/	/	/	2 nets: 1 RM, 3 BM, 13 JK	/	/
Sun. 29.01.	/	/	/	/	/	/
Mon. 30.01.	/	8 nets: 86 RM, 3 NP, 2 M, 1 TP, 2 JK	/	/	fishing rod: 42 TP	/
Tues. 31.01.	not asked	8 nets: 52 RM, 3 NP, 5 M, 2 JK; fishing rod: 1 TP	/	/	/	/

Information about Participants:

- 13) **Nancy Gawi, Possuko clan, 9 nets:** Nancy is the first wife of Eddi Gawi. She lives alone with her children in a house while her husband shares a house with his second wife and her children. Nancy has had health problems during my fieldwork. During the time of the study Nancy had not fished often enough and had only caught a few fish so that she did not travel to the market.
- 14) **Rita Kaiban, Yak clan, 8 nets:** Rita was born in Ambunti where her father, a Kandingei man, worked. She was married as the second wife to Barnabus Kaiban but is widowed. She is a strong, confident, and self-assertive woman with a loud voice. She has many children of whom two still lives with her. She is also taking care of one of her grandchildren. Her sister Anna Leslie smokes her fish in her household and the two woman paddle out to the lake together. If one of the woman is sick, the other checks the nets. Also Rita provides Anna her family with fish when Anna does not fish.
- 15) Rita said she would travel up to three times per month to the market if she had enough fish. During January she travelled to the market twice, heavily loaded with bags of fish from other woman who contributed to her travel expenses.
- 16) **Rosa Kaiban, Yak clan, 9 nets:** Rosa was born in Kandingei and moved to Timbunmeli when she married Barnabus Kaiban. She is quiet and modest person. Rosa does not travel to the markets herself, but usually gives a bag with fish to her co-wife Rita or one of her daughters to sell. Rosa is an older woman and does not paddle out to the lake but puts her nets close to the village. During the study she gave a bag of fish twice to a relative, and once she travelled herself to Maprik to sell fish and then travel on to Wewak where she stayed for a while with her in-laws.
- 17) **Monika Kerowin, Nyaura clan, 12 nets:** Monica is a friendly intelligent woman. She is married to man from Changriman but the couple lives – contrary to the customary rule – not the husband's but wife's place. Monica has a supporting husband who also goes to the lake to check her nets when she is sick. When she travels to the market, her daughter Joyce checks the fishing nets. Monica said she would travel to the market twice per month if she had caught enough fish. During January 2013 she travelled once to the Maprik market.
- 18) **Anna Leslie, Yak clan, 7 nets:** Anna does not paddle to the lake regularly. Often she and her family rely on other woman from their family to provide them with fish. Anna grew up in Pagwi and never got used to the arduous work. If she has fish to sell, she gives it to her sister Rita. During the study Anna did not travel to the market.
- 19) **Margaret Alois, Gama clan, 19 nets:** Margaret is a confident, strong woman who speaks her mind. She or her husband travel to the market usually twice per month. During January 2013 Margaret travelled to the Maprik market twice.

Fishstudy - Amount and Kind of Fish Caught By Timbunmeli Women in January 2013

Date	Erika	Maria	Lina	Anna J.	Rita I.	Urusta
Sat. 07.01.	19 nets: 155 RM, 2 NP, 3 TP, 1 GP, 1 B	/	/			
Sun. 08.01.	23 nets: 86 RM, 1 NP, 3 M, 4 B	8 nets: 9 RM, 1 NP	4 nets: 19 RM			
Mon. 09.01.	/	8 nets: 96 RM, 2 NP, 5 TP	6 nets: 22 RM			
Tues. 10.01.	/	8 nets: 25 RM, 1 BM, 1 JK fishing rod: 5 TP	6 nets: 20 RM fishing rod: 4 NP, 2 TP, 6 LN			
Wedn. 11.01.	/	8 nets: 98 RM, 4 NP, 1 JK	6 nets: 78 RM, 3 NP, 2 BM, 1 TP, 1 RP, 2 JK			
Thurs. 12.01.	16 nets: 180 RM, 1 N, 2 M, 5 JK	8 nets: 22 RM, 2 NP fishing rod: 4 TP	6 nets: 14 RM, 1 GP, 3 JK fishing rod: 67 M			
Fri. 13.01.	16 nets: 16 RM, 3 NP, 3 M, 1 BM, 1 JK fishing rod: 2 NP	/	6 nets: 6 RM, 1 NP, 1 JK			
Sat. 14.01.	16 nets: 255 RM, 6 NP, 3 M, 3 BM, 1 TP, 2 JK	8 nets: 39 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP fishing rod: 2 NP	6 nets: 96 RM, 1 NP, 1 M, 1 GP, 1 JK fishing rod: 18 NP			
Sun. 15.01.	19 nets: 183 RM, 4 NP, 1 M, 5 BM, 1 GP, 1 TP, 1 JK	8 nets: 29 RM, 6 NP, 6 TP	10 nets: 45 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP, 1 TP	12 nets: 91 RM, 1M	9 nets: 47 RM, 1 M	10 nets: 67 RM, 1 NP, 6 M
Mon. 16.01.	19 nets: 39 RM, 4 NP	8 nets: 11 RM, 2 NP 4 TP; fishing rod: 25 TP	10 nets: 50 RM, 1 M, 3 TP, 1 JK, 1 bird fishing rod: 13 NP	10 nets: 32 RM, 1 NP fishing rod: 2 NP	11 nets: 15 RM fishing rod: 21 TP	10 nets: 40 RM, 1 NP, 2 M
Tues. 17.01.	19 nets: 240 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP, 4 JK	9 nets: 8 RM	10 nets: 21 RM, 1 NP, 1 TP, 1 JK fishing rod: 10 NP, 1 JK, 8 LN	9 nets: 25 RM, 1 KP, 1 JK		9 nets: 29 RM, 3 NP, 2 M

Date	Erika	Maria	Lina	Anna J.	Rita I.	Urusta
Wedn. 18.01.	19 nets: 310 RM, 3 NP, 1 BM, 8 JK	9 nets: 16 RM, 4 TP fishing rod: 35 TP	10 nets: 12 RM, 1 TP, 1 bird	11 nets: 21 RM, 1 NP, 1 BK	9 nets: 16 RM, 2 NP, 1 GP, 1 TP	10 nets: 46 RM, 2 M fishing rod: 7 NP
Thur. 19.01.	/	/	/	13 nets:, 59 RM, 1 JK	9 nets: 68 RM, 2 NP	10 nets: 108 RM, 1 NP, 6 M fishing rod: 9 NP
Fri. 20.01.	8 nets: 127 RM, 1 NP, 1 BM, 2 JK	/	/	24 nets: 61 RM, 2 NP, 2 BM	6 nets: 16 RM fishing rod: 5 RM	10 nets: 56 RM, 3 NP, 7 M
Sat. 21.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 39 RM, 2 NP, 2 M, 1 TP fishing rod: 7 TP	11 nets: 54 RM fishing rod: 6 TP	10 nets: 73 RM, 1 BM, 3 M fishing rod: 1 NP
Sun. 22.01.	/	/	/	/	/	10 nets: 127 RM, 1 NP, 3 M fishing rod: 2 NP
Mon. 23.01.	not asked	not asked	not asked	13 nets: 13 RM, 2 NP	/	10 nets: 32 RM, 4 NP, 3 M fishing rod: 2 NP
Tues. 24.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 44 RM, 1 NP, 1 GP fishing rod: 5 NP, 3 TP	9 nets: 102 RM, 1 M, 2 GP, 2 JK, 1 TP	/
Wedn. 25.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 56 RM, 1 BM, 1 TP, 6 JK	/	10 nets: 15 RM, 5 M
Thur. 26.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 35 RM, 2 NP, 1 M, 3 BM, 10 JK	/	/
Fri. 27.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 13 RM, 1 NP, 1 BM	/	/
Sat. 28.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 60 RM, 2 NP, 11 B fishing rod: 11 NP	/	/
Sun. 29.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 56 RM, 1 BM, 1 TP, 6 JK	/	/
Mon. 30.01.	/	/	/	13 nets: 45 RM, 1 NP	/	/
Tues. 31.01.	/	/	/	/	/	/

Information about Participants:

- 20) **Erika Kaiban, Yak clan, 19 nets:** Erika is a very industrious woman. Next to the biggest trade store in the village that she owns, she has also optimised her fish work. If she is not paddling out to the lake herself, she pays young women from her family to do so. They also support her with smoking the fish. Sometimes she takes her motorized canoe to check her nets. Erika owns a motor canoe business and travels to the market every week, sometimes twice per week if she has caught enough fish to sell. Then she buys store goods in Maprik or Wewak. During January 2013 Erika travelled to Maprik market once, and twice to Wewak.
- 21) **Maria Iven, Yak clan, 8 nets:** Maria is an older woman who does not travel to the markets herself. Her daughter Emma provides her and her husband with fish when she does not check her nets and also takes her fish bags with her to the markets.
- 22) **Lina Beno, Yak clan, 6 nets:** Lina is a hardworking woman who lacks support from her handicapped husband. When Lina is occupied with other tasks, such as finding fire wood, her daughter Marleen checks her nets. Lina usually travels once per month to the market, if she has caught a lot of fish she travels twice.
- 23) **Anna Jack, Nambuk clan, 12 nets:** Anna approached me after the first week of the fish study was over stating that she wanted to be part of the study. She owns 8 nets herself, 4 nets belong to her sister. After she returns from a market she gives a monetary contribution to her sister. Anna has a mentally handicapped adult son who never leaves the house. Also her second son is mentally confused. During the fishstudy her sick son attacked her and injured her head – Anna did not go to the lake for a while to recover.
- 24) **Rita Ivut, Nyaura clan, 11 nets:** Rita is a quieter woman who expressed the wish to be part of the study after it already had started. During the time of the study Rita did not travel to the market. Her husband, however, once took her fish bags with him on his way to Wewak to sell them on the Maprik market.
- 25) **Urusta Florian, Nyaura clan, 10 nets:** Erusta wanted to take part in my study after she had found out about it. She is a young quiet but jolly woman. She does not travel to the market herself, but usually hands her fish to a relative to sell it for her.

Chapter 2

Parts of body and person

Nyaura	English	Nyaura	English
<u>bange</u>	body, skin	<u>minya</u>	breast
<u>bange simbe</u>	outside skin	<u>minyabissik</u>	nipple
<u>aura bange</u>	inside skin	<u>mauk</u>	heart
<u>tsing</u>	corpse	<u>yak</u>	abdomen
<u>kaik</u>	spirit, soul, life-spirit	<u>gambuk</u>	stomach
<u>bangewagen</u>	presentiment, spirit of the skin	<u>arrinje</u>	belly button, umbilical cord
<u>yerrebik</u>	thoughts, feelings, memory	<u>marrowa</u>	waist (front)
<u>nambu</u>	head	<u>yibma</u>	waist (back)
<u>djaurak</u>	brain	<u>sauviya</u>	lungs
<u>nimbe, yui</u>	hair	<u>wutnyawing</u>	bladder
<u>mundama</u>	face	<u>hudming</u>	liver
<u>mini</u>	eye	<u>tusik</u>	kidney
<u>miniande</u>	orbit	<u>buni</u>	back
<u>miniru</u>	eyebrow	<u>buniabba</u>	spine
<u>miniyui</u>	eye lashes	<u>gwai</u>	hip
<u>kubmui</u>	cheeks	<u>gwaiabba</u>	hip bone
<u>dama</u>	nose	<u>maguk</u>	buttocks
<u>damaabba</u>	nasal bone	<u>milik</u>	anus
<u>tupmui</u>	lips	<u>diambe</u>	rectum
<u>ganga</u>	mouth	<u>di</u>	feces
<u>tigak</u>	tongue	<u>wutnya</u>	urine
<u>kundi</u>	voice	<u>digumbi;</u> <u>yakdigumbi</u>	intestine
<u>gangabba</u>	chin, jaw	<u>kidnya</u>	vagina
<u>gangabbanimbe</u>	beard	<u>kidnyayui</u>	pubic hair, f.
<u>qwak</u>	front neck	<u>nyangwuk</u>	uterus
<u>mak</u>	back neck	<u>sip</u>	male genitals
<u>banjegai</u>	throat	<u>sipyui</u>	pubic hair, m.
<u>banjegaiabba</u>	Adam's apple	<u>dauwa</u>	thighs
<u>tangabba</u>	shoulder	<u>mang</u>	leg
<u>Marrowa/puabba</u>	collarbone	<u>seitmang</u>	calf
<u>kissegurak</u>	armpit	<u>qwalimang</u>	knee
<u>kissegurak yui</u>	armpit hair	<u>minimang</u>	ankle
<u>angwaramba</u>	upper arm	<u>tzibmang</u>	toe
<u>gussaramba</u>	lower arm	<u>mangblasu</u>	toenail
<u>qwaliramba</u>	elbow	<u>kandemang</u>	soles
<u>tamba</u>	hand	<u>bunimang</u>	upper foot side
<u>minitamba</u>	wrist	<u>abba</u>	bone
<u>tzibtamba</u>	finger	<u>dingirrik</u>	cartilage
<u>nambantamba</u>	thumb	<u>mingi</u>	vein, artery
<u>nindetzibtamba</u>	pointer, middle and ring finger (middle fingers)	<u>yarraguweng,</u> <u>yarroweng/yanoweng</u>	blood, sickness
<u>dzanglentamba</u>	little finger	<u>gu</u>	water, body fluids

<i>blasu</i>	nail	<i>minyambi</i>	breastmilk
<i>blasutamba</i>	finger nail	<i>dumbui</i>	semen
<i>bunitamba</i>	upper hand side	<i>mbak</i>	period, mun
<i>dugube</i>	upper body	<i>guyak</i>	vomit
<i>marrowa, pu</i>	chest	<i>muk</i>	breath

Chapter 3

Mavak's version of the Kibbinbange myth

M: Kibbinbange already made a house [in *undumbunge*] and he came back [to the village]. His wife was busy with cooking. He went into the house, she stood up, and he shot her with a spear. He killed his wife. Ok, his two daughters got up and he killed them. Their bodies were not buried. Ok. The two men, Nyounyang and Nyamenyang, they wanted to marry those girls. Ok. Those two men, too, prepared their bodies, decorated them and then killed themselves. They also went to *undumbunge* and there they married the two daughters of Kibbinbange and stayed with them. But Kibbinbange, he did not die. No. He went with his body. [...] Kibbinbange, he alone went alive. His body went alive. He was a man. We are related to this, we Nyoui, we Yak. He did not turn back. He went forever.

I: Why did he kill his family?

M: He thought about it, if he went alone, his wife and children would not live well and that is why he killed them. [...] If he had stayed here, we would have had the same skin as you all [meaning white people]. [...] It is because of this man, Kibbinbange e. He made this stupid thing and that is why we die. He himself murdered and he destroyed it and we die. [...] Now, you see, all the Papua New Guineans, we cannot change our skin. Ok. [...] The white man became a white man. He [Kibbinbange] murdered and he broke the law. He blocked the door. He broke the law and we became black men. He blocked the door. He killed his family and blocked it. If he had not blocked it, if he had not killed them, then we would be different. Then, we would be like you are. But he wanted to kill, he wanted to give only to one side and he wanted to give it to your side.

Moses version of the Kibbinbange myth

He was a human, Kibbinbange; he was a man who lived in a place. [...] Ok, the place that was close to him, many people lived there, made noise, sang; all sorts of noise. [...] Ok, he heard that noise; it was too close to where he lived. He heard that noise and he said, 'Ey, you be quiet and we will live together.' Many times he made this announcement, but they did not listen. So he got up and told his small brother 'You get coconut, banana and put it in the canoe.' His little brother heard what he said and brought bananas and coconuts and put them into the canoe. And he knew that he would leave them now. He was a man, a man who stayed with them, alive. OK, he took his paddle, went down, took his canoe with all the stuff that was inside, he was about to sit down and he cried for his little brother. He said: 'I will go. Will I come back and see you or will I not come back and see you?' He made this talk, story, and cried for him. He cried for his brother. When it was over, he said 'Ok, see you.' [...] He paddled in his canoe. It was not like when we go straight to a place. There were many places that he went to. He went, and went, he landed at one place and listened. Would he hear a chicken call, or how they beat the *garamut*, or how they shouted and talked, how they hit the *kundu*, or could he hear something they sung? When he heard something, he said 'No, they are too close. They make a lot of noise.' So he went on, and on, and on, and on. He tried so many places but still heard their noise and said 'No, they are too close.' He went further away. [...] Ok, then, he did not hear a noise. It was quiet. [...] He slept. Then, he started to cut rope, and went on like that. He made fire, set a fire, smoke. No one could see the smoke. No. They could not see it. He hid himself. He started to do this kind of work, and went on like that. [...] He sat down and discussed with himself: 'Will I go or what shall I do?' He sat down like that, he was that wind. He was this wind now, and he came with power now. He came with power now.

His little brother, he tried to find him. He said to himself 'Where should I go and find my big brother?' He tried to find him, no. He had gone further away. He sat down and cried. He said: 'Where did you go? Can you call out

or call me or hit the *garamut* or a tree so that I will hear you and follow you!’ It went on like that and he was lost. He died. His small brother died. But when he died, he came up at his big brother. He was the first. What happened to him, he went, he sat down, he looked. He walked about like that and when he went, he was a spirit. [...]

Ok, his sister’s child, it carried food back in the village and said ‘Mother’s brother went away, where did the *wau* go to?’, it said this to the mother. The child said: ‘Mama, we have to follow the *wau*.’ Ok, the mother, she was Kibbinbange’s sister, she got up. [...] His sister, too, was a knowledgeable woman; she had wisdom. She went now, she took her three children and they went, followed his road. [...] They followed her brother. She knew. His sister knew. [...] She knew, ‘This place, this valley we have to go and we will see a big stone.’ That stone was there, they listened. They did not hear a noise. She knew, her brother was there. The sister knew that her brother was there. [...] She made magical spells to break the stone [...]. Ok, in the morning, she told them a story, and cried for their family whom they will not see anymore. [...] She took up that piece of wood that she made a magical spell on and she shot it. The stone opened. When they looked down, they saw ‘Oh!’ They were decorated, they decorated themselves and they came. All of them were inside. [...] Kibbinbange walked along and came. [...] Then she said: ‘I will put you down now.’ [...] When the children looked up, the door was closed. Their mother’s brother took them and they all went. That happiness (*dispela kain amamas*) that they were in, they too stayed like it. He took the three children and the mother. [...]

Now that we sit down, one or two die and go. We do not see them, we do not hear the sound of the dead or their noise. No. When our eyes play a trick on us we say it is the spirit of a dead. But that spirit is not talking with us. It is that place, where Kibbinbange went to. We say, he is in the garden. [...] We say, he made the place. When a man, woman or child dies, you will hear people say and cry out some sort of talk. It is because of this. They say: ‘Where will we hear your noise? You went to the place that we do not know.’ Like the bible says, it is paradise. We know it and we say Paradise. [...] *Undumbunge* is where he went to with his body and we do not see it. And we do not see the dead go and we do not hear their noise. It is because of that. He went with his body. He did not like the sound and he went away.

Chapter 4

The agency of spirits demonstrated by a moving grass island

Early in the morning I heard noise in the village. People were alarmed. A huge grass-island (*miagwi*) was floating in front of the village, threatening to destroy the house of Papmangawi and his family [see photo no 39 p.115]. It had come out from the bush area called Tonagwan that lies opposite of the village. I went up the hill from where one has a good view to take a photo of the drifting island. My brother Misek, who saw me walking uphill, exclaimed that it would be *tumbuna gras* [ancestral grass] and that no one had known that it was a grass-island. Later, too, people told me again and again that it was *tumbuna graun* [ancestral ground] that had come up with the ground a long, long time ago that was lose now.

People were at unease – the area belonged to the Possuko clan, it was part of its ancestral repertoire, the place of ancestral spirits, and no one had ever seen it move before. Someone must have stirred it up. Some people said they heard a motor running when the *miagwi* passed by – like a ship propelled by a machine. Then, I heard the rumor about Papmangawi, who had made a magical spell and had moved the ground. I paddled to his house to ask him about the incident and he told me to wait for him in my house where he would tell me what had happened in privacy.

I learned that his son had worked in the Tonagwan’s bush when a wild pig came unusually close and seemed to watch him and his companions. The group of men got nervous – a wild pig would usually run away, it would be afraid when encountering humans. A spirit must have taken its body to observe them. Back in the village the son told Papmangawi about what had happened and the old man used magical spells to send the spirit that belonged to his clan away. The spirit got upset by his action and started to move the grass-island towards Papmangawi’s home.

Before it could destroy the family house, Papmangawi managed to tame the spirit with another of his clan’s secret spells and the grass-island moved away again. For some weeks the *miagwi* floated in front of the village, moving back and forth, before returning to its former location.

A visit to the spirit stone Ukata

In the morning we took our canoes to paddle to the area called Mingre at the northern part of the island. Rodney Kinyak, his wife Grace, their son Newman with his son Aithon, and their adopted son Gassuo together with his wife and their two small children, Adrien, my sister Masallah and I wanted to go to the backside of the mountain to ask the spirit being Ukata for help. Gassuo's and Newman's children were often sick, suffering from a persistent cough.

Ukata is a spirit being from primordial times. He belongs to the Manawi, the traditional landowners of the area. Rodney and Grace had adopted Gassuo, a descendant of the Manawi, from Korewui, a Mali settlement at the southern backside of Timbunmeli mountain. Gassuo wanted to perform a washing ritual with the children and ask Ukata to take the children's sickness away.

The spirit stone is situated in a small stream that comes down from the mountain. I had recorded his myth before and was excited to see the place in which the mythical actions took place. We had taken canoes to paddle to the northern part of the mountain. From there we walked inland, first through a small area of grassland, then through a swampy area infested with leeches that seemed to be especially attracted to my light skin, my companions joked. After a long walk we arrived at a creek that we followed upstream. It was a beautiful scenery and soundscape with bird calls and the stream's murmur. On our way we passed sago trees and Rodney told me that this was the place where Ukata's daughters had washed the sago in the myth he had told me before.

When we finally arrived at our destination, we discovered that the spirit stone was for the most part covered with sand, gravel, and water – we had had a lot of rain during the last weeks and the stream must have carried scree down from the mountain that now wrapped the stone. While I recorded Ukata's story, the party started to clean the stone. He had been tricked by those who had married his two daughters. The brideprice he was given did not contain valuable shell money, but only coconut shells. The anger had overwhelmed him and to cool the heat he had felt, he wanted to drink water. I was told and shown how Ukata had bent down – he had placed his lime back under his left arm, squatted and put his head down to fetch water before he turned to stone. We could only see his backside, his neck, and his two elbows – the rest of his body was covered with gravel and sand.

When it was decided that the stone was freed enough for the time being from its graveled enclosure, Gassuo took the children to perform a washing ritual with them. He started with the two small boys. Gassuo had brought stems from a banana tree that he cut into halves and broke apart so that their milky fluid could be mixed with the water that surrounded the spirit stone. I was told that the plant's liquid is a local medicine. He went on to pick up water with the stems and squeezed it together with the milky fluid over the heads of the boys while he asked Ukata to take their sickness away. Later he performed the ritual with his baby son whom his wife was holding.

Although in former times humans had treated Ukata unjust by betraying him with a false brideprice payment, he was not an evil spirit. He was willing to help humans who treated him with respect. But those who were careless in his presence and mistreated him, he would punish. Stanley, Adrien's brother, had once, against Gassuo's warning, sharpened his bushknife on the stone and in the aftermath paid for his trespass. Ukata's spirit had followed him back to the village where he hit him hard in the face. For days Stanley's eye was swollen. Every afternoon Ukata would visit him to give him more pain that would not let him sleep. Stanley had only found relief after he had gone back to the spirit stone and apologized. The same day, his pain had stopped.

After about an hour we decided that it was time to go back to the village. Before we left, Rodney thanked Ukata for his help. Gassuo's wife took leaves from a bush nearby with her – a precaution to make sure that the small children's *kaik* would follow them back to the village.

Two brothers and the Noah story told by Jerry Gawi

J: It is my *tumbuna stori* [ancestor's story]. I will tell a story about Wabowi and Namowi, two brothers. It is a nice story. You will hear that it also touches the Big Man above. Ok. I am from this clan, Yagun. It is my story. Our fathers used to tell us, 'You cannot miss this story. You have to join and join it. [You have to tell it to] your grandchild, your grand grandchild – until the time that the ground is over. Or until you die.' Ok, a really long time ago, the two men I called, Wabowi and Namowi, the big brother Wabowi, he went to a market. They lived downwards at Yensan, Kanganamun. Down below. The big one went to a market with his wife. He also took his fighting gear. If someone wanted to harm him, he could fight. His little brother, he stayed back. He stayed in the village with his wife and children. His big brother was married to a nice woman, a good-looking woman, a fat woman. He took her with her, the couple went away.

Ok, it was day break now. He must have left his brother when it was still dark. Ok, his little brother did not go to do any work. He just stayed in the village. He went to sleep in a big men's house. He was sleeping there. And many men were in this men's house and they were jealous for the wife of his big brother. They said, 'That kind of man, how can he marry such a woman?' They were jealous. He [Namowi] heard it. He heard it while he slept. He was only pretending to sleep. They looked at him, he slept. He did not make a sound; he had already heard what they had said. He slept like dead. The men who were in the men's house, they said 'No, what if he can hear us?' Ok, they broke a piece of stove, like the one down there [like the shards that are placed underneath each stove to keep it levelled].

They put it into the fire. How many pieces they put into the fire! When they were hot, when the stone was red now, they put them on his body. Everywhere on his body. It was not like he was wearing a shirt or trousers. No, he wore a loincloth like they did then. They put them everywhere on his body, also on his ass. The whole body. This part, that part, they already put it [on there]. The man slept as if he was dead. They talked. They continued to talk about the wife of his big brother. They continued to talk.¹⁴⁰ When they stopped now, he pretended 'mmmmmmmh' to wake up. He got up. He just looked, all the men were there. He went outside now. He did not worry about the way the fire burned him, he walked off. He took his basket and went to his house. [...]

He went to sleep, until daybreak, took white ground, took his paddle, his spear, put it into the canoe. He paddled to a rivulet, followed his brother. He went, left the village, went a little further and climbed a big *qipma*. You know *qipma*. A tree. He climbed it. He removed all the branches. He became like *saun* [white egret]. He painted his whole body with the white ground. Then, he saw his brother and his wife – they paddled and came. When they came, his big brother took a piece of bamboo and this thing that we call *mawa*, you know it from the time when someone dies, we shoot it outside, ya. He put away his paddle and told his wife: 'You paddle. Look, there is a *saun* on top of the tree.' But no, it was not a *saun*, it was his brother, who said 'Mh, you came to shoot me? I am your bird, come!' And he came to see: 'No, the boy ya!' He put down his spear and said to his little brother: 'What is it? Come down.' And the boy left the tree and came down, stood close to the canoe and pushed it outside. He put his paddle into the other canoe and the two sat down: 'Wife, you paddle. We go.' The whole story, how they burned him [Namowi], what kind of talk they had made about his wife, he [Wabowi] heard it all, his brother told him. Then they went ashore and slept.

The next morning, they started it [magic] now. Two *masalai* [here water spirits], the *masalai* of our clan, two *wanjemook* (spirit of the water, here crocodiles), the two, too, were brothers [Palingalan and Mawakgalan]. Ok, he [Wabowi] told his little brother: 'What do you think? Shall we destroy the community?' And he [Namowi] answered: 'Do you see my body – It is on the mark to death. Whatever you think, do it!' They took a canoe, put two long bamboos inside. They were close to the village. They threw the bamboo and came, they came to the lake, they came to the rivulet. They came together. They came and the bamboo got attached to the big *masalai*, the brother of the small one. He held on to the bamboo. The canoe stopped. Ok, they checked for the small brother, threw the bamboo and he held it. The *wanjemook* held on to it now. The two took *lagi* ya, *kamin*, ginger leaves ya. They made magical spells, and attached it to the bamboo. They paddled and paddled. They came ashore at the village. They removed the ginger leaves and planted it in the *tivui*, the thing I told you about before [ceremonial hill in front of the men's house, where in former times the heads of the victims of headhunting raids were buried]. They waited until it was dark.

When it started to get dark, the big one [brother] planted it first. 'Nimim nimim nimim nimim', he called out. Like an earthquake that came. The first one [earthquake] [came]. [...] The two started to get ready now, they just watched. When the sun had gone down, [...], four [earthquakes] were already over. [...] The community was a big community. They made all sorts of things, big noise.¹⁴¹ [...] Then the last one, number five, came. The two took their time. They got up, collected all the small things that we do not see, snakes or pigs, dogs, chicken, whatever sort of animal, whatever sort of insect, [...]. They doubled a canoe and put them inside together with their two wives and children. And their animals. They waited for the last one [earthquake] and went inside [the double canoe that had an interior].

The community already slept like dead. The last one [earthquake] sounded; there was no noise on the ground. A big rain came. All the animals were in the double canoe. That represents Noah now. I will go to that now. The bible story, I will go to it now. It is the same, you will hear. It went on, the rain came down, the two watched. They had a big young girl. The two of them. It went on, the rain. One woman, her house was located like the school [on a hill]. The rest of her family were in a house like this little house [which is situated on a lower level]. Her child cried; it felt that it had to urinate and it cried. It cried now, it wanted to go down to the ground, but it was afraid. She said, 'You urinate here into this hole in the house [floor].' And when the girl urinated, her urine made a sound because the water was already close. [...]. It sounded close, the mother turned, saw it and called out 'Listen! How do you sleep! The place is high water!' When she made this talk, 'The place is high water', she was too late with her talk. The water swallowed everything, coconut trees, whatever you can think of, betelnut trees, betelpepper trees, everything, highwater! Only the two brothers were in this double boat. They were there. The whole community – those who liked to get up and go somewhere, there was nothing – which tree, which ground could they go to? There was no way. It was the end. They went and how they drowned, everything was at its end. There was nothing more.

The two *masalai* controlled this double canoe and went outside to a place where a lake was, the boat had to be there. It could not go to a place where ground had been before. The *masalai* controlled it. It went like this, it was over. Five times. Five times.¹⁴² The fourth was over, the last one, it stopped. The water stopped, the rain stopped. Everything stopped. The double canoe, it floated outside. The two saw a desert. There was not even the smallest thing. No mountains, no, everything was over. Over like this. That is it.

The two *masalai*, whose name you wrote down, they were angry now so that the two [Wabowi and Namowi] would give them something, a present [an offering as payment for their help]. The two killed a pig. The big crocodile came to the top, they put it [the pig] on its face. No way, it did not get it. The chicken went. No way. The two took

¹⁴⁰ In other versions of the myth it was revealed that the men had affairs with the bigger brother's wife.

¹⁴¹ In other versions of the myth it was explicit that villagers had sinful behaviour.

¹⁴² The number 'five' seems to be important in myths and rituals, but I could not find out why.

everything outside. Their girl, the big girl, that I mentioned before, they cut her hair, dressed her really nice. They dressed her with this decoration for dance, *kina* shells, they hung it on her. Dressed her real nice, designed her face with good ground, they tied a grass-skirt on her. Then, one of them held her on one side, the other one held her on the other side and they carried her outside of the double canoe. They showed her, the two [crocodile spirits] liked her. A good, nice girl – she went already. Oh, the girl cried: 'Sorry, my two fathers, why are you doing this to me? I am not your pig and dog so that you will give me to those two *masalai*.' She worried for her father and cried. In our language we say: '*Wombunmeli nyaikna, Namowemeli nyaikna. Wungakmindangak kipma ibeigeandeimbita*'. She made this speech, '*brimbaknasimbui walanasimbui*'. She said this and cried at the same time. They put her onto the forehead of the two men [spirit crocodiles]. The water went slowly down until it was at the level that the water usually was. It went down, down, down, down, down, in the middle it stopped, they could not see anything. It was a desert. They were far away from their place. It went on like this.

Then the two sent out a bird. They went inside and opened the door, they sent a bird out. I will show you this bird first. It is a big story, a secret story that I am telling you now. We do not tell it to other clans [He tells me the name of the bird, which shall remain secret]. The first time, the two sent this bird to check whether ground was somewhere. It went around, it went, it was happy about what it saw. It saw a good ground; it did not return to the ship. We do not talk about this man [name of the bird]. It went, it was happy about the ground. It was happy about the mountains. It was happy about everything. It went, went, went, it went for good. It did not turn back to see the two fathers; to the two men, *kai* [no]. The two waited for almost a week. They stayed, then the big one went outside to the front of the ship and said 'I want an egret to come.' *Namio* [small white egret]. A white bird. Ok, he put out his hand; the *namio* came and sat down. And he said 'I want you to go and have a look at that area that fog is covering. I cannot see one mountain. You go, if a tree is there, a mountain is there, break a branch and come back to the ship. And the ship will go to that place.' OK, he held out his hand - 'pupupupu' - fly! The two stayed and watched until it was out of sight. It went, went, went, went, went, it saw a tree that came up from the ground, mountain. It went and saw it; it sat down on one tree and rested. Stayed, then it broke off a piece with leaves. It looked around; put it into the mouth and 'psssh' – it went back to the double canoe. It went, went, went, went, went, it arrived at the double canoe. It stood there, the man [the egret] called out, 'Kingamesun. Kingamesun', it sang with the piece in its mouth. When it called out, the two men came outside and saw it 'Ey, ya, the man came. It came with a branch. There is already ground. There is already a mountain. Ok, the double canoe, we push it back.'

The two *masalai* controlled this double canoe. [...] The canoe went inside [to the place where there was ground], the double canoe went inside. They docked [...]. They did not see a little thing on that ground. It was a nice ground. No grass, nothing. Now all the animals, all the small things that we do not know, for everything they opened the door. And the two went outside and said 'Who will try to step on the ground? The ground has no marks. Who will go?' Now, a man [the dog Korewui] called out. [...]. It said 'Two fathers, I!' It went on the double canoe and jumped down on the ground. It itself put its mark and went. The ground had no marks. It went, went, went, went, went. Grass started to come on the top, you know, everything came afterwards. The first man who walked on the ground [...] broke a piece of tree and came. The egret, we call it *namio*. The second one was *wala* [dog], the one that now calls out. We say Korewuimbange, ya! It was over. Whatever the two [Wabowi and Namowi] had locked [in the interior of the ship], it went like it wanted to. The dog put his mark on the ground, after the dog, they jumped down now. What the two of us can see, whatever the two of us cannot see, everything went on the ground. The double canoe was empty now. The fathers, mothers, children only were there. They did not have a house; they were yet on the canoe. Afterwards they made a house. Ok, there was no one in the community. Only them, they changed their partners. Their children. They changed their partners and the community became big. That is all and thank you for getting the story. [...]

I: And the daughter must have died, or?

J: No! She did not die! You know, the *masalai* took her with her. She went alive.

I: Their place was underneath the water?

J: Ya, they were there. It is a big water. Before, [...] a man like me [...], I had *sibbukundi* [magical spells]. I could make it into my hand, clean my eyes [with it], and I could dive down. It is my family *masalai*. It would not attack me. I would go to its men's house. Before, at the time when the forefathers lived. They knew. Now, you know, the school [mission] killed the entire story, the way of before. And now we [*yumi*] live.

I: Now, there is not that kind of knowledge.

J: *Kai* [no]. [...] That is our big story. This is a big story of ours. This woman, now the bible – the woman went with her life and her body, Mother Mary who now goes around in the community [see Chapter 5]. [...] the woman went alive and we suspect that it is *mama* [Mother Mary]. We say it like this. And now that we received the bible and we read it and I am thinking, it could be that Mama Maria came from my side.

I: That is that girl that they took with them?

J: Ya. The two *masalai* took her with them. We say it like that.

Chapter 5

Removal of sorcery items from the school ground

20.10.2013

As every day during the month, the catholic women started to pray the rosary in front of the statue of Mother Mary who was placed on a table on the school ground. During the prayer session, spirits started to possess them – the Holy Spirit was working through them. Grace was possessed by Mother Mary, other women were floated by *wassanctu* (patron saints), and David took possession of Sandra. After the prayer session had ended the councilor's wife, Stella Wavi (Nyaura clan) went to the altar to pick up the statue. Stella, too, was floated by the spirit of Mother Mary during the month October. In her hands, the statue started to dance – bending forth and back. Mother Mary now guided Stella around the assembled group members, leading her also to a classroom, where the movements of the statue increased. On a different day, David removed a sorcery bundle that was hidden in this class room – Mother Mary had already indicated that evil had taken its place in it. In the following other women who were floated by the spirits of God took over carrying the statue who moved in their hands on its own.

David, who possessed the body of Sandra, led the group to the house of Mr and Mrs Wavi, the headmaster's home, where Sandra collapsed and had to be supported by other women [photo no 45 p.155]. A sorcery bundle had been hidden underneath the house of the headmaster – to remove it had cost all of Sandra's strength. The community members present prayed together with the mother's group, and sung church songs accompanied by music, to strengthen Sandra's body and show their support. Her weakness was not only interpreted as a sign of David having to fight a strong evil power, but also as an expression of the doubt of community members present who were weakening Sandra's body. Especially the church leaders, Nikki Tonagon and Iven Mavak, were later identified to have caused disturb – they did not really support the group of the catholic women.

The sorcery bundle was placed in a bowl of water [photo no 46, p.156] and carried to another teacher's house, in front of which the prayers continued. One of the teacher's was asked to open the bundle – it contained the skin of a betelnut, a cord in which seven knots were found, marking the time that the headmaster's family had left before the spell would destroy the headmaster Mr Wavi, a piece of tobacco on which the spell had been made, as well as 10 toea, representing the 100 Kina with which the work of the sorcerer had been paid – all wrapped in a leaf that among the Nyaura is used for magic and sorcery.

Again and again Grace, possessed by Mother Mary, exclaimed that one had to pray more vigorously – the evil should be given no chance to attack Sandra's body who tumbled and staggered around. Only if the prayers and songs would be kept up continuously without a break, would the good win over the evil. And so the procession walked praying and singing around the school ground, until the group arrived in front of Mother Mary's altar. Here, the prayers continued for a while. David, still possessing Sandra, announced that two more sorcery items were hidden on the school ground.

24.10.2013

After the prayer session was over, David took my hand and guided me into the classroom. There he marked the spot where the sorcery item was hidden with a colorful rosary. He said that Rita Kaiban (Yak clan) should remove it after dark. However, when Rita, herself possessed by the Spirit that in her took the form of her dead husband Barnabus Kaiban, went inside the classroom in the dark, she could not find the rosary. David, too, could not find it. I was called to reconfirm the spot where David had hung up the rosary before. Then, Rita rushed outside, where she found the bundle on the ground on the other side of the wall. Possessed by the spirit, she ran around the class room towards the altar, speaking and shouting in tongues, circling around the assembled women – the spirit in her floated her too much. Mother Mary, possessing Grace, stopped her: 'Stop, in the name of Jesus!' and commanded Rita to put the bundle onto the altar. Rita did not immediately follow the instructions, resulting in Mother Mary commanding her not to waste any further time. Barnabus, possessing Rita, answered: '*I know. I know*', in English. Barnabus had been a well-educated person, who had studied at a technical school. During his life, he had known English, and so did he after death when possessing Rita.

Finally, the bundle was placed on top of the altar. Another song was played and sung to praise Jesus. Then, Jakoba, Sandra's sister, was sent to the altar to open the bundle: It contained a leaf in which two broken pieces of a beer bottle were found together with a stone. Jakoba placed the items into the bucket of water. The dancing and singing went on for a while.

In the meantime, David had instructed women to get bundle of leaves. To my surprise, spontaneously a procession started in which the Catholic women's group, guided by David, left the village, marching on the narrow path that ran along the shoreline of the lake towards the village. It was pitch dark and only torches made from dry leaf-bundles provided some light. The processing women marched through the village [not the separate village part

of Wongiambu] to chase away malevolent spirits. The procession attracted many villagers as it made its way from the school ground to the end of what is considered the main village, singing and praising God. In different spots in the village David instructed the women to hit the ground with the leaves he had instructed them to get before. The women hit the ground in accord, shouting 'Jesus!'. The march ended with the women praying over the body of Sandra, who had collapsed in exhaustion. Then, the bundle of leaves that were used to chase the evil away, were thrown into the lake. After a while the villagers returned to their houses. It was about half past nine at night.

Iven's talk

Now many of us, we tap our chest [boast] and we pray and we are much too loud. And we do not receive the talk that God Holy Spirit is giving to us. There are many ways you can pray. You will be quiet and pray inside you. Sometimes you will sing. When you sing, this singing is prayer. You pray. You should not think that it is empty songs. You pray. When you read the bible, you pray. [...]. Now many Christians, many charismatic men and women, many *present man na meri* [spirit mediums], because of that boasting, the Chambri Parish, all communities fell already down. They made too much noise. [...] Now – the charismatic life came to its end.

Poor Bernard [a Catholic leader of the Chambri Lake parish] is trying his best. He wants to visit the whole community for three days. He likes to restart it [the charismatic movement] and straighten all *presents* [spirits] and talk out on what kind of work those *presents* will do. In Timbun, please Godpapa, this year, all the talk has passed. Already last year. No, no, no! How will you recognize your *present* [spirit]? How will you recognize your prayers. What kind of spirit is using you now? Some will get up and guess [*gespaia nating*] and say: 'It is this spirit.' And that is why I use to say, *home-made presents*. That is one Tok Pisin of mine; I use to say *home-made presents*. *Home-made spirit ya!*

One day there will be a three days mini rally. During the day there will be lessons, he [Bernard] will run a seminar. At night there will be a fellowship. Ok when it is over, on the last night, then we all will recognize which *present* [spirit] is working in you now. What kind of work you have. But we yet we get up and say: 'Oh, a spirit is using her/him! S/he has this present!' Home-made spirit. Home-made spirit.

This is one way how we can find out, brothers and sisters. Now the mothers and the youth have these thoughts. What night was it that I heard them at night and I listened and I said: 'They must be learning songs.' And afterwards I saw the group how they came and I said: 'Godpapa, what is this now!?' I, too, was confused. And I said: 'Oh it must be that thing [Jericho march] that they stepped on and came.' I was completely scared. I was totally scared! It was a Jericho march! A Jericho march is not something easy [that should be done hasty]. Brothers and sisters. Because of that I was totally scared and I sat down and I only listened. What will happen? And I weighted the talk that I use to say: 'Do all of them recognize their *presents*? What kind of work they have?' I thought about the *fallen angels*. The *fallen angels*. Woe us if a big *bump* will come up.

It went on and on, I listened, it was over. All the women went back. When I talked, my wife wanted to say something and I told her to be quiet. 'Woe you if you feel pain. What I am talking of, you do not know. Many areas, you all just stepped on. I am afraid of God because of that.' Brothers and sisters, Satan has 95 percent. God gave only 5 percent. [...] Satan can do miracles. He can do all sorts of things and we all will believe that it is the spirit of God. But tomorrow he will leave us and a bad odor will come up. His smell will cover the whole community. That bump already came up in the Chambri parish and the charismatic [life] has ended! Some did not recognize what *presents* [spirits] were working. The *present* [spirit] of the evil was also working [among them] and when he left – it all ended! [...]

When you are quiet, when you sing and when you are praying, Satan will come like a flying fox for the ripe bananas or pawpaw in the garden. He will try to listen to your prayers. He will say 'What kind of prayers and what kind of God does the person have?' You have to listen, when you pray, this rosary of yours should not hang around like a mere necklace. It has to be in your pockets. It is the key of your life. It is the key of the Catholic Church. [...]. Brothers and sisters, every day you have to give food to your *present* [spirit]. You have to give even more. It shall not be hungry. When it is hungry, sorry, it will not have the strength to fight. You should not weaken that *spirit man* of yours. [...] Brothers and sisters, pray and you feed that man who is inside of you. Give it more food, every day. When it needs water, give it water. You should not feel lazy. When it likes to eat, give it food. You should not say 'Ah, you only eat a short time ago, and now you want to eat again?' [...] Brothers and sisters, give food to your *spirit man* only. This God Holy Spirit. Give only food to it. When Satan comes and he asks you for food, do not give him. What kind of Satan's food is there? Call one, two, or three – the food of that other man? 'I [Satan] swear when I drink steam ya, I have illegitimate sex ya, I follow the drunken behavior ya, I drink steam, I smoke marihuana ya!' That is his food. He gets strength. You should not give this food to him. When you give it, he will get stronger. Leave him and pray, read the bible. Sing, meditate, give food to your *spirit man*. [...]. Now brothers and sisters, very true, we recognize how the Kingdom of God is working at this time. [...] We all have a *present* [spirit]. This Holy Spirit is with you. And that is why we call it *spiritman* of yours. Look after it. Feed it. [...].

Nikki's talk

Brothers and sisters, I think I have a big announcement to make. The church or KST is the steersman in this community, of all church work that you are making. Do you understand me? [Answer: Yes.] The church or KST is the steersman of all the work of God that you make. Now, you can see, when you like to leave the church, and you go outside, what will come up at you? Disunity. Disunity! [Leslie Kaiban's prayer group had fallen apart. Before, they had not accepted Nikki's claim to be in charge of any religious activity.] So, I ask you, you have to work together with the church, or KST. They are here to steer you. They are here to make you good. They are here to make that work of yours grow. So that change will come. So that you will have a good life! But you want to see that life, yes, it comes up to small groups who give themselves. But the big group [referring to the TSM], disunity came up and they are outside. When you do not hear the church, when you do not hear the KST, your steersman, listen brothers and sisters, Timbun's church, Satan is working in it already. Do you have eyes? It fulfills the talk of God. Do you have eyes? It is the sign and mark of Satan who works in your community. You broke into two groups. So listen to the church, listen to the KST! This is an important announcement that I have for you.

Please, there is no one to work [on the new church building]. When you say 'no' to the church, and want to work the work of God, it will not work out. Not at all. It will turn out bad. So, work together with the KST chairman.

Also, I am still giving a steering talk: Any kind of chapter groups, any kind of family prayer, or prayers or whatever concerns the work of God, and it becomes big, the church will steer it. The KST will steer it. Like now, you see, the Mewang family. They came back to the church. The church works with them. And this blessing [David's spirit possessing Sandra] they received. They came back to the church. The church will work with them, the church will straighten them. Strengthen them, grow them. Their work will grow big with the strength and *power* and *glory* of God. And they bring about *miracles*. So on top of this, I will make it clear to you, now concerning this Mewang family, their *organization*, their group, it is their family prayer. The church or chairman or KST, we make a structure for them. You cannot go inside and steer them. You cannot go inside and confuse (*faulim*) them and tell them they should go that way. No! They will have their own government from their own family. And whatever kind of big work comes up, the church is there – to steer them and grow them.

On top of that, I continue, you see, we went to Kandingei, for that man who came in wind and rain, he made penance, he made a sacrifice. The spirit of God allowed us to go. But within the church and the KST, they say no: There is no work outside [of the community] that they will do. It is forbidden. When they go outside, big fight, a lot of bad things will happen. People will cut them, too. They will try to kill them, too. Like you saw it with brother Steven [a spirit man from Drekikir who came to stay in Timbun for several weeks, see Chapter 6]. He has a huge mark on his side and came. So, we work with them, the church will steer them. They have to receive help, the church will give strength to them and the church will recognize their work, and the official allowance (*tok i orait pepa*) or something like that of the church, government or other organization concerned with that kind of work will come. Like brother Steven, he has such a paper already. [...] So, one example already happened. People from Paliagwi came. I think the spirit of God, Sanctu David, he worked. He gave a direction and they went and started a fight [in Paliagwi]. That is not the work of God! You Christian person cannot make that kind of behavior. Christian people have the behavior of God. Be humble, forgiveness. You cannot fight. That is the steering talk. [...]

So the steering talk, brothers and sisters, who can say where the holy life will come up? [answer: Timbun, among us]. Here in Timbun, where? [answer: among ourselves]. Among yourself in which area? [answer: family life] Family life! Inside your house! [...] You want that [holy] life, start to pray in your family. Father, mother, and children. Follow the talk of God. At this place they say, the KST chairman stops the work of God. That is not the talk of God. Where did you hear that talk? Follow the talk of God!

Nyaura creation myth

First there is only water. Everywhere there is only water. A crocodile, a mighty crocodile, lies on this endless water surface. It lies there motionless and thinks. 'Why is there no piece of earth that I could lie on?', it is thinking. Then it slightly opens its mouth; saliva drips out and sinks into the water. The saliva sinks down to the bottom of the sea, the crocodile, too, dives down. Then a rotating motion starts, the saliva circles and surfaces as a small piece of ground, the crocodile also rotates with it, the lump of ground sticking to its body. Both reach the surface; the piece of ground lies on the water like a small island. This happens close to the current village of Gaikorobi. Then the dog Koruimbangi shows up, he runs from one end of the island to the other, runs to and fro and by that enlarges the ground until a gap splits open: From there the first living beings emerge. The crocodile now widely opens its mouth until it breaks up into two parts. Its upper jaw becomes the sky, its lower jaw falls down on the ground. Deep darkness prevails until from the urine of the first woman, the snake Ndumagwanimbik, her first son develops: the sun Nyagonduma [Nyaugunduma]. With long bamboo cane the first human beings will push Nyagonduma to his place up in the sky later on; after that brightness dawns, and the first humans dance happily like wild. From the still swampy ground the first grass starts to grow as well as two trees, the *mangi*- and the *wani*- tree, that support the still fluctuating sky: but

really they are not two trees, but the first two male humans, who crawled from the gap in the ground at the same time. They are followed by their sisters, and more pairs of brothers and sisters. All of them inhabit the first men's house Minjimbit at the current place of Gaikorobi. They intermarry, and when the first men's house becomes too small for the many humans, they leave the place of creation and migrate on different paths, stroke out by crocodiles, to the current settlement site. With that Creation is completed (Wassmann 1988: 12, my translation, underlining added).

The men's theft of the Wagen nambu that women discovered:

I: Alois, is there a *tumbuna stori* [ancestral story] of those wagen, how they came into existence? Is there a story?

A: Yes, yes, yes. Oh, you heard a bit about it, a? [...] Yes, there is a story of them. Of those two wagen. Before, there was nothing like that. When our ancestors lived, this was not there. Then, Andura and Nukura, Nukura with Andura, two sisters ya! The two of them went to get shrimps. They used a fishing net. [...] They pushed the fishing net underneath a grass and they pulled it back, they caught shrimps, the two put them into their canoe. They made it like this, and then the two of them caught those two wagen there in the water.

I: They were in the water?

A: They were in the grass and the two caught them. And they awoke now, they started to perform inside of that [fishing net]. Ok the big one arose and said 'dang'. The small one got up 'dang'. 'Daang, dang, daang, dang, daang, dang, daangen, dange,' they performed now. They had this beat now. 'Ey!' now the women went to meet. 'Ey, that is something. It was in the water and those sisters ya, it got caught in the fishing net and they brought it [home].' Now, the women put it in one big house. And all the women from the village, all of them went inside; they met in the house and listened. The two [wagen] performed inside of the house. And when they performed in the house, they made that beat 'daang, dang, daang, dang, dange, dange.' They performed in the house. And all the women with their children went in that house. They watched how the two performed. Hey, the men, they walked around, they did not sit down. They walked around, talked about it now. They said 'Ey, there is something happening in the house. All the women from the village meet in one house.' They talked and went to the *haus boi* [boy's house]. They made a plan, and they came. And they carried tongs and they carried brooms. They were in the *haus boi* and ran to the house. They went inside and hit the women who were in that house. They hit them, they chased them off. Some are afraid of that kind of tongs; we call them *sagqari*. This something, they [women] were afraid, they dropped it, got up and ran away. They ran away now and the men picked up these two things, the wagen ya. They took them and brought them to the *haus boi* now. They put it in the middle of the *haus boi* now, and the two started to perform in the *haus boi* now: 'daang, dang, dange, dange.' The two started to perform, they performed now, and now the men said 'Ok, we get this beat. Oh, this one goes to that beat. Ok.' Now, the men went inside, took sticks, and the two started to perform 'dange, dange'.

I: On the slit drum?

A: That is it. The two men started to perform on the slit drum 'dange, dange.' The man started to perform on the slit drum now. They caught up on the beat of the two [wagen], come up at one beat, come up at the other beat. Come up at one beat; come up on the other beat. They went on like that. It is not only one beat. They went to full five, six, seven beats. They recorded them [*rekord*, memorized]. Quickly indeed they caught the beats. They had them already. Now they took the two [wagen] and put them into a bag. Ok they put them in the bag, no, they put them inside of a pot in the house that was made from ground. Something like a ground pot. A big one. A huge one. They closed it with a lid. A huge pot, ground pot. They got it in Aibom [place in Chambri Lake from where the Nyaura obtain clay pots and stoves]. They put them into this ground pot, and the two [wagen] performed in the ground pot. They were in there, they still performed yet. They use to perform, and the men caught up on them. Ok. They started to make what now, they started to make it from wood, they saw the face of the two [wagen], what they looked like, their shape. What they looked like. They saw it, now the men started to carve them from wood. They made it like a statue of the two. They carved it in wood, and they put it into a basket. These two wagen, they call them *Unjewagen* and *Yeppiyerri*. [...]

I: And the men, they removed this something from the house of the women?

A: The women met and they [men] chased them off. Otherwise, the women would have left the children they carried with the men so that the men would stay in the house and look after the children. The women would have stayed in the *haus boi* and be happy about this wagen.

I: Ah, and the men did not want this!

A: The men would have become like women and stayed in the [family] house. That is it! The men already discussed it in the *haus boi* and came now. Because of the *sagq* [broom] and *sagqeri* [tongs] they [women] were afraid and ran away. They got it and carried it away. The story is like that.

Chapter 6

Thomas Soul's prayer meeting on February the 23rd in 2013:

Anna opened the prayer with asking God for His mercy. Then all the others joined in praying. Each group member addressed God in personal prayers. A babble of devoted voices filled the house. Each time I tried to concentrate on one of the voices, my mind slipped to one of the others and I could not make out the exact words. However, I could hear Anna and others asking God to help them receive the *emailnamba* [email] from their *bridge* [see below]. Several times I had voiced my concerns that the group might be the victim of a money scam. Since the group did not want to desist from sending money to their *bridge*, I advised them to try to receive at least some more information about the people they were talking to on the mobile phone before sending any more money. The group thought this to be a good idea and had asked their *bridge* to send a copy of their business arrangement that was said to bring 5 Million Kina for the group. The *bridge* had promised to send an email that would contain information about themselves. This had caused confusion among the group since no one knew what an email was. No group member had an email address and the group asked me to give my email address [*emailnamba*] to which the *bridge* should send their email. [The email never arrived.]

Then the usual prayer sequence followed with group members praying together in a chorus and stretching out one or two hands into the air. They started with the prayer 'Our Father/The Lord's Prayer':

Our Father in heaven, holy be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Do not bring us to the test, but deliver us from evil. Amen!¹⁴³

Followed by 'Hail Mary':

Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen!¹⁴⁴

Then Anna took the lead again and announced that the next prayer would be addressed to the *souls* to ask them to send the *email*. Again, the group prayed 'Our father'. After this prayer, Anna said that the group apologized for all the *disturb* that they had caused. She said in a loud voice: 'Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!'

After that the group turned to pray the 'Divine Mercy' with their rosary. On each large bead before each of the five decades the group prayed:

Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins, and those of the whole world.¹⁴⁵

After the first large bead, before they started the vers of the small beads, Anna said: 'We pray to the souls!'; and the group started to pray: 'For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on the souls and on the whole world.'¹⁴⁶ Here, the group had changed the official prayer from 'have mercy on *us*' to 'have mercy on the *souls*', adapting it to their concern. This vers was repeated ten times on each small bead of a decade (of which there are five).

During the praying of the Divine Mercy chaplet, Helen took seat on the floor of the house while all the others remained standing.

At the last small bead of the first decade, Anna said: *Yumi putim olgeta souls yumi kisim bridge long en ananit long kros bilong Jesus* (We put all the souls of whom we received a bridge under Jesus' cross). Everyone chanted, 'For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on the *souls* and on the whole world', for the last time of this decade. Next, Anna announced the second decade with the words: 'Whatever our needs are, whatever we desire, we put it all under your cross.' And the group went on with praying the divine mercy.

During the fourth decade Helen got up. She had stopped praying. It was not Helen anymore who was present, but Thomas who had taken possession of her body. He slid each of the beads of his rosary through his fingers, looking at them – one bead after the other.

When the group had finished praying the fifth decade, Thomas cleared his throat loudly. He started to walk up and down the space in front of the house altar, still sliding the beads through his fingers.

The divine mercy prayer had finished and as usual the group finished the prayer with the chanting of the words: 'Holy

¹⁴³ *Papa bilong mipela yu stap long heven. Mekim nem bilong yu ikamap bikpela. Mekim kingdom bilong yu ikam. Strongim mipela long bihainim laik bilong yu long graun, olsem ol ibihainim long heven. Givim mipela kaikai inap long tude. Pogivim rong bilong mipela, olsem mipela ipogivim ol arapela imekim rong long mipela. Sambai long mipela long taim bilong traim. Na rausim olgeta samting nogut long mipela. Amen.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ave Maria, yu pulap long grasia. Lord, i stap long yu. Mipela onaim yu moa long ol meri, na mipela adorim Jisas, em Pikinini bilong bel bilong yu. Santu Maria, Mama bilong God, yu pre bilong helpim mipela manmeri bilong sin, nau na long taim milpela i dai. Amen.*

¹⁴⁵ *God papa bilong ol taim, mi offerim long yu body na blut, soul na gutpasin bilong Jisas Kraist, pikinini bilong yu, yu laikim em tumas, em i bikpela bilong mipela. Bai yu ken marimari na forgivim ol sin bilong mipela na sin bilong olgeta manermi bilong ground.*

¹⁴⁶ *God papa yu tingim pen bilong Jesus na yu marimari long souls na long olgeta manmeri bilong graun.*

God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on the souls and on the whole world,¹⁴⁷ again substituting 'have mercy on us' for 'have mercy on the souls.' Thomas had joined the group in this prayer. Everyone was holding up one hand with a rosary.

Then, Anna said: 'Let us pray', to announce the final prayer, which everyone started to shout loudly into the room: 'Jesus, I trust you! Jesus, I trust you! Jesus, I trust you!'¹⁴⁸ Finally, the group bowed in front of the altar – the prayer session had officially ended and was followed with another round of shaking each other's hands.

Thomas said: '*Em nau, nau heven i ken kamdaun, yupela mas tok!*' (That is it, you have to say: Now the heaven can come!) And he himself shouted loudly 'Jesus!'

Thomas healing Maria

Maria, Rita, Anna and I had left Timbunmeli early in the morning in our canoes to avoid the heat of the relentlessly burning sun on our way to the island of Wondunumbuk. Helen was staying there for some weeks until she had enough fish to sell at the markets in town. We wanted to see her. Maria had been feeling weak for a while and no bettering of her situation had occurred. Now the TSM members hoped to find help from Thomas.

We met in the house of one of the group members in Wondunumbuk where the group wanted to pray for Maria. After some small talk had been exchanged, the group started to pray the rosary, standing in a circle in the small house. Towards the end Helen kneeled down, praying in devotion, raising her right hand that held a rosary into the air. Then, her body suddenly shook – Thomas had taken possession of her. It was no longer Helen, but Thomas who was in control of actions. He stood up and took over the lead. Thomas, as always, held his rosary in his right hand, sliding the beads between his thumb and pointer, pressing one or the other bead with his thumb and resting his eyes on the rosary. Only for short instants he would take up his sight to look at his audience. He told the group to apologize for their sins by saying 'sorry' five times. The group followed.

Then he attended himself to Maria, who was sitting on the floor next to him: 'How do you feel?' 'I am not feeling well', Maria replied. Thomas started to massage her arms. Anna took the initiative to inform him about Maria's condition, but he interrupted her telling her to stay quiet as he intended to pull Maria's spirit back into her body. 'Did you eat well and evacuate your bowels?', Thomas asked Maria, who answered with 'yes, but I did not sleep well.' She had felt a cold crawling up her limbs. While Thomas listened to Maria's statement, he was pressing the beads of his rosary again, resting his eyes on the chain: 'Why didn't you sleep well?'. Maria replied that she felt that her body was weak. 'Did you argue with someone?', Thomas asked. 'Only with my grandchildren', Maria replied. Thomas stated that disputes would take their toll on the body and make it weak. I had learnt that the Nyaura belief that the *kaik* of a person can be chased off by too much disharmony. Thomas was hinting at this belief.

As often during his sessions, Thomas suddenly changed the subject. The end time was near, he said. 'The bible already became human' (*baibel kamap man pinis*), he exclaimed and pointed his right hand at me. He went on saying that the group members should not behave stupidly towards me as I would then do the same. All the missionaries would return to their countries now and would take everything with them. With this statement he was commenting on the jealousy of group members when I spent time with others or gave small presents to others than themselves. By stating that other white people would leave the country and take all their belongings with them, he was indicating that I might also decide to take my possessions with me instead of sharing them further with people. After a while Thomas said that Maria's spirit was coming closer. He told Maria that she should not argue with her grandchildren. Then he stated 'Your husband already died. He will come back. Did you see him? You are busy with arguing. When you behave stupidly, he too will behave stupidly (meaning he would not come back to her)'.

Then Thomas took up a bowl of water in which leaves had been placed. He added his and Maria's rosary to the water. Following, Thomas prayed over the water and blessed it in Tok Pisin and in tongues – the language of spirits. When he had finished, he took the rosaries out of the water and reminded the prayer group members to remain calm for he would guide Maria's spirit back into her body. Then he wrapped Maria's rosary around her right hand wrist, like people usually do with a *kaik manje*. Now he took up the wet leaves from the bowl and started to touch Maria's face, neck, breast, and back with them, each time marking a cross saying 'I bless you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' in Tok Pisin. He did the same with Maria's legs, knees and feet. He finished with touching her neck, her hands and her forehead. He repeated touching Maria's forehead, hand wrists and feet ankles with his rosary instead of the leaves. Then he announced: 'I will hit your forehead now'. He completed his healing session by saying the words 'In the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit, Amen' and clapping Maria's forehead with his right hand. This caused Maria to fall back – another group member was already standing behind her to support her and take care that she would fall back slowly.

After that Thomas attended to a different group member who had asked him to strengthen her body just

¹⁴⁷ '*Sanctu God. Sanctu God i strong olgeta. Yu marimari long souls na long olgeta manmeri bilong graun.*'

¹⁴⁸ '*Jesus, mi trustim yu! Jesus, mi trustim yu, Jesus, mi trustim yu!*'

in case. After that he used the leaves to water the room with the blessed water. He remarked: 'You see? Her spirit is coming closer.' Then he addressed his attention to other topics, but returned to Maria after a while and massaged her body. He informed her 'Your body will need a lot of food and water to get rid of this *tumbuna* (ancestral) sick.' He touched Maria's body with his rosary and instructed to take care to drink a lot of water and eat many fruits.

After that Thomas requested the group members to whisper their local names into his ear, while he was holding and pressing his rosary as usual in his hand. He entered the names into the *screen* (see chapter 7), from where the group members will be watched under the eyes of God. I was also asked to whisper my local name, Savikakanambumange, into his ear.

Maria started to engage in the conversations that followed. It was obvious that she was feeling better – her spirit had returned to her body and she felt stronger.

At the end of the session, Thomas knelt down, raising his arms and praying in Tok Pisin and tongues, before he would leave Helen's body – visible by the body shaking. Helen, as always, could not remember what just had happened.

Healing session as described by Bateson

After the shamanic spirits had spoken for some time they invited Antimali [sick man] and his household to wash [with bespelled water]. He and his wives and children stood between the canoe of water and the entrance to the house, and the contents of the canoe were splashed over them by the shamans. Immediately after the canoe and the water were thrown down the ladder of the house.

There then followed the part of the ceremony for which the neck strings [*kaik manje*] had been prepared. The learned men had also bespelled lumps of red clay and the lime gourds, betel and areca belonging to the people who were washed. While they were still wet with the water which had been thrown over them, they were quickly painted with the red clay in long stripes from head to foot. Then their lime gourds and betel chewing apparatus were returned to them, being first held to their ankles, knees, hips, shoulders and elbows to loosen their joints, and passed once around their bodies. Then they sat down and began to chew betel. As a result of this chewing of bespelled betel and the loosening of their joints they became possessed, not by shamanic spirits but by their own *kait* or souls [*kaik*]. I was told further that the neck strings were worn to retain the *kait* and prevent it from leaving the body. The symptoms of possession by *kait* were much less striking than in the case of possession by shamanic spirits, but still of the same general nature.

The first person affected was the wife of Antimali. She stood up in a position of attention and began to shake up and down by a rapid contradiction of the calf muscles, raising and lowering her heels. This trembling increased, affecting her balance, and involving the whole body in a rapid bending backwards and forwards. Then she let herself fall backwards and was caught by a man who was standing there ready. She sat down on the floor with a rather surprised look. One of the learned men came and slapped the soles of her feet and the palms of her hands, and as it appeared, ritually re-fastened her joints, first pushing her fingers longitudinally towards her joints, then holding her arm above and below the elbow and pushing the two parts together. In the same way he re-fastened the joints of her legs. Shortly afterwards she got up and behaved normally. Several other people, men and women, were affected in the same way by possession by *kait*. Some rose to their feet but, failing to get a seizure, went away and sat down laughing (Bateson 1932b: 419-420).

Chapter 7

Sambang, December 10th 2013

Sa: I witnessed it, the dead talk to the people on the ground. A German priest, his name was Father Gottfried [came to Korogo]. They said they had to dig a hole. They buried a body and put a long bamboo down into the mouth [of the dead man]. So when he talked, his voice would go into the *mike* [microphone] and go to the top. It was not a *mike*, it was like a *speaker*. When he talked, it would go into the speaker and we could hear it. [...]. All of us who sat around that *mike*, we all heard it. [...]. So we were there and we asked the dead man [*daiman*], we wanted to find out [whether it was true], 'That thing, where did we put it?' And he said: 'Ah, I watched and you put it. You put it under the table in the house.' And it was true! He did not know, he was a dead man [*daiman*], he was underneath the ground, and that thing that we put underneath the table, he did

not know that. The fathers asked him, and he said 'Oh, it is at that place.' They could not believe it. And some more men came to ask him questions like 'This *tumbuna* [ancestor] is [he] there or is he not there?' He called his name and he [the dead man] said 'Yeah, this ancestor, your father, he is here.' Or if it was his child, he would say: 'Oh, your father or your child is at that compound. I will tell him/her and s/he will come. You just put your ear and listen. Your child comes.' So we stayed and we heard a big voice [...]. He said: 'You come, your father and your relatives they are there and want to hear your voice.' When the child went inside, it said: 'Hello' and 'Good night,' 'It is me this person', it gave her/his name and said 'Oh, I would like to talk with my father.' It was a child that died and it wanted to talk to his father. When it talked to its father, everyone, all the people, too, witnessed it. I, too, was there. That was around the 60s.

I: During the 1960s?

Sa: Yes, around 62, 63. It was around that time. So we were there and that voice came and I said: 'It is true, [it is] its voice, and it knew it wanted to talk to its father.' His mother, and many more wanted to cry when they heard its voice, the voice of their child, they worried and cried. [...].

I: Can you tell me what he [the priest] exactly did?

Sa: Yes, he put a wire into the hole. He put it into the hole with a speaker or whatever it was, to the body of the dead man. The dead man was in that hole and he [the priest] put the wire together with the speaker or what it was, into it, close to his mouth. And that wire went to the top, go, go, go, until it reached that bamboo where a *mike* was. But when they put the mike on, the talk or the voice of the [dead] men and women who came to talk, we heard it on the top. It was like that, it was some sort of *miracle*, or some sort of *nature* of the ground that talked.

[....]

I think in other places like Kandingei, they did it too. Priests came and made it; they said they talked with the dead and that they wanted to hear the dead and this sort of thing.

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