12 Narratives of self and other: Auto/biography in Papua New Guinea

Rosita Henry (James Cook University)

It is currently a widely held view among scholars in the humanities and social sciences that one of the ways humans construct selfhood is through the stories that we tell about ourselves and about others. Yet, anthropological and linguistic studies on Papua New Guinea (PNG) reveal that, while humans may indeed construct selfhood through narratives, such narratives do not necessarily involve the teller as a character in the story. In other words, they are not autobiographical in the way this genre is typically defined in literature studies – that is, as a literary genre denoting the retrospective telling of one's own life – often synonymously termed "life writing". This paper discusses the idea of the narratively constructed self by drawing on ethnographic research the author conducted in the Western Highlands of PNG for the auto/biography of Maggie Wilson and on comparative anthropological literature examining various narrative genres found in PNG. It is argued that it is important to distinguish between the concepts of 'self' and 'person'. If selfhood is constituted narratively, which is debatable, then it is important to consider in tandem with the cultural concept of person, what type of self is thus constructed.

1. Introduction

Narratives of various kinds are an important part of the way people communicate with both humans and non-humans in their worlds. Both the nature of the narrative form and the interpretation of the messages encoded in narratives that they record in the context of field research are of great interest to both linguists and anthropologists.

Among scholars in the humanities, arts and social sciences it is widely accepted that humans construct selfhood narratively, that is, through telling stories about ourselves and our relationships with others (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001, Nelson and Fivush 2020). "More precisely, we are characters – usually the protagonists – of the stories we tell or could tell about ourselves" (Vice 2003: 93). However, if the self is indeed created narratively, through discursive practice, a claim which is itself debatable (Zahavi 2007)[1], then we must consider

[1] Zahavi (2007) challenges the claim that the self is a narratively constructed entity. He argues that while self-narratives can tell us something about who a person is, the self is not reducible to what can be said narratively.

not only if this is the case in all cultural contexts, but also what kind of self is thus constructed?

In this chapter, I consider the problem of the 'narrating I' in relation to the concept of self and how personhood might be constructed, with reference to the auto/biography of Maggie Wilson (2019) and to anthropological scholarship on various traditional narrative genres in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Maggie Wilson's mother was from the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea and her biological father was a brother of Michael and Daniel Leahy, who were among the first Australian explorers to venture into the Highlands. Maggie's life spanned the last twenty-five years of the Australian administration in PNG and the first three decades after Independence. Maggie's uncle, Daniel Leahy, sent her to a Catholic boarding school in the far north of Australia (Mt St Bernard College in Herberton, North Queensland) in 1970. There, we began the life-long friendship that drew me to complete the autobiography she began before her sudden death.

The book that resulted is part autobiography, part collective biography. Maggie's life story chronicles a complex entanglement of social worlds. The narrative involves an interplay of many life stories, not only Maggie's but also those of her family and friends, including mine. The stories about Maggie that others told me provide a rich resource for reflecting on the problem at the heart of this chapter – the narrative construction of the self.

2. Autobiographical consciousness in Papua New Guinea

Classically within literary studies, autobiography is 'auto-diegetic'[2], that is, it is told in the first person[3] where the narrator is also the protagonist, based on memories of experiences the narrator had in the past, but told from the point of view of the present. In other words, the author occurs within the world of the narrative rather than external to that world. The 'autobiographical person' is the both the narrator and the person who has experienced or is continuing to experience the events, situations or feelings narrated. Thus, autobiographies are often critically analysed in terms of the peculiar temporal qualities that emerge:

[2] Genette (1980) distinguishes between a narrator who is also a character in the story – a homodiegetic narrator, and a narrator who is not a character in the story but knows everything about it – a heterodiegetic narrator. If the homodiegetic narrator is also the protagonist of the narrative, it is an autodiegetic narrator.

[3] However, there are examples of autobiographical writing told in the second and third person (Schwalm 2014).

> At the heart of its narrative logic lies the duality of the autobiographical person, divided into 'narrating I' and 'narrated I', marking the distance between the experiencing and the narrating subject. Whereas the 'narrated I' features as the protagonist, the 'narrating I', i.e., the 1st-person narrator, ultimately personifies the agent of focalization, the overall position from which the story is rendered, although the autobiographical narrator may temporarily step back to adopt an earlier perspective. (Schwalm 2014)

The concept of the self that is expressed in autobiography by this duality (the 'narrating I' and the 'narrated I'), and the associated spatial and temporal dimensions, are not just a construction of the narrative itself. While life narratives work to create and reproduce a concept of the self, culture has a dynamic impact on autobiographical remembering (Wang 2016) and narrators bring to their narrations already formed cultural ideas about what makes a self and what constitutes a person.

Much of the critical scholarship on PNG postcolonial literature today is framed in terms of a comparison between how narratives were once told traditionally and how they are told today by PNG writers. For example, in his book, *"Imagining the Other: The Representation of the Papua New Guinean Subject"*, PNG scholar and author Regis Stella (2007) compares "the precolonial oral representation of landscape and place as a focus of identity and sense of belonging" with "the postcolonial salvaging, reconstituting, and reinscribing of that oral representation, primarily through the medium of writing". Similarly, anthropologist Michael Goddard (2008: 35) compares "the mythopoeic, and therefore non-historical, worldview of the Motu-Koita", where he argues "an autobiographical individual could not exist", with the rise of the autobiographical genre written in English in the postcolonial era.

This distinction can be understood with reference to debates among anthropologists regarding concepts of the person in Melanesia. Based on her research among Melpa speaking people, Marilyn Strathern argued that in Melanesia persons are predominantly understood as 'dividuals' rather than individuals (Strathern, M. 1988: 131, 185). While this distinction has been challenged by some scholars (e.g., Josephides 1991, Macintyre 1995, Li Puma 1998, Englund and Leach 2000), it has now become commonplace among anthropologists to refer

to dividuals and the 'relational self'[4] as being a feature of Melanesian society that is rapidly being replaced by an autonomous inward looking possessive individual (Martin 2007; Sykes 2007a, 2007b). Following this line of thinking, Goddard (2008: 40) argues that "traditional Motu-Koita did not acknowledge themselves as the autonomous, ego-oriented entities, imbued with temporal continuity, which we might call individuals. Consequently, they could not have an autobiographical consciousness." He argues that it was only in the postcolonial context that such consciousness started to appear. He provides examples of some very early transitional works to evidence his point – one being a story that a prominent Koita woman in Port Moresby, named Kori Taboro, dictated in the 1940s. Her narrative was published in both English and Motu. However, as Goddard notes, her account is not so much a life story as a story about "migrations, warfare, missionary and other colonially related activities."

The Motu title of Kori Taboro's story, *Kori Taboro Ena Sivarai*, also indicates its lack of autobiographical consciousness. Two types of possession, alienable and inalienable, are marked in the Motu language. *Kori Taboro Ena Sivarai*, unlike its English translation 'Kori Taboro's Story', is unequivocal in meaning. It is specifically 'the story told by Kori Taboro'. To indicate a story *about* Kori Taboro, a different phrase, *Kori Taboro Sivaraina*, would be required, and the speaker would be someone other than Kori Taboro. *Sivaraina* (*sivarai* with a possessive suffix) is the inalienable case, the story and its subject are inseparable... Such a construction cannot sensibly occur with the speaker as the object, such as *lau sivaraigu*, 'the story of me'. In order to use the inalienable construction in a reflexive manner, Kori Taboro would have to tell a story about her *participation in* an event (e.g., *lau Mosbi nala sivaraina*, 'story about my trip to Moresby'). In conformity with the mythopoeic conception of the persona, Kori Taboro cannot represent herself as an entity with its own life history.

'Autobiographical consciousness', following Nelson and Fivush's (2020: 73) definition of the concept, means the ability to integrate 'an extended subjective perspective within an extended narrative framework', which they argue is universal. They argue that humans develop autobiographical consciousness through "language and linguistically mediated cultural narratives" but "the form of language and narrative structure may be culturally variable and thus the form of autobiographical consciousness may be variable as well" (Nelson and Fivush 2020: 74). This would include, for example, pronominal choice.

[4] This concept of the 'relational self' can be, and has been, applied to humanity in general without cultural distinction (Gergen 2011).

In English, it is usual when speaking and writing about oneself to use the first-person pronoun, although there are some exceptions within the autobiographical genre.[5] However, there is, as Zahavi (2007) reminds us, a difference between having a first-person perspective and being able to articulate it linguistically: "Whereas the former is simply a question of enjoying first-personal access to one's own experiential life, the latter obviously presupposes mastery of the first-person pronoun". Thus, the fact that the first-person pronoun may not be used, or that it may not be possible in certain languages to *represent* oneself narratively in the first person does not mean that a first-person perspective, or a sense of a self, does not exist. According to Zahavi (2007), the "experiential core self is an integral part of the structure of phenomenal consciousness and must be regarded as a pre-linguistic presupposition for any narrative practices". Zahavi, thus, suggests using the terms 'self' and 'person' to distinguish between an 'experiential self' and a 'narrative self' (that is, the self as a 'narrative construction') respectively.

3. Self and person in relationship with the other

The terms and 'self' and 'person' are quite often conflated or used interchangeably in the literature (Harris 1989) although many scholars have attempted to differentiate these concepts (Josephides 2010). While there is a close link between subjective experience, or 'self-consciousness' and the way that persons are imagined in any cultural context, it is important to distinguish these concepts. Josephides (2010), in line with Cohen (1994), questions the assumption among some anthropologists and others that selfhood is a "culturally alien concept for many societies" (Josephides 2010: 23). She argues their narratives demonstrate that Kewa people derive great pride from their selfhood "which they burn to have recognised as something they have authored." Josephides uses both terms, self and person, but not contrastively. She uses the term 'person' when she is considering 'how characteristics are ascribed and 'self' when discussing consciousness and the construction of the self and its relationship to the other' (2010: 23–24). Self here is understood as always being constituted in relation to other. Consciousness of self involves a process of othering, as theorised by Hegel (2019 [1807]: 91):

[5] Paul Aster's autobiographical works, "*Winter Journal"* (2012), "*Report from the Interior"* (2013) and the first part of his first autobiographical work "*The Invention of Solitude"* (1982), are written in the second person.

> A self-conscious being exists in being present to a self-conscious being. Only thus does it in fact exist at all, since only thus does its oneness within itself in its otherness become evident to it.

Pippin (2010: 90), in interpreting Hegel's notion of self-consciousness, notes that it is about mutual recognition. The self-other relationship is a 'recognitive relation', in which "any putative pair of self-consciousnesses must be ascribed a practical teleology, the ultimate outcome of which is that 'They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other'".

A recognitive relation is required for biographical consciousness. As the foundation of any social relationship it also lies at the heart of the concept of the person. Harris (1989) helpfully differentiates the related concepts of 'self' and 'person' as follows. While self is a concept of the human being "as a locus of experience, including of that human's own someoneness" (ibid.: 601), person is "an agent, the author of action purposively directed toward a goal…an agent-in-society" (ibid.: 602). In some societies, according to Harris (1989) the self is subordinated to the person and in others the person is subordinated to the self, as, for example, in America where agency-in-society is subordinated to subjectivity and the concept of the person is "shaped by a psychologistic concern with the self" (ibid.: 607). The self is closely tied to the concept of the individual, defined by Harris (1989: 600) as "a single member of the human kind", not all of whom may be granted or achieve social recognition as agents-in-society.

Harris's is a useful distinction that may provide some resolution to the debates regarding dividual personhood in Melanesia and whether it is possible for such persons to linguistically represent themselves as self-conscious entities with their own life histories. In concert with Josephides, Strathern and Stewart (2000: xix) write in their introduction to their new edition of the life story told by Ongka, a leader among the Kawelka people of Mount Hagen, which Andrew Strathern had recorded and transcribed in 1974, that:

> The view that societies such as the Hagen society in the past did not have a concept of the individual and that this emerged only with modernity is in our opinion untenable on the basis of Ongka's narrative as well as materials from the very earliest ethnographic writers on the region…

For Strathern and Stewart, Ongka's narrative exemplifies that, while he is a relational person (i.e., a person constituted by and embedded in relationships with others), he is also capable of representing himself as an individual self. The question remains, however, regarding which is dominant in Ongka's narrative. Is it the relational (or dividual) person as 'agent-in-society' or is it the self as introspective 'locus of experience'?

Sarvasy (2021) has recorded narratives in Nungon, a Papuan language[6] of the Morobe Province, where the tellers feature themselves as protagonists. One story, by a woman of about 40 years old, Roslyn Ögate, which concerns an exciting multi-day journey she made with her sister-in-law across perilous terrain, begins with the narrator using the first-person singular, and reiterating that it is she who will tell the story.

(1)

Nok,	wo-rok, homu-na		Dono
1SG.PRO	DIST-SEMBL fem.same.gen.in.law.of.fem-1SG.POSS		Dono
oe-no=rot,			
woman-3SG.POSS=COMIT			
I, that is, with my sister-in-law, Dono's wife,			
Yupna ha-in	ongo-go-mok=ma=hon	hat	yo-wang-ka-t.
Yupna area-LOC	go-rp-1DU=SUB=GEN	story	say-PROB.SG-NF-1SG
went to the Yupna area's story, will I tell.			

The story is autobiographical in that Roslyn is both the 'narrating I' and the 'narrated I', and she clearly has a first-person perspective. Similarly, another of Sarvasy's Nungon informants, a man by the name of Waasiong, narrated a story about an important event in his own life

[6] Details on Nungon grammar can be found in Sarvasy (2017).

history, using the first-person singular and prefacing it with: 'Another story, that is, I will tell about myself' (see Sarvasy 2017: 601).

(2)

Hat	au	Wo=ma-i
Story	other	that
Another story, that is		
Naga=ha	yo-wang-ka-t	
1SG.PRO.EMPH=BEN	Say-PRPB.SG-NF-1SG	
I will tell about myself		

A close examination of these short stories, and Ongka's narrative reveals that they are typical of the kinds of stories Kulick (1992: 234) has defined as personal narrative accounts of places to which the narrators went and what they saw there. Such stories characteristically are told in terms of an action, an encounter, or a difficulty and a return to the point of departure (ibid.: 238). They are "event-dominated narratives displaying strong temporal referencing and ordering of event lines, roles, and entities are the basis upon which experience and the self are represented as socially authentic and credible …" (Pickford 2014: 182). In other words, the narratives are sociocentric and concern the actions of relational persons. The use of the first-person singular does not necessarily equate to an 'I' that is an egocentric, self-reflective, introspective individual self. If, as Ricoeur (1992: 18) argues, "to say *self* is not to say 'I'", one could also argue that to say "I" is not to say *self,* at least not always and everywhere.

There are other genres that, I argue, make it is possible for people express themselves as autobiographical persons, or 'autodiegetic narrators' (Genette 1980), even though they are not commonly understood as autobiography – myths, public speeches, confessions, and songs – where in some cases to say 'I' is not to say self and, in others, to say self is not to say 'I'.

There are clearly oral narrative genres in Papua New Guinea, such as ancestral myths, songs, sung tales, public speeches, migration histories and confessional speeches that, I argue, can be, or at least become, autobiographical, when employed in the service of self-

representation. Such narrative genres are, and continue to be, a way for people to tell stories that feature themselves as protagonists and that enable them to express their own introspective desires, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, shame and anger, while at the same time expressing and celebrating the relational personhood.

4. Oral narrative genres and the self

4.1 Public speeches: The segmentary person

Oratorical uses of grammatical person categories from the Western Highlands have been extensively studied by Alan Rumsey and Francesca Merlan (Rumsey 1986, 1989, Merlan and Rumsey 1991) specifically among Ku Waru speakers in the Nebilyer Valley. Ku Waru belongs to a linguistic continuum that includes Penambi Wia *tok ples* and also Melpa in the Hagen area. As Merlan and Rumsey (1991) have documented, and I have also observed while conducting research for Maggie Wilson's life story, it is common in public speeches given at intergroup events such as brideprices, *haus krai* and funerals and compensation payments for the orators to use the first-person singular when referring to their entire tribe, even if the orator himself had not personally participated in the historical events recalled, and may not yet have been born. In other words, an orator, through the use of the first-person singular, "presents the entire clan as a homogeneous collectivity" (Strathern 1991: 211). For example, a Mogei orator might say 'I killed that old woman' (Maggie's grandmother, was killed in a tribal war back in the 1920s) meaning not him personally but his segmentary group and/or their allies in that war. Rumsey refers to this use of the first-person singular as the 'segmentary I' or the segmentary person. However, use of the segmentary person in such oratory does not preclude the orator also being a protagonist in his narrative. As Rumsey writes, "in personifying his clan, he amplifies himself by representing its unity as the outcome of *his* single will (*numan*)" (Rumsey 2000: 109). Additionally, it is often not clear when a speaker is referring to himself or to his whole segmentary unit. Rumsey (2000) notes the co-presence of two tendencies "the simultaneous amplification of the everyday self and partial eclipse of it" (2000: 109). He writes:

> The Ku Waru orator can, within the space of a single sentence, speak as one man, and then as a body of men, which would still have survived as the 'one

> man' whom he was instantiating even if some of its component 'men' had been killed. (Rumsey 2000: 111)

Thus, the use of the first person in public oration in the Highlands, I would argue, could be deemed to be autobiographical, whether the orator is speaking as one man or as a body of men, depending on how autobiographical selfhood or the autobiograhical person is conceptualised. Whether a Highlands orator narrates his own personal lived experiences, or whether he narrates the experiences of the group that he instantiates, he orates as a 'world-immersed' self (Zahavi 2007: 6), as a relational person, or 'dividual', who at the same time seeks to enhance his own *noman*, "variously glossed as mind, consciousness, intention, will, social sentiment, and understanding" (Strathern and Stewart 1998: 170).

4.2 Confession

Another oral genre in which autobiographical consciousness is expressed is confession. In my discussion here I draw on my own understandings of confessionals among Maggie Wilson's Penambi Wia family, but also rely heavily on papers on the topic by Rumsey (2008) and by Strathern and Stewart (1998b). After Maggie died, and the *haus krai* (funeral) was over, Maggie's lineage (the Penambi Wia Ulgamp Komp) held a special meeting to give members of her lineage an opportunity to confess (*outim sin*) any wrong they had done Maggie during her life so that, as Maggie's daughter Bernadine put it, "behain, behain we will be okay as a family" and no one will get sick or die as a result of harbouring their own wrong doing or their own resentments against others (see Wilson 2019: 193–194 for details). Such confessional practices, while merging today with Christian ideas, are traditional in the Western Highlands. Rumsey (2008: 457) discusses the various *tok ples* (vernacular) terms for confession. For example:

1. *ung kis pára si-*, where si- is a verb root that takes suffixes indicating grammatical person and number (*ung kis pára sid* 'I confessed'; *ung kis pára sing* 'They confessed').

   Para si- means neutralise or disarm so literally term 'to confess' translates as 'talk-bad-neutralise-I/they'.
2. *ariribe mons- pára si-*

   anger (resentment)

Communal confessions bring the agency of the person into focus and, as such, are a mode of definition of personhood (Strathern and Stewart 1998). However, Christianity has led to a shift in the traditional confessional mode from a communal inquiry to a private statement before God, which, according to Strathern and Stewart (1998: 21), has led to a change the definition of personhood "toward a new kind of individuation".

I argue that the confessional narratives people tell of their relationships with others, and the wrongs they may have done towards those others, or the resentments that they harbour towards them for perceived wrongs perpetrated against them, can be treated as a form of autobiography, if not whole life stories, then at least auto-diegetic micro-narratives. In such confessions people will use the first-person pronoun and, although I have not done this myself, I think there is potential to study such confessional narratives in depth to explore the duality of the autobiographical person, where the confessor features herself as *both* the protagonist (the narrated I), *and* as the 1st-person narrator (narrating I). Such a study might also shed further light on changing concepts of personhood and how this might relate to the emergence of autobiographical literature in the postcolonial context.

4.3 Songs

A variety of genres of song in PNG also lend themselves to introspective self-expression. Maggie Wilson also includes songs that her kin composed about her during her lifetime in her autobiography, and I followed suit in my biographical completion of her book. After Maggie died in 2009, several songs were composed about her by women in Kunguma Village. As the finale to her book, I included one of these songs, which the women danced during a sing sing they held for my benefit and that of a group of undergraduate students I took to her home in Kunguma Village for an ethnographic field school.[7] The song was composed by a woman named Mawa Pil, an Ulga woman who had married into Maggie's sub-clan:

Weldo we, ya weldo we: Chorus

Knep ya morgup kantmegl: Looking from Knep I can see

Kunguma kapa lo penem: The Kunguma house with the tin roof all locked up

[7] The field school was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as part of its New Colombo Plan programme.

Ina werel tigi pont: I am so lost

Mogpe nenba ampbegl agimp: The only person I could talk to

Kuguma mey rawa ngump: Is buried at Kunguma

Klanda mana ora kilt penem: Tears run over my pillow

Pep ropeldop pelepent: I cannot sleep at night, thinking of you

Weldo we, ya weldo we Chorus

In reflecting upon the songs in Maggie's book and also the genre of sung tales (*tom yaya kange*) discussed by Alan Rumsey (2006, 2011) it seems to me that such songs (or at least some of them) could be analysed as micro-autobiographical narratives - stories in which the narrators feature themselves at a particular time of their lives and that enable them to express or reveal their own *noman* – their own inner desires, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows and so on. As Rumsey (2011: 269) writes,

> …*tom yaya* performers tend to present tales as if they themselves are stepping into the narrated world and taking the part of the protagonists or interacting with them. This is a two way process, in that by doing so performers also bring aspects of the narrated world into the here and now, identifying themselves with the protagonists, implicitly or even explicitly in the case of Paulus Konts, who regularly casts himself as the central male character…'

4.4 Myths

It is not only songs that can used as a vehicle for autobiography, but also myths. Young (1983) in his classic study of 'living myth' in Kalauna, Goodenough Island, argues that "it is invalid to contrast unique biography (lived experience) with impersonated myth (exemplary experience), for biography in Kalauna is shaped, even contaminated by myth in its very construction" (1983: 19). Personhood in Kalauna, Young writes, is "underwritten by myth" (1983: 21). He presents the intertwined biographies of three male leaders – Didiala, Iyahalina, and Kimaola – each who presented their life histories to him in terms of how they converged with their myths, at the same time reciprocally creating the mythical heroes in their own images. For example, when Young asked Iyahalina to tell him "the story" of his life, instead of the autobiographical details about his childhood, his marriage and so on, that

Young was expecting, Iyahalina recounted a myth about a culture hero named Kiwiwiole, with whom he closely identified. Through his rendition of the myth he constructed his own identity and represented himself as the embodiment of his clan, a clan that, through its ancestral hero Kiwiwiole, provided food to all the other Kalauna clans. Iyahalina claims respect from other lineage for himself and his Lulauvile lineage for this act of food-giving, insisting that if it were not for him "everyone would still be licking stones" (Young 1983: 188):

> Kiwiwiole went hither and thither …and fetched food. He brought together yams, taro, bananas, coconuts, pitpit, sugarcane, betel nut, and pigs. He put them down and he said: "This is our real food". Then he shared them out…So in this way each clan got its pig, its yam and its other food. We Lulauvile had many things and we distributed them thus…These were mine and I shared them out…You came from the ground with empty hands and carried nothing of value. But I came from inside the ground with my possessions and my wealth. I shared them out and now there is abundance for all. I am Lulauvile Man: I feed large pigs, I preserve yams in my house, I hoard coconuts and betel, I tie sugar cane. My customs adhere to me like the dirt of my ancestors. The body dirt of my ancestors sticks to my comb and my limepot. (Young 1983: 187)

Similar to the use by big men in the Western Highlands of the 'segmentary I' (Rumsey 1986, 1989, Merlan and Rumsey 1991) and the way *tom yaya* performers present their sung tales "as if they themselves are stepping into the narrated world" (Rumsey 2011: 269), Kalauna leaders appropriate the myths of their lineages to tell of themselves and their own life projects, but also of themselves as relational persons instantiating their lineage identities.

The genres discussed above - public speeches, confessions, songs, and myths - are all oracular. What can be concluded about the written autobiographies that have emerged in the colonial and postcolonial context in PNG? To address this question, I return to Maggie's autobiography.

5. Maggie's memoir

The narrative that is considered to be the first true PNG autobiography, i.e., defined as one that is auto-diegetic (*having both a 'narrating I' and 'narrated I')* is Albert Maori Kiki's (1968) "*Kiki: Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime"*. Many similar autobiographies soon followed, usually structured first by a narration of early childhood experiences growing up in the village, then an account of first encounter with Europeans, followed by opportunities for gaining a Western education, and so on.

This chronological structure was also followed by Maggie in her memoir. She began with an account of her birth as follows:

> My grandmother said, "Kuan, indeed you have the spirits on your side; it is a strong healthy baby girl. Just wait until we settle her in the *bilum* and pass her out to you for a look. Grimel, put some more *pit pit* grass in the fire, so I can see what I am doing!"
>
> *I was there but I don't' remember this.*

Here, Maggie identifies herself clearly as the 'narrating I' (I was there but I don't remember this), but she is also the narrated I (herself as a baby). Maggie continues her life story with an account of the history of her lineage (tribe, sub-tribe, clan) and their first contact with the Whiteman, beginning the chapter with identifying herself as a member at the highest segmentary group level of the paired tribe – the Elti Penambi.

> *Na eltika penamb ampael* I am an Elti Penambi woman

Maggie then moves on to discuss the colonial relationship of the Australians with her people, and especially the Leahy brothers at the goldmine near her birthplace; and her own encounters with these 'others'. She writes of her school life, including boarding school with me in Australia, her return to PNG, her working life and her political and business ventures.

Yet, while Maggie's narrative can be categorised as an autobiography in the classic definition of the genre – i.e., a retrospective telling of one's own life – she is spare in terms of self-reflection. She generally states what she did and what she saw in quite a straightforward

matter of fact manner, rarely revealing an inner self, or directly disclosing what she might have felt or thought about something or someone. Her emotional states need to be gleaned by the reader mostly through what she does, the practical actions she takes, and the nature of the social relations in which she was engaged. In this sense, her narrative reflects vernacular oral genres. Her narrative is event-dominated rather than characterised by introspective self-reflection. It has the "go-come" structure that Kulick (1992) identified as characteristic of the *stori* genre – "strong temporal sequencing of material action; …references to local people, school, and community events as mutually informing contexts; and … restrained use of direct evaluation" (Pickford 2014: 188). Maggie presents a 'self' through her practical deeds, exchanges, temporally emplaced social actions and her relational engagement with others. She draws into her narrative, the stories that members of her family tell about her and the songs they sing about her. In this way, she is able to narratively construct herself sociocentrically through others, rather than just through her own self reflections. In telling tales of Maggie, her kin and friends in turn are able to tell something of themselves. As a result, the book is effectively a relational auto/biography in which the distinction between both self and other, and self and person collapse.

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